

Nadal, Federer on collision course

AP, Melbourne



australian open
The Grand Slam Asia-Pacific

In the same half of a Grand Slam singles draw for the first time since 2005, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer are taking similar paths to a potential semifinal matchup at the Australian Open.

A rematch of the women's 2011 final is already in place, with defending champion Kim Clijsters and China's Li Na both winning Friday night to set up a meeting in the fourth round.

Neither the four-time Australian champion Federer nor 2009 titleholder Nadal have dropped a set, although Federer's path has been made easier by a walkover win in the second round.

The longtime rivals played back-to-back matches at Rod Laver Arena on Friday. Nadal, his right knee still taped from a recent injury, showed no problems while moving briskly around the court in a 6-2, 6-4, 6-2 win over qualifier Lukas Lacko.

Federer followed in the marquee matinee program by beating Ivo Karlovic 7-6 (6), 7-5, 6-3, saving a set point in the tiebreaker with a scrambling lob over the 6-foot-10 Croatian.

Federer will play Australian teenager Bernard Tomic on Sunday in the fourth round.

Nadal will next meet fellow Spaniard Feliciano Lopez, who beat No. 16

John Isner 6-3, 6-7 (3), 6-4, 6-7 (0), 6-1 to put the last U.S. man out of the draw.

No. 7 Tomas Berdych beat No. 30 Kevin Anderson of South Africa 7-6 (5), 7-6 (1), 6-1 and will next play No. 10 Nicolas Almagro of Spain, who beat 21st-seeded Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland 7-6 (2), 6-2, 6-4.

Germany's Philipp Kohlschreiber defeated Alejandro Falla of Colombia 6-3, 6-2, 7-6 (3), 11th-seeded Juan Martin del Potro beat Yen-Hsun Lu of Taiwan 6-2, 6-3, 6-0 and Tomic defeated 13th-seeded Alexandr Dolgoplov of Ukraine 4-6, 7-6 (0), 7-6 (6), 2-6, 6-3. Del Potro plays Kohlschreiber in the fourth round.

Defending champion and top-seeded Novak Djokovic and fourth-seeded Andy Murray, who has lost in the final at Melbourne Park the last two years, play their third-round matches Saturday, with a Djokovic-Murray replay only possible in the semis.

On the women's side, top-seeded Caroline Wozniacki also has not dropped a set in advancing to the fourth round as she continues her quest for a first Grand Slam title. She beat Monica Niculescu of Romania 6-2, 6-2 Friday, and third-seeded Victoria Azarenka defeated Mona Barthel 6-2, 6-4.

It's the toughest half of the women's draw, Wozniacki could face Clijsters in the quarterfinals. But before Clijsters gets that far, she will have to beat French Open winner Li.

Li advanced to the fourth round late Friday when her opponent, Anabel Medina Garrigues of Spain, had to retire in the first set after badly twisting her right ankle attempting a shot. Li won the first three games and was up 0-30 on Medina Garrigues' serve when the Spaniard went to the net to retire a game and a half after she had sustained the injury.

Clijsters advanced with a 6-3, 6-2 win over Daniela Hantuchova earlier at Hisense Arena.

On Saturday, the two biggest threats in the other half of the women's draw, five-time champion Serena Williams and 2011 Wimbledon winner Petra Kvitova, play for a spot in the last 16.

Wozniacki, who needs to reach the quarterfinals to have any chance of retaining the No. 1 ranking, wasted one match point and was broken when she was serving for the match. But she broke back immediately to ensure she moved into a final 16 encounter against former No. 1-ranked Jelena Jankovic, who beat American Christina McHale 6-2, 6-0.

Azarenka, who beat Li to win the Sydney International last week, has only lost eight games at Melbourne Park and remains one of three women who can overhaul Wozniacki for the top ranking at the Australian Open.

The 22-year-old from Belarus will next meet Czech player Iveta Benesova, who beat Russian qualifier Nina Bratchikova 6-1, 6-3.



Kim Clijsters pumps her fist as she celebrates winning a point against Daniela Hantuchova during their third round match of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Friday. PHOTO: AFP

Bolt to prep in Rome again

AFP, Rome

World record holder Usain Bolt will take part in the Rome Diamond League meeting on May 31 as part of his pre-Olympic preparation, organizers said on Thursday.

Bolt was a huge draw at the Stadio Olimpico last year where almost 50,000 people turned up to watch the world's fastest man.

