

YOUTH C'WEALTH GAMES
Dismal start for BD

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladeshi athletes put up dismal performances in the 5th Youth Commonwealth Games which got underway in Samoa on Saturday.

Both Sheikh Ashrafuzzaman and Tamanna Akhter finished 18th in the boys' and girls' 100m sprints respectively, with Ashrafuzzaman clocking his best time of 11.07 seconds while Tamanna taking 13.01 seconds to finish the race.

Boxer Robin Mia lost against India's Gourav Solanki in the 52kg category while Saiful Mia lost against England's Patrick James in the singles of squash, said a Bangladesh Olympic Association press release.

SA GAMES TRAINING
BOA to get Tk 10 crore

SPOTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) is set to get Tk 10 crore from the government to run training camp for the 12th South Asian Games, which is scheduled to be held in India from January 10 to 20.

The youth and sports ministry allocated the fund which is Tk 6.75 crore less than what BOA had sought, informed the association's joint secretary general Ashiqur Rahman Miku yesterday.

The BOA had already started the training camp from last month with a plan of providing each athlete with Tk 500 as food allowance and Tk 300 as pocket money. The association is now thinking about reducing the amount of allowances due to the curtailed allocation from government.

Carrick out of Swiss clash

AFP, London

Manchester United midfielder Michael Carrick has pulled out of the England squad for the Euro 2016 qualifier against Switzerland at Wembley on Tuesday because of injury, it was announced Monday.

Venus in way of 'Serena Slam'

AFP, New York

Serena Williams will play sister Venus for the 27th time as professional rivals in a US Open quarterfinal Tuesday, but no prior matchup has had so much at history stake.

World number one Serena is three wins shy of completing the first calendar Grand Slam since Steffi Graf in 1988 and taking a 22nd Slam singles title to match Graf's Open Era record, two shy of Margaret Court's all-time mark.

Exactly 14 years to the day after they met in their first Grand Slam final at Arthur Ashe Stadium, the sisters will return for their 14th career Grand Slam meeting, one that might be the toughest hurdle between Serena and a rare feat she has not achieved.

Serena, two years younger than Venus at 33, leads the Williams sibling rivalry 15-11 with an 8-5 edge in Grand Slam meetings, but they have split four US Open meetings, including Venus winning the 2001 final and Serena taking a 2002 rematch.

"The only player in the draw I don't want to play, not only because she's my sister, but for me she's the best player," Serena said of Venus.

"She has beaten me so many times. She's a player that knows how to win, knows how to beat me and knows my weaknesses better than anyone."

Venus wants to add to a trophy



"Don't think anyone wants to be a spoiler. I think people love to see history being made. But at the same time, you're focused on winning your match."

- Venus Williams



"The only player in the draw I don't want to play, not only because she's my sister, but for me she's the best player."

- Serena Williams

collection that includes the 2000 and 2001 US Opens and five Wimbledon titles, the most recent in 2008.

"I would love to. But it's easier said than done," Venus said. "Even though you're playing your sister you have to be prepared and focus. The preparation doesn't change."

Serena's 32-match Grand Slam win streak includes a Wimbledon title run to complete a "Serena Slam" and make her the oldest major champion at age 33.

Serena, whose first "Serena Slam" in 2002-03 came by beating Venus in four consecutive Slam finals, has won 25 US Open

never was able to beat her."

In their younger days, nerves and sisterly devotion made for some ugly matches, but maturity has created sibling spectacles.

"It's more fun than it used to be," Serena said. "We really relish the opportunity. We're both happy to still be involved in getting so far. And it's still super intense. She's doing well and she wants to win this. So do I. It's not easy."

It's only their fourth meeting since 2009, with Serena taking the most recent matchup in the fourth round at Wimbledon in July and Venus winning the one before last year in a Montreal semi-final.

