

SPORT



Serena Williams wrote her name in the record books at the Rod Laver Arena yesterday, defeating her sister Venus Williams in the Australian Open final to clinch an Open-era-record 23rd Grand Slam title.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Twenty three and counting

Serena eclipses Graf beating sister Venus in Australian Open final

AFP, Melbourne



A jubilant Serena Williams said it was "awesome" to finally clinch a record 23rd Grand Slam title after beating her sister Venus in the Australian Open final, a result which also took her back

to world number one.

The dominant American won her seventh Aussie title 6-4, 6-4 to finally surpass Steffi Graf's Open-era milestone of 22 major wins, nearly 18 years after she lifted her first Slam trophy at the 1999 US Open.

The 35-year-old Serena, who had equalled Graf's mark at Wimbledon last year, now stands just one behind the all-time record of 24 won by Margaret Court, who was in the president's box at Rod Laver Arena.

"I don't like numbers during a tournament when I am trying to reach a big milestone. Now we can talk about it," she told ESPN, after posing in shoes branded with '23' on the heel.

"It's pretty awesome. I really wanted to get to 23, more than you can ever imagine. And I kept telling myself, 'Serena, 22 isn't bad'.

"To get to number 23 here is really rather special, against Venus as well because my first big match was against her here on this court. Going into this match, it felt like it was all full circle."

Serena's astonishing achievement also means she ends the brief stay at world number one of Angelique Kerber, who displaced Williams in

September after three-and-a-half years at the top.

Fittingly, her sister and closest confidante, Venus, was on the other side of the net to share the moment of victory, another chapter written in their amazing family history.

"There is no way I would be at 23 without her. There is no way I would be at one (title) without

Serena Williams now has an Open-era record of 23 Grand Slam titles. She has won the Australian Open 7 times, another Open-era record, the French Open 3 times, Wimbledon 7 times and the US Open 6 times.

I would really like to take this moment to congratulate Venus. She is an amazing person. There is no way I would be at 23 without her. There is no way I would be at one without her. There's no way I would have anything without her. She is my inspiration, she is the only reason I am standing here today and the only reason that the Williams sisters exist.

-- Serena Williams

her," said Serena.

"She is my inspiration. She is the only reason I am standing here today and the only reason that the Williams sisters exist."

It was Venus -- when still a teenager with beads in her hair -- who knocked Serena out in

round two on her Grand Slam debut in Melbourne 19 years ago, and they have since played nine major finals together.

Aged 36 and seeded 13, Venus had turned back the clock to make her first Grand Slam title match since Wimbledon in 2009, but adding to her seven major successes was not to be.

"Serena Williams... That is my little sister, guys. Congratulations Serena on number 23," said an emotional Venus. "I have been right there with you, some of them I lost right there against you. Yes, that is weird but it is true."

She added: "To have this opportunity to play against each other again, and to be able to rise to that occasion, was quite momentous."

Showing the single-mindedness that has propelled her to greatness, Serena, seeded two, overcame a scratchy and nervous start in which all four opening games were breaks and when she smashed a racquet in frustration.

But she soon settled to get a decisive break to go 4-3 in front with an unstoppable backhand, and served out the set with an ace.

Serena was fired up and she worked three break points in the third set, only for her sister to negotiate her way out of trouble with some big forehand winners.

The battle went with serve to 3-3 before Serena cranked up the pressure to break with a scintillating crosscourt backhand and take a 4-3 lead.

With history beckoning, she served out the match, falling to the floor in celebration before a long embrace with Venus.

Mushfiqur back in training

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim batted in the nets in Mirpur yesterday for the first time since he injured his right thumb in New Zealand. He was the only national player present at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday as he focused hard to middle deliveries.

While Mushfiqur was not keen on speaking to the media, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) sports physician Debashish Chowdhury told reporters that there was nothing to worry about with regards to the skipper.

"After returning, he went through another scan and we didn't see any cracks or fractures. That's why we aren't too concerned about Mushfiqur. While there is no fracture, he does still have some pain and we need to give him time for that.

