

## MILAN TAKE YAFFA TO COURT

AC Milan is taking former academy player Yusupha Yaffa to court following allegations he told the club he was nine years younger than his real age. Yaffa arrived in Italy in 2009 seeking asylum from Gambia and according to Gazzetta dello Sport, lost his identity papers and claimed his age was 13, when his actual age is said to have been 22. A move to the Milan academy followed in 2013 when he was presumed to be 16 years old with a birthday of December 31, 1997, but an investigation puts his real birthday as February 14, 1987. The striker faces fraud charges in Italy after reportedly raising suspicions over his age with comments made on Facebook regarding his schooling and multiple queries from



## More players reveal fixing approaches

AFP, Melbourne  
More players revealed match-fixing approaches on Tuesday as the Australian Open Grand Slam tournament came under close scrutiny following claims that corruption in tennis was widespread. Australia's Thanasi Kokkinakis said he had been targeted through social media, while a British former Davis Cup player said he was once offered an envelope stuffed with cash to throw a match. According to Australian media, police were also on the look-out for suspicious results in the first round of the Australian Open. The latest developments come after the BBC and BuzzFeed, citing leaked documents, said 16 players who have reached the top 50 had repeatedly fallen under suspicion without facing action. "More than half" of the players, who include singles and doubles Grand Slam champions, are at the Australian Open in Melbourne, according to BuzzFeed.

## Fresh gear for U-19s

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Fresh has secured the sponsorship rights to the Bangladesh Under-19 team for the ICC Under-19 World Cup to be held in Bangladesh this year. After ending their deal with Aamby Valley, the U-19s will be sponsored by the subsidiary of the Meghna Group of Industries for the ICC tournament.



Spain's Rafael Nadal reacts during his men's singles first round match against compatriot Fernando Verdasco during the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Nadal's fall from grace

REUTERS, Melbourne



Rafa Nadal was heading back to the drawing board on Tuesday after another startling early loss at a Grand Slam deflated his early-season optimism and left him questioning his strategy. The Spaniard arrived in Melbourne for the start of the Australian Open talking of his 'happy feelings' after a strong run at the end of last year and a positive opening to 2016 following a rigorous pre-season fitness camp. But any hope that Nadal, who turns 30 this year, can revive the glory days when he ruled tennis were blown away in the first round by compatriot Fernando Verdasco, who roared to a 7-6(6) 4-6 3-6 7-6(4) 6-2 triumph. Nadal has suffered some crushing early defeats since he won the last of his 14 grand slam titles at the French Open in

2014 -- Dustin Brown (at Wimbledon) and Fabio Fognini (U.S. Open), but in those he lacked form and fitness. Against Verdasco, a player he had beaten 14 times in 16 meetings, the physical ailments that have dogged his stellar career were not apparent, his game just looked stale. "The game is changing a little bit," the world number five told reporters after only his second career loss in the opening round of a grand slam tournament. "Everybody now tries to hit all the balls. There are no balls that you can prepare the point. The game has become a little bit more crazy in this aspect. "I was practicing a little bit different, trying to be more aggressive. I can play defensive or offensive. But if you stay in the middle, then I am dead." At his peak Nadal, coached throughout his career by his uncle Toni, wore down opponents with an attritional baseline game before finish-

ing them off with clinical winners. These days, with wear and tear dulling his lightning speed, his game looks vulnerable against lower-ranked players prepared to attack him -- as Verdasco did to devastating effect. As Toni watched on in the final games, Nadal seemed powerless to stem the tide. "You cannot be in the middle of being offensive or defensive, because it is obvious that finally you don't have a consistent strategy, then you are lost," Nadal said. The Mallorca native can only hope that he can respond to his first-round defeat like he did when losing to Belgium's Steve Darcis in the opening round at Wimbledon in 2013. Then, Nadal rebounded to win the U.S. Open a few weeks later, rolled into the following year by reaching the Australian Open final and went on to claim his ninth French Open title.

## Nepal storm into final

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Forward Nawayug Shrestha struck his first international hattrick as Nepal stormed into the final of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup with an emphatic 4-1 win over Maldives in the second semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Bishal Roy struck the other goal for the Gorkhalis while Nashid Ahmed scored the consolation goal for Maldives. The Red Snappers, who had come into the semifinal with the favourites' tag, struggled to cope with the speed and pressure from the Nepalese from the beginning and conceded the lead on the half-hour mark. Nawayug fired home from close to give Nepal the lead in the 31st minute after Bimal Gharti Magar, being set up by Bishal Bal, rattled the bar from inside the box. Nepal goalkeeper Bikesh Kuthu then denied Maldives striker Easa Ismaili with a brilliantly save one minute before the break. After resumption, Nepal continued to show their spirited performance and doubled the lead in the 53rd minute when

Bishal Roy drove a miscued clearance by a Maldives defender home with his left foot. Nepal took the match away from their opposition when Nawayug cleverly put the ball over the onrushing goalkeeper Faisal Mahamed in the 62nd minute. Despite trailing by three goals, Maldives showed some character to reimburse one goal in the 76th minute, with Nashid Ahmed placing the ball at the far post after receiving an angular pass from Hassan Naiz and then Ibrahim Ansar hit the post in the 80th minute. Nawayug completed the rout and his hattrick in the stoppage time to send a few hundred Nepalese supporters into wild celebration. "It was my first international goal as well as my first international hattrick. It became possible because of our teammates, especially Bimal Gharti Magar, and I am really proud of this achievement," said the Nepal Army striker. "Nepal were better than us today [Tuesday] and they deserved this result. Probably they are the best team in the tournament and hats off to them," said Maldives coach Ricki Herbert. Nepal will face Bahrain in Friday's final at the same venue.



