

Star SPORT

Man City after Nasri

Manchester City are close to completing a move for French left-back Gael Clichy and are also interested in signing his Arsenal colleague Samir Nasri, Sky Sports claimed on Thursday. The big-spending FA Cup winners have reportedly stolen a march on Liverpool in the race to sign Clichy and are preparing a £20 million (\$32.1m) bid for France midfielder Nasri, according to the British television channel. Nasri, 24, enjoyed his best season in an Arsenal shirt last term, scoring 10 league goals, but has yet to agree a



Djokovic downs Tsonga

Makes his first final

AP, London

Novak Djokovic reached his first Wimbledon final and guaranteed himself the No. 1 ranking by defeating Jo-Wilfried Tsonga 7-6 (4), 6-2, 6-7 (9), 6-3 Friday in a match filled with diving shots by both players on Centre Court.

Djokovic, a two-time Australian Open champion, improved his record to 47-1 this year. And although he won another Friday, it was Tsonga who entertained the crowd with his tennis skills and showmanship.

In the final, Djokovic will face either defending champion Rafael Nadal or Andy Murray.

Djokovic will replace Nadal as the top-ranked player in the world on Monday, but reaching the final at the All England Club was the relief he was looking for after losing twice at the same stage.

After Tsonga's return on match point sailed out, Djokovic dropped to the ground and lay on his back. A few seconds later, he knelt down and kissed the grass.

"It's hard to express your emotions in a very short time but hopefully some celebrations are about to come," said Djokovic, who also beat Tsonga in the 2008 Australian Open final.

Djokovic started the season by winning 41 straight matches, but he lost to Roger Federer in the French Open semifinals. Since then, he is 6-0, with all those victories coming at the All England Club.

"I've been working all my life for this," Djokovic said. "I've been dreaming about playing the finals of Wimbledon since I started playing tennis when I was 4. To be able to be there on Sunday will probably be the best feeling."

Tsonga, however, didn't make this one easy. The 12th-seeded Frenchman went to

the turf several times to knock balls back over the net, some landing in and some going long.

Twice in the third set, both players went down on the same point.

At 1-1 with Tsonga serving, the Frenchman dived to send the ball back toward Djokovic. The Serb then dived to hit a backhand across the net while Tsonga scrambled to his feet just in time to dive again and push a forehand long.

In the seventh game, Djokovic dived to hit a forehand, but Tsonga did the same, sending a forehand winner back over the net.

There were more theatrics in the first set. With Tsonga up a break and serving while leading 3-2, the two players volleyed the ball back and forth until Tsonga dived and hit winner.

As Djokovic clapped his hand on his racket to acknowledge the acrobatic play and the crowd applauded, Tsonga turned to the Royal Box which included former Wimbledon champions Bjorn Borg and Goran Ivanisevic and stretched out his arms to roaring cheers.

Tsonga again relied on his big serve and booming forehands, and they worked early. He broke Djokovic in the opening game of the opening set to take the lead, but the

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Serbian Novak Djokovic pumps his fist during his Wimbledon semifinal victory against Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Booters reach Lahore

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national football team reached Lahore via Karachi to play their away match of the World Cup pre-qualifiers after a gruelling 17 hour journey from Bangladesh.

Team manager Sayeed Hasan Kanon informed that they reached the team hotel, Park Plaza, in Lahore safely after a long journey and the players were tired but they might have a stretching session inside the hotel before taking dinner.

Bangladesh Biman, carrying the booters, took off about 3:00pm in Friday night though it was supposed to fly at 11:00pm on Thursday but the flight was delayed and Biman Authority informed it to the Bangladesh team, who reached the airport at 12pm.

A Bangladesh Football Federation official informed that there was a six-hour transit in Karachi from where the footballers reached Lahore through a Pakistan domestic flight.

Bangladesh will get only one day to prepare them before facing hosts Pakistan on Sunday in the second-leg match. Bangladesh are in an advantageous position after winning the first leg 3-0 against Pakistan.

Nat'l women's football

SPORTS REPORTER

Goals continued to come in full force in the National Women's Football Championship as Jessore thrashed Kishorganj 11-0 in the second match of the meet at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

Jessore dominated the first half 5-0 in the one-sided affair as Sharmin slammed four goals, Bilkis struck a treble, Lima scored twice while Khaleda and Bely netted one goal each for the winners.

Kool-BSJA Media Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

The quarterfinal line-up of the Kool-BSJA Media Cup football tournament was completed when Banglavisian, Daily Destiny, The Financial Express, ETV and ATN News emerged as group champions at the Handball Stadium yesterday.

Banglavisian beat Daily Kalerkantho 2-0 to emerge as group A champions to set their quarterfinal clash with Radio Today, who had earlier become group E champions.

Daily Destiny played out a 1-1 draw against Diganto Television to become group G champions and they will face RTV, who had also earlier moved into the quarterfinal from Group C.

ATN News also played out a 1-1 draw against Daily Amardesh to emerge group B champions and set their last-eight battle against Channel i, who had earlier become Group E champions.

In the day's other match Baishaki Television defeated Daily Janata 1-0 that put The Financial Express to the quarterfinals to play against ETV, who found their last-eight ticket after The Daily Sun thrashed ABC Radio 2-0 in the Group H final match.

All four quarterfinals will take place today at the same venue. SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

Mahela hits hundred

Cricket

AFP, Leeds

Mahela Jayawardene's career-best century powered Sri Lanka to 309 for five against England in the second one-day international (ODI) at Headingley here on Friday.

The opener made 144 -- Jayawardene's highest score in 343 ODIs surpassing his 128 against India at Sharjah in 2000 -- as Sri Lanka looked to level this five-match series at 1-1.

A couple of reckless run-outs reduced Sri Lanka to 45 for two in the 10th over after England captain Alastair Cook won the toss and elected to field.