"His recovery though has been satisfying. If he improves in the same way, he shouldn't have any problems returning to the game after 31st January."

At the moment Bangladesh are plagued by injury concerns. Aside from Mushfiqur, the BCB also has to worry about Imrul Kayes, Mominul Haque, Mustafizur Rahman, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Mohammad Shahid.

Mustafizur, who missed out on most of the New Zealand series, is complaining of some pain in the hip region.

"Mustafizur has no problem with his shoulder. His new problem is around back and hip region. Although he has some pain, his name is not there on the injury list that

the management provided us, so it's not that serious.

"I think it's natural for a person to be a bit less confident after immediately returning from surgery. That is very obvious. He will improve with time. All he needs is some game time. The pain that he has on his side is very normal and many pacers have this. It's not that serious," explained Debashish.

Shahid, who had injured his right knee during the Bangladesh Premier League, is likely to be sent to Australia next week in order to be further assessed. Shahid had suffered a partial ACL tear and at first was expected to recover after rehabilitation. However, the BCB is now sending him to Australia in order to get a second opinion.

"If the surgeon over there thinks that he will need an operation, then he will go under the knife," said Debashish.

With regards to Mominul, who had suffered a bruised ribcage during the New Zealand series, Debashish expects him to be fine before the Test series. However, he expressed caution over Imrul, who has been diagnosed with a strain in his thigh muscle.

"Imrul is recovering quite well. However, since this is a muscle problem, the pain might return. So we have to be absolutely sure about Imrul because we don't want him to get injured again and then put him in danger for the Sri Lanka series," said Debashish.

On another note, Bangladesh ODI and T20I captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who fractured his right hand in New Zealand, will need five to six weeks to recover.

The players will undergo a physical test on January 31, after which the extent of their fitness levels will be clearer.



Bangladesh Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim observes his bat following his first practice session since returning from injury at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Jayed rips through Central Zone

SPORTS REPORTER



Pacer Abu Jayed carried on his good form from the National Cricket League (NCL) to give his side, Islami Bank East Zone, a brilliant start on the first day of the Bangladesh Cricket League, the premier four-day competition of the country, yesterday.

The 23-year-old scalped a five-wicket haul at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra to help bundle out Walton Central Zone for just 224 in 65.2 overs. In reply, East Zone opens Liton Das and Mehedi Maruf put on 95 runs for the opening wicket and ended the first day on a high.

Jayed was not the only successful pacer. Ebadat Hossain scalped two and Mohammad Saifuddin took one as the pacers ran through Central's middle order. The boost from the pacers left Central reeling at 86 for 5 after 26 overs.

Captain Mosharraf Hossain and veteran Mohammad Sharif scored 46 and 44 respectively to help Central cross the 200-run mark before Jayed dismissed the tail along with spinner Saqlain Sajib. Jayed finished with impressive figures of 5 for 37 in 15.2 overs. The bowler, who was the highest wicket-taker in the NCL seems to have kept his touch.

In reply, Liton smashed 60 off 59 balls

with three sixes and seven fours, while Mehedi hit 32 with five fours as East Zone raced to 95 runs in 19 overs.

Led by Jahurul Islam, BCB North Zone ended the first day on a strong position as they made their way to 210 for 3 in 93 overs against Prime Bank South Zone at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

Half-centuries from Jahurul and Naeem, who were well supported by Forhad



ABU JAYED ... 5 for 37

Hossain's 43 and Nasir Hossain's unbeaten 35, helped North Zone reach the dominant position.

The one thing they will be disappointed about is the fact that their batsmen lost their wickets after getting set. Jahurul was dismissed by Abdur Razzak for 65 and Forhad was caught behind off Shohag Gazi on 43, while Naeem remained unbeaten on 54.

Mukund to lead India A against BD

PTI, New Delhi

Tamil Nadu captain Abhinav Mukund will be leading a 14-member India A side in a two-day warm-up match against Bangladesh before the one-off Test against visitors start on February 9 in Hyderabad.