Nepal players celebrate one of their four goals against Maldives in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## NADAL'S DECLINE

**2014**  
**JANUARY:** Against Wawrinka in the Australian Open final, Nadal suffered a back injury when he was down 2-0 in the second set, and although he won a set, he lost the match in four sets.  
**AUGUST:** Nadal withdraws from the US Open with a wrist problem, raising fresh fears about his health after several battles with injury.  
**NOVEMBER:** After defeating Novak Djokovic in the French Open final in June, Nadal undergoes surgery to remove his appendix in Barcelona which sees him miss the rest of the season.  
**2015**  
**JANUARY:** On his return to Grand Slam tennis, Nadal loses in the Australian Open quarter-finals 6-2, 6-0, 7-6 (7/5) to Tomas Berdych  
**FEBRUARY:** In the Rio Open, Nadal suffered a shock defeat at the hands of Fabio Fognini in the semifinals.  
**JUNE:** Novak Djokovic ends the King of clay's six-year French Open unbeaten streak in the quarter-finals, 7-5, 6-3, 6-1. Afterwards, Nadal's ranking drops to 10th, his lowest in more than a decade, and just a year after he was world number one  
**JULY:** Concerns grow as Nadal exits Wimbledon in the second round to 102nd-ranked Dustin Brown, 30  
**SEPTEMBER:** Nadal throws away a two-set lead to exit the US Open third round against Fabio Fognini, leaving him without a Grand Slam title for the first season since 2004  
**DECEMBER:** After his chastening season, Nadal admits he's not sure he'll ever win a Grand Slam title again. "I don't know if that's going to happen," he tells reporters in New Delhi.  
**2016**  
**JANUARY:** Loses in five sets to fellow Spanish left-hander Fernando Verdasco at

## Sheikh Jamal leave empty-handed

### All 11 national booters refuse to join club

SPORTS REPORTER



Despite the lacklustre performances of players in international matches, the demand for local footballers is still sky high to the local clubs. And those clubs had no hesitation disbursing millions to these national players in a bid to rope them in for the Bangladesh Premier League. It seems that even club officials are not taking the booters' dismal performances in their last two international tournaments into account. Yesterday officials of top clubs rushed to the headquarters of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) to secure national players -- who earlier made commitments to various clubs -- for their sides. The three-hour drama saw officials of Sheikh Jamal DC, Sheikh Russel KC, Abahani Ltd and Chittagong Abahani

attempt to take away the national players from the custody of the national team's management. A total of 22 national players, of whom 11 were from Sheikh Jamal DC, reached the BFF House from Hotel Purbani with police escort yesterday morning and were confined to the conference room of the federation for nearly three hours before they departed, escorted by the club officials and supporters. However, Sheikh Jamal officials had to leave empty-handed as all 11 players refused to return with club officials despite a series of meetings to convince them otherwise. Eleven players were offered to sign the joining papers of Sheikh Jamal for their AFC Cup Qualifiers training camp -- which was supposed to start yesterday for the upcoming home-and-away fixtures beginning in March -- but none of the players

signed the papers. Instead they told Sheikh Jamal officials that they were ready to represent them in the AFC Cup Qualifiers as guest players. "It is certain that I am not playing for the Sheikh Jamal this season. I need some rest and I want to go back home and then I will take a decision on the transfer," Mamunul Islam stated openly in front of Sheikh Jamal officials. "The chairman of the national team's committee informed us at today's [Tuesday] team meeting that we are now free players. So, we are not bound to go back to Sheikh Jamal and I will take a decision on my own," said defender Nasir Chowdhury, who along with Mamunul, Sohail Rana and Raihan Hasan reportedly pledged their commitment to Chittagong Abahani. Jamal Bhuiyan, Shakhawat Hossain Rony, Monaem Khan Raju and Alamgir

Kabir Rana are supposed to play for Sheikh Russel while Abahani have taken commitments from goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohail and defender Yeasin Khan. Gaffar Chowdhury, in-charge of Sheikh Jamal, alleged that the federation has hatched a conspiracy against them after handing over the national players to different clubs instead of Sheikh Jamal. "The manager of the national team said that they would send the eleven Sheikh Jamal players to their respective houses with police protection, but they handed them over to other clubs. We could have taken the players away the way other clubs took them away today, but we did not do it. It is a conspiracy from the federation against Sheikh Jamal. It is all right, Sheikh Jamal will not form any squad and will not play in the AFC Cup Qualifiers," said Gaffar.

## Rafael, Simona sent packing

AFP, Melbourne



Rafael Nadal and Simona Halep were sent crashing out of the Australian Open first round on Tuesday as a dramatic day of upsets shifted the landscape of the year's first Grand Slam. Nadal suffered one of the worst Grand Slam results of his career as he was stunned by fellow Spanish left-hander Fernando Verdasco in a five-set thriller which recalled their epic 2009 semi-final. Halep, the women's world number two, soon followed him out in an almighty upset by Chinese qualifier Zhang Shuai -- who wept freely as she won her first Grand Slam match in 15 attempts. Andy Murray, a four-time finalist who is seeking his first win in Melbourne, dispatched Germany's Alexander Zverev 6-1, 6-2, 6-3 in hot conditions to move into the second round. Rising star Garbine Muguruza beat Estonian debutante Anett Kontaveit 6-0, 6-4 in one hour exactly -- and immediately set her sights on dethroning Serena Williams in the final. While Murray and Muguruza motored through, seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams suffered an early exit when she lost to British number one Johanna Konta 6-4, 6-2.

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