He didn't disappoint either by overhauling compatriot Asafa Powell with a late surge to win the 100m in 9.91sec.

"I am looking forward to returning to Rome and to be back on the fast track of the Stadio Olimpico for the Golden Gala," said Bolt.

"I have great memories of last year's edition: it was my first time running in Italy.

"Someone told me it was the biggest crowd for athletics in the last ten years; something that made me really happy.

"I remember the huge coverage from media there, the press conference I had two days before the race was one of the biggest I ever had outside the Olympics or World Championships."

It was Bolt's first competitive race of the season and although he won, he later went on to false start at the World Championships, getting disqualified from the final.

Navy reach semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Navy reached the semifinal of the Trust Bank-ViyellaTex 28th National Hockey Championship as group runners-up by eliminating Tangail 5-3 in a super league match at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Mortuza and Shihab struck twice each and Shuvo netted one for Navy while Rahul, Pushkar Khisha and Titu scored one apiece for Tangail.

In the day's other match, Dhaka beat BKSP by 3-1 goals at the same venue. Iqbal Nadir Prince, Rubel Hossain and Russell Mahmud Jimmy scored one each for the winners.

In the semifinals tomorrow, Navy team will take on Faridpur while BKSP will play against Bangladesh Army at the same venue.

Jamal takes

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amazing tee shot on the 12th earned him yet another birdie. He ensured that there were no further hiccups as he made pars on the last six holes and stayed ahead of his nearest challenger Siddikur.

"This victory gives me a big boost in confidence since it has earned me an exemption on the PGTI till 2014-end," said Jamal who won a cheque of Tk 323,300 lakhs for his exploits.

Meanwhile, Siddikur (66-73-70-71) added to the joy of the local supporters as he bagged second place after firing a one-under-71 which featured five birdies against four bogeys. The 27-year-old regular totalled eight under 280 for the event.

Mukesh Kumar of India bagged third place after shooting a 67, the day's best score. Mukesh totalled seven under 281. Shamim Khan and Abhijit Singh of India grabbed a share of fourth place at five under 283. Bangladeshi amateur Sajib Ali took home the trophy for the best amateur score. Sajib, the only amateur to make the cut this week, carded a 71 in the final round to total four over 292. Sajib secured tied 15th place.

Comedy

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regulation time and added five minutes without their in-form striker Mithun. This incident apparently was a cause for celebration for BJMC manager Arif Khan Joy, who protested the demand of the Mukti officials and started premature celebration. Arif was shown the red card by the referee for his actions.

Ajmal the spin king



AFP, Dubai

Pakistan off-spinner Saeed Ajmal Friday rose to world's highest ranking spinner a day after guiding his team to a comprehensive ten-wicket win in the first Test against England inside three days.

The 34-year-old registered his second ten-wicket haul -- a career best 7-55 in the first innings and 3-42 in the second -- to help Pakistan take a 1-0 lead in the three-Test series.

"Ajmal earned 117 ratings points for his magnificent bowling performance, now has England's second-ranked James Anderson firmly within his sights who has 37 more ratings points," the International Cricket Council (ICC) announced.

Given that Ajmal is still in a qualification period for bowlers, it is likely that he will move even further up the ladder depending on how he performs in the second Test which starts in Abu Dhabi on January 25, the ICC said.

South African paceman Dale Steyn tops the bowlers' list with 896 rating points.

Ajmal has also leapfrogged England's off-spinner Graeme Swann who has slipped one position to fourth, while Ajmal's spin partner Abdul Rehman has also leapt five places which has put him in a career best 14th position.

The latest rankings have brought bad news for England batsmen.

England opener Alastair Cook and Ian Bell, who entered in third and fourth positions respectively, have slipped two and three positions respectively, while Kevin Pietersen has fallen out of the top 10.

BJMC's dream run

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and Sunday indulged in a misfiring spree. But BJMC -- comprising veteran players like Alfaz, Abul, Shuvro, Jonny, Saif -- were determined to turn in on the act and they did so by snatching two late goals to create history.

"Actually we felt the absence of holding midfielder Iganka, who was not available due to suspension, which resulted in huge pressure on our backline. But the available players were able to foil their attacks before coming out as winners," said BJMC coach Jakaria Babu, who is guiding a professional side for the first time.