The squad features all-rounder Jayant Yadav, who sustained an injury during England series and the match will be his fitness Test before the big game against the neighbouring nation.

Hardik Pandya will also like to make his case stronger and get retained in the squad after being injured during practice ahead of the Mohali Test against England.

The team of 14 features all performers in the Ranji Trophy, including top run-getter Priyank Panchal and top wicket-taker Shahbaz Nadeem.

One of the features of the squad is presence of three wicketkeepers -- Ishan Kishan, Rishabh Pant and second highest scorer of the season Nitin Saini of Haryana.

SQUAD: Abhinav Mukund (C), Panchal, Shreyas Iyer, Ishank Jaggi, Rishabh Pant, Ishan Kishan (WK), Vijay Shankar, Hardik Pandya, Shahbaz Nadeem, Jayant Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Aniket Choudhary, CV Milind, Nitin Saini.

Mixed day for U-16 girls in Japan

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh U-16 women's football team endured mixed fortunes on the opening day of the J-Green Sakai Lady's Football Festival in Osaka, Japan yesterday. The Bangladesh team, who consider this festival as preparation for September's AFC U-16 Championship finals, won a game, lost another and drew the other in the three 40-minute matches they played on Saturday.

According to a message received from the Bangladesh Football Federation, the girls in red and green drew the opening match 0-0 against AC Imabari Academy.

Bangladesh goalkeeper Mahmuda Khatun made two crucial saves in the first half while defender Shamsunnahar wasted a penalty by shooting straight against the crossbar.

Bangladesh lost the second match against Cerezo Osaka Sakai Girl's Team 2-0. The hosts, who are supposedly the title-holders of the Japanese U-15 Girls Championship, scored both goals in the second half.

However, the girls in red and green wrapped up the day's work with a morale-boosting 2-1 victory against Naguya Ladies Team in their last match. After going a goal down early in the match, Bangladesh fought back and notched up the victory, thanks to a brace from prolific striker Sirat Jahan Swapna.



Bangladesh U-16 women's football team (in green jersey) battle it out with their Japanese counterparts during one of the three matches played yesterday, the opening day of the J-Green Sakai Lady's Football Festival in Osaka, Japan.

PHOTO: BFF

SA cruise to win

REUTERS, Cape Town

Wayne Parnell and Imran Tahir took three wickets each as South Africa cruised to an eight-wicket victory over Sri Lanka in the first one-day international in Port Elizabeth on Saturday.

South Africa won the toss and elected to bowl, restricting the tourists to 181 all out in 48.3 overs on a slow wicket.

The home side never looked troubled, reaching their target with 94 balls remaining to take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

Kusal Mendis provided lone resistance for Sri Lanka, who were rocked by two early strikes from Parnell, before Tahir ripped through their middle-order.

Quinton de Kock and Hashim Amla put on 71 for the first wicket, before the former offered a catch to cover off Lakshan Sandakan.

Amla posted his 31st ODI half-century before he was caught and bowled by Asela Gunaratne but Faf du Plessis and AB de Villiers steered South Africa home with ease.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: 181 all out in 48.3 ov (Mendis 62, de Silva 28; Tahir 3-26, Parnell 3-48)
SOUTH AFRICA: 185 for 2 in 34.2 overs (Amla 57, du Plessis 55 not out, de Kock 34; Gunaratne 1-19)
Result: South Africa won by 8 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Imran Tahir.

SCORES IN BRIEF	
WALTON CENTRAL ZONE VS ISLAMI BANK EAST ZONE	no loss (Liton 60 not out, Mehedi 32 not out)
WALTON CENTRAL ZONE: 224 all out in 65.2 overs	BCB NORTH ZONE V PRIME BANK SOUTH ZONE
(Mosharraf 46 not out, Sharif 44; Abu Jayed 5 for 37, Ebadat 2 for 42)	BCB NORTH ZONE: 210 for 3 (Jahurul 65, Naeem 54 not out; Ziaur 1-28, Shohag 1-29)
V ISLAMI BANK EAST ZONE: 95 for	