But a record stand of 159 between

former captains Jayawardene, dropped on seven, and Kumar Sangakkara, who made 69, turned the tide Sri Lanka's way.

Angelo Mathews kept the runs coming with a brisk 46 not out off 30 balls while Jeevan Mendis's unbeaten seven included a hooked six off Stuart Broad that saw Sri Lanka past 300.

Off-spinner Graeme Swann -- who dropped Jayawardene -- led England's attack with two wickets, both stumpings completed by wicketkeeper Craig Kieswetter to remove Sangakkara and Jayawardene.

But the seamers suffered with Broad, Tim Bresnan and Jade Dernbach managing just one wicket between them for 203 runs in a combined 28 overs.

James Anderson's none for 44 in 10

overs was respectable in comparison.

Sri Lanka skipper Tillakaratne Dilshan was run out for nine when he failed to beat Broad's underarm direct hit on the bowler's end stumps.

The tourists were fortunate not to lose Jayawardene soon afterwards when first slip Swann dropped a high chance off Bresnan.

Dinesh Chandimal, replacing the now retired Sanath Jayasuriya following England's 110-run win at The Oval on Tuesday, fell in similar fashion to Dilshan for five, only this time Anderson hit the stumps.

Cook, with none of his frontline bowlers disturbing the third-wicket duo, brought on part-time off-spinner Kevin Pietersen.

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Big guns back for Eng

Cricket

CRICINFO

India are ready to welcome back Gautam Gambhir, Sachin Tendulkar, Zaheer Khan and Sreesanth to their Test side when the selectors meet in Chennai on Saturday to pick the team for the series in England. Virender Sehwag's fitness, though, remains uncertain after he underwent surgery on his shoulder. There have been conflicting reports on how long his recovery will take, but the selectors might risk picking him even if he is a doubt for the first Test, which begins on July 21.

Sreesanth, Gambhir, Sehwag and Zaheer have all spent time rehabilitating at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) in

Bangalore, and Gambhir and Sreesanth have publicly declared their fitness. Zaheer, too, is expected back. Tendulkar had asked for a rest during the West Indies tour and should be charged up for England.

M Vijay is likely to retain his place at the top if Sehwag doesn't make the cut but if Sehwag is fit India are unlikely to take an extra opener along - unless they pick a 17-man touring party as they did to South Africa. That squad included two extra quicks, one extra spinner, one extra middle-order batsman, one reserve wicketkeeper and an extra opener.

When everybody is fit, the XI selects itself, with Sreesanth edging out Praveen Kumar as the third pace bowler. Praveen will be one of those extra quicks for sure after his impressive showing in the West Indies, and Munaf

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Premier Div b'ball

SPORTS REPORTER

Holders The Gregorius maintained their winning spree in the Citycell Premier Division Basketball League when they posted their fifth straight win with a 106-33 win over Bakhsibazar SC at the Dhanmondi Basketball Gymnasium yesterday.

Leaders The Gregorius boosted with three Nepalese players led the first half 41-13. Morshed was the top-scorer with 30 followed by Manzil's 24 while Bakhsibazar's Auyun and Tahmid scored 12 and 10 respectively.

The Gregs recorded their third victory in their fourth match as they handed a massive 104-29 defeat to Flame Boys after leading the first half 51-12 as Mehedi scored highest 36 points for

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Russian superstar Maria Sharapova goes through some warm-up routines at the All England Tennis Club yesterday, ahead of her Wimbledon final against Petra Kvitova today.

PHOTO: AFP

Final step in Maria's return

AFP, London



Maria Sharapova will attempt to complete her long journey back from the wilderness at Wimbledon on Saturday when she takes on Czech eighth seed Petra Kvitova for the women's singles crown.

The 24-year-old Russian fifth seed is the overwhelming favourite to reclaim the title that she won for the first time in 2004, when as a fresh-faced teenager she took the All England Club by storm. Sharapova's victory in SW19 seven years ago was followed by further Grand Slam titles at the Australian and US Opens by the time she turned 21, a period that also saw her rise to world number one.

But Sharapova's march to the summit of women's tennis has been blown off course since 2007, when a serious shoulder injury led to a long lay-off which led many to wonder if she could ever be the same player.

Yet this season has provided the first solid proof that Sharapova is ready once more to fulfill her vast potential, with a semifinal run at the French Open followed by her serene progress into the Wimbledon final.

With Serena and Venus Williams showing signs of decline, Justine Henin retired and Kim Clijsters injured, there is a vacancy at the top of the women's game that Sharapova looks equipped to fill.

Sharapova admitted she had endured dark days in 2008 and 2009, when she was struggling back from shoulder surgery and she dropped out of the top 100.

"There were doubts because I had many expectations on when I would come back. I set myself certain goals and I never really met any of them, to be honest," she said. "So that was frustrating. You're going to have certain doubts when you go through something like that knowing that not too many players have recovered fully."

Sharapova insists however that quitting was never an option, and she

remained driven by the memory of the glittering early years of her career.

"I'm not really the type of person that ever gives up. Even though it was tough, I believed in myself," she said.

"I give a lot of credit to my team that was around me. It takes a good team to really keep you in high spirits.

"I think when you know how good it feels to lift the big trophies, the ones you really want in your career, and when you know how good you can play ... I never had the interest of stopping.

"I always felt like I had a lot better things in me."

Sharapova has yet to drop a set en route to this year's final, and confidently disposed of the big-serving German wildcard Sabine Lisicki in the semi-final, winning in straight sets 6-4, 6-3.

Sharapova is bracing for a sterner challenge from Kvitova in Saturday's final however, the 21-year-old Czech challenger who is appearing in a Grand Slam final for the first time.

"I expect her to be a really tough

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