Having survived a few scares, BJMC went ahead in the 68th minute against the run of play.

Pietersen, who scored two and nought in the Dubai Test, has lost six places and is now in 16th position while England captain Andrew Strauss has also dropped six places to 34th spot.

The only England batsmen to make any upward movements are wicketkeeper Matt Prior in 18th (up by one) and Swann in 64th (up by 11).

In contrast, the Pakistan batsmen have made positive gains with Younus Khan in fourth (up by two), captain Misbahul Haq in 14th (up by three), Mohammad Hafeez in 30th (up by 15), Taufeeq Umar in 32nd (up by six) and wicketkeeper Adnan Akmal in 70th (up by 23).



SAEED AJMAL

Abdul, who also struck one of the three goals in their group stage match against the same oppositions, controlled an Ismael Bangoura header with his chest and created space on his favourite right foot before driving a low-shot from outside the box to find the near post.

In an effort to step up the attack, Muktiyoddha coach Manik brought three changes but all their efforts went in vain as Mithun and Sunday spurned two chances at the fag end of the match by driving wide from inside the box. BJMC found more space to attack and succeeded again as substitute Rony found the back of the net with a deflected shot to end the last rays of hope of Muktiyoddha.

contained six boundaries.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KALABAGAN: 227-8 in 50 overs (Nasiruddin 72, Rifat 41, Nizamuddin 23, Sohag 20; Abul 2-37, Nazmul 2-43, Riyad 2-36)

ABAHANI: 228-3 in 44.3 overs (Anamul 120 not out, Rabbi 21, Marshal 39, Riyad 36 not out; Rockybul 2-34)

Result: Abahani won by seven wickets.
MOHAMMEDAN: 224-6 in 50 overs (Imtiaz 60, Imrul 52, Naeem 29, Rajin 52 not out; Rashid 2-25, Forkan 2-59)

CCS: 194 all out in 46.5 overs (Robiul 54, Rokibul 38, Suleman 50; Yasim 3-28, Amitav 2-35, Nur 4-30)

Result: Mohammedan won by 30 runs.
BIMAN: 81 all out in 39.5 overs (Kashif 16, Javed 14; Sanjamul 3-14, Nayyar 4-19)

GAZI TANK: 82-4 in 19 overs (Mominul 21, Nasir 30)
Result: Gazi Tank won by six wickets.

SA post 299

STAR SPORT DESK

AB de Villiers smashed 96 off 76 balls to power South Africa to 299 for seven against Sri Lanka in the fourth ODI in Kimberley yesterday.

The right-hander smote eight boundaries and three sixes during his sparkling knock.

South Africa's batsmen took advantage of a hapless Sri Lanka bowling attack. Graeme Smith and Alviro Petersen gave the solid foundation sharing 84-run in the opening stand.

Smith hit 68 off 69 balls that featured seven boundaries while Petersen added 37 off 39 balls that saw four boundaries.

Jones, Bevan

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the absence of their icon player Tamim Iqbal and captain Riyad in the function.

Riyad was busy with his commitment in the Premier Division Cricket League match but there has been a rumour that Tamim skipped the players' auction and logo unveiling ceremony due to a dispute with the team officials.

"Tamim has a match tomorrow in the Premier Cricket League and you know he does not like to talk before any match. And may be he has some personal commitment as well," said Mahmud when asked about the absence of Tamim.

Tamim also said that he wanted to focus on his club's (Victoria) crucial match in the Premier Cricket League against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club.

"There has been nothing wrong in the relationship with my franchise and you know I know these people for very long. I have a big match tomorrow and that's the reason I didn't appear in the function," explained Tamim.

Confusion

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February 28 and 29 and the Dhaka Franchise was well aware of this situation," a statement from the franchise read.

"The former Pakistan skipper not being available for BPL 2012 is only a rumor as both Afridi and his agent have confirmed his presence for Dhaka Gladiators on the mentioned dates," it added.

Battle

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have to play our best again if we want to beat Sheikh Jamal," said Sheikh Russel coach Maruful Haque.

The coach will undoubtedly be boosted by the news that wingers Zahed Parvez and Faisal Mahmood and Nigerian strikers Alam Bukola and Siankam Emanik are again available for selection.

'Win will improve image'



AFP, Dubai

Pakistan coach Mohsin Khan insisted Friday that the comprehensive ten-wicket win over the world's best Test team England will boost the image of his team.