"It has been an amazing rivalry," Serena said. "I think it has meant a lot. Venus and I have definitely proven that you can be enemies on the court and friends and sisters off the court."

Tuesday could be one of the last great moments in the epic rivalry.

"It has helped the sport to grow because it has been such an unusual circumstance and so intriguing for everyone," Venus said.

"That's what we always wanted growing up, just to be out there on the big stage duking it out when someone named Williams will win."

Novak battles into last 8
Azarenka, Wawrinka through to quarter-finals

AFP, New York

World number one Novak Djokovic reached his 26th consecutive Grand Slam quarterfinal Sunday but only after surviving a US Open scare against Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut.

Meanwhile, two-time runner-up Victoria Azarenka reached her fourth US Open quarter-final on Monday with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Varvara Lepchenko of the United States.

On the other hand, Stan Wawrinka beat Donald Young in a hard fought contest to go through to the quarter-finals. Wawrinka beat the American 6-4, 1-6, 6-3, 6-4. It was a tough match considering that the Swede was beaten 1-6 in the second set. He however, came back well to win the game three sets to one.

The Belarusian, whose season has

been stalled by a left thigh strain, appeared on Arthur Ashe Stadium with both biceps tightly strapped.

"It's a little embarrassing. I have blisters from my shirts rubbing against my arms so I needed the bandages," said Azarenka.

Lepchenko, who was bidding to become the first American woman not called Williams to make the last-eight since 2009, was broken in the third and ninth games of the opening set.

She rallied to edge ahead in the first game of the second but handed the break straight back to the 26-year-old Azarenka. The Belarus star carved another break for 5-3 before faltering when she served for the match.

But she secured victory in the next game on her first match point when left-handed Lepchenko went wide.

"I felt at 5-3 that I never went for my shots, she didn't give me much rhythm," she said. "But I told myself to

be aggressive and go for it."

Djokovic, the 2011 champion won 6-3, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 to set-up a clash against Spanish veteran Feliciano Lopez in what will also be his ninth US Open last-eight place in a row.

Djokovic gave up a 4-2 lead in the second set and saw an early break clawed back in the fourth by the 23rd seeded Agut, a former junior footballer with Villarreal in Spain.

The Serb was also broken when serving for the match at 5-2 as Agut unleashed a barrage of deep, murderous forehands before steadying himself to claim his 60th win of the year.

Defending champion Marin Cilic made the last eight for the fourth time with a 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 (7/2) 6-1 win over France's Jeremy Chardy.

French 19th seed Tsonga reached his second New York quarter-final with a 6-4, 6-3, 6-4 win over Benoit Paire.

Iceland make history

AFP, Paris

Iceland made footballing history on Sunday as they qualified for a major tournament finals for the first time, joining the Czech Republic in securing their berth at Euro 2016.

The island nation, with its population of barely 330,000, became the least populated country ever to qualify for a European Championship thanks to a nervy 0-0 draw with Kazakhshtan in Reykjavik.

Iceland only needed a point to secure one of the top two places in Group A, and captain Aron Gunnarsson of Cardiff City was sent off in the 89th minute just before celebrations erupted on the final whistle.

The result allowed the side coached jointly by Heimir Hallgrimsson and the Swede Lars Lagerback to follow the Czechs and England in being able to book flights to France next year.

England became the first nation to qualify for the 24-nation jamboree on Saturday and the Czechs sealed their place by beating Latvia 2-1 while the struggling Netherlands slumped to a potentially

disastrous 3-0 defeat in Turkey.

First-half goals from David Limbersky and Vladimir Darida put the Czechs in control in Riga, and they held on after Arturs Zjuzins got a goal back for Latvia.

Bosnia were comfortable 3-0 winners at home to Andorra, with Ermin Bicakcic, Edin Dzeko and Senad Lulic all scoring in the first half.

Both sides were reduced to 10 men after the restart as Everton's Muhamed Besic was sent off for the hosts along with Andorra's Victor Rodriguez.