"Our aim is to provide a boost to the nation and fans of Pakistan cricket, and to show the world that there is more to Pakistan cricket than just negatives like spot-fixing," Khan told AFP on Friday.

Pakistan romped to a 1-0 lead in the three-Test series with two days to spare as England crumbled to 160 in their second innings with Umar Gul (4-63), Saeed Ajmal (3-42) and Abdul Rehman (3-37) sharing the spoils.

Khan said the team were determined to improve their performances and their image.

"This group of players is playing an important role in improving the image of Pakistan cricket, by playing tough cricket and winning consistently and therefore showing the world that Pakistani cricketers are among the best and they deserve respect," said Khan.

Khan took over as interim coach after Waqar Younis quit the post in September last year. The 56-year-old was retained for this series but is likely to be replaced by former Australian batsman Dav Whatmore next month.

Khan praised off-spinner Ajmal for getting his second ten-wicket haul in Test cricket.

"Ajmal was brilliant and when you play against the best team in the world then getting ten wickets is a big achievement, but I

would say that Gul, Rehman and Aizaz Cheema all bowled well and deserve credit," said Khan, a former opener.

Khan said Pakistan's good start gave them the upper hand.

"We had a wonderful start to the Test match and after getting five early wickets we thought that the game was in our hands and we knew that if we get a good lead we can put pressure on England and that happened to our plan," said Khan.

England, who won the toss and decided to bat, were left struggling at 52-5 at lunch on the opening day -- a position from where they could never recover.

Khan also praised the good job done by the batsmen.

"After we got to 338 (in first innings) we had a confident feeling that now we can bowl our way to the victory and Gul provided that with a brilliant spell, we were expecting a win but not inside three days," said Khan.

Pakistan gained a 146-run lead on the back of half-centuries from Mohammad Hafeez (88), Adnan Akmal (61), Taufiq Umar (58) and Misbahul Haq (52).

"It was a great team effort and the boys gave their almost hundred percent, we must praise our batting as well, the openers gave us a sound start and then everyone chipped in by showing good fighting spirit," said Khan.

"I hope the intensity and the hard work continues because we have just won the first Test and must show consistency to win the series," said Khan.

The second Test starts in Abu Dhabi on January 25. Dubai will stage the third Test from February 3-7 followed by four one-day and three Twenty20 matches.

Flower sure Eng will bounce back



AFP, Dubai

Andy Flower on Friday expressed his confidence in England staging a swift comeback against Pakistan after losing the first Test by ten wickets inside three days.

England crumbled to 160 all out in their second knock on Thursday to go 1-0 down in the three-match series -- their first Test as world number one, a position they attained in August last year following a 4-0 rout of India.

Flower, who was named UK coach of the year in 2011, said beating Australia in Australia was a bigger test, but coming back in the second Test will also be a big task.

"Pakistan certainly outplayed us by a long margin in this Test. We underperformed, poorly. However, we can come back from this. Is it a real test? Yes it will be," the 37-year-old England coach told reporters.

"Beating Australia in Australia was a big test. This team has done great things in the recent past, but you have to move on from the past and live in the present, and this is a very good indication that you have to live in the present," said Flower.

England have not lost a series since losing to the West Indies in 2009 -- Flower's first after he took over from Peter Moores.

Flower disagreed that England -- playing

their first Test since August last year -- were under-prepared or lacked application.

"I don't think it's either of those. Our preparation were excellent," said Flower of the two wins inside games here. "It might be fair to say that the lay-off we've had probably means people aren't quite up to speed as we usually are.

"However we needed that break, the players needed a mental and physical break and you can't have it all ways. Our challenge now is to get up to speed for the second Test," said Flower the match starting in Abu Dhabi from January 25.

Dubai will stage the third Test from February 3-7 followed by four one-day and three Twenty20 internationals.

Flower backed captain Andrew Strauss and struggling batsman Kevin Pietersen.

"He's a pretty calm bloke and I wouldn't say he's in poor form at all," said Flower of the England captain who made 19 and six against Pakistan.

"Strauss looks very composed and compact at the crease. He got out in the first innings to a shot he wouldn't want to repeat, and he was unlucky in the second, so that's how it goes sometimes. He will come back," said Flower of Strauss who has only one fifty in the last 12 innings.

"As Strauss said, there's no point in panicking. What we've got to do is play better."