Italy edged closer to qualifying from Group H after Daniele De Rossi's sixth-minute penalty proved enough to beat Bulgaria 1-0 in the Sicilian city of Palermo.

De Rossi and Bulgaria's Ilian Mitsanski were both sent off in the second half, while Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon won his 150th cap.

The Euro 2012 runners-up are two points clear of Norway, who leapfrogged Croatia into second place thanks to a 2-0 win when the sides met in Oslo, Jo Inge Berget of Malmo scoring twice.

In the other game in Group H, Malta and Azerbaijan drew 2-2, with Rahid Amirguliyev scoring twice for the visitors either side of goals by captain Michael Mifsud and Alfred Effiong for Malta.



Iceland made history on Sunday as they qualified for any major tournament finals for the first time ever. Here Iceland players celebrate their victory over Netherlands in a Euro 2016 qualifier last Thursday.

End of the road for Pirlo?

AFP, Milan

Andrea Pirlo's status as one of Italy's 'untouchables' has been shaken after the Azzurri legend was sidelined by coach Antonio Conte in the wake of criticism following a mediocre performance in a Euro 2016 qualifier.

Pirlo has 116 caps and is widely regarded as one of the world's all-time great deep-lying playmakers.

But the 36-year-old's move from four-time consecutive Serie A champions Juventus to New York City FC has coincided with a dip in form and the 'orchestrator', as Pirlo is often known, has looked somewhat out of tune.

Pirlo looked far below his usual best during a 1-0 win over Malta last Thursday and, although he has Conte's backing, he was sidelined for Sunday's 1-0 win at home to Bulgaria which took Italy to the brink of booking their ticket for next summer's finals in France.

The back-to-back wins sent Italy top of Group H with a two-point cushion on Norway and they require just one point from their next two encounters -- away to Azerbaijan and at home to Norway -- to qualify for the European Championships.

The Euro 2016 finals will Pirlo's last international tournament, but his performance against Malta last week has prompted debate that even that could be a step too far.

"I think every player has to know when it's time to hang up his boots," said Beppe Marotta. Coming from the

CEO of Juventus, whom Pirlo helped lead to four 'scudetti' and the Champions League final last season, it must have been painful reading.

Marotta added: "I don't know if that moment has already come for him. It's a decision only he can make."

Against Bulgaria, Roma's midfield general Daniele De Rossi stepped in for Pirlo in the middle of Italy's three-man midfield, flanked by Marco Verratti and Marco Parolo.

Italian sports media on Monday were quick to jump on the fact Verratti



admitted he fared better playing alongside De Rossi than with Pirlo last week.

But the Paris Saint Germain star explained: "Maybe I played a little better tonight (Sunday), but that was because Bulgaria gave us more space than Malta did."

De Rossi, a no-nonsense defensive midfielder with a history of indiscipline, fired Italy into a sixth-minute lead from the penalty spot after Antonio Candreva was fouled in the area.

But De Rossi's poor disciplinary record was blotted again when he was sent off 10 minutes after the restart for

Malaysian chief to quit

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's football chief announced plans to step down on Monday after a record 10-0 defeat which cost the coach his job and prompted the sports minister to threaten to suspend the country's soccer body.

Football Association of Malaysia (FAM) President Tengku Abdullah Ahmad Shah said he would gradually step aside, state-run Bernama news agency reported, without giving further details.

"I will step down in stages because there are a lot more matters in FAM that I have to complete," he was quoted as saying. No timetable was given for his exit.

Coach Dollah Salleh had already resigned on Saturday, two days after last week's embarrassing World Cup qualifying defeat to UAE -- Malaysia's worst loss ever.

The result has proved a tipping point for Malaysia.

Youth and Sports Minister Khairy Jamaluddin on Sunday warned of "drastic" measures against FAM if it continued to "recycle" old excuses for losing, the New Straits Times reported.