

SPORT



Roger Federer further cemented his status as a tennis deity after bagging his 18th Grand Slam title by beating Rafael Nadal in the Australian Open final in Melbourne yesterday. INSET: The respect and affection between the two great champions remained high.

PHOTOS: REUTERS

King Roger rules once more

- The Australian Open title took Federer's Grand Slam tally to a record-extending 18
- Federer became the only player to win five titles each at three different Grand Slams
- He is the oldest Grand Slam winner since Ken Rosewall in 1972

REUTERS, Melbourne

Roger Federer came out on top after a rollercoaster ride in the 35th chapter of his rivalry with Rafa Nadal to win his fifth Australian Open 6-4 3-6 6-1 3-6 6-3 and clinch a first Grand Slam title in four and a half years on Sunday.

The 35-year-old capped his triumphant return from knee surgery with a record-extending 18th major title after a vintage battle with his Spanish rival, who had won all three of their previous meetings at Melbourne Park.

Left-hander Nadal, also returning from injury this year, showed sustained periods of his brutal best from the baseline but was just unable to stay with his rival in the gut-wrenching drama of the deciding set.

Federer was forced to endure a nervous wait for his victory after Nadal unsuccessfully challenged the line call on the second championship point before becoming the first man to win five or more titles at three different Grand Slams.

The Swiss, for many the greatest player of all time, celebrated with tears in his eyes but his first words were for his old friend and rival.

"Tennis is a tough sport, there are no draws in tennis but I would have been happy to accept one tonight and share it with Rafa," he said.

"I would have been happy to lose to be honest, the comeback was as good as it was. I hope to see you next year but if not, then it was a wonderful year here and I couldn't be happier tonight."

Federer made the slower start to the contest but it was the Swiss who made the first breakthrough, converting the first break point of the

| GRAND SLAM HALL OF FAME | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------|-----|--------|-----------|----|
| PLAYER | TOTAL | AUS | FRENCH | WIMBLEDON | US |
| Roger Federer | 18 | 5 | 1 | 7 | 5 |
| Rafael Nadal | 14 | 1 | 9 | 2 | 2 |
| Pete Sampras | 14 | 2 | 0 | 7 | 5 |
| Novak Djokovic | 12 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 |

match with a forehand winner to go 5-4 up.

That was enough to take the opening set but this was never going to be a straightforward win for either player and Nadal was all over his opponent's serve at the start of the second and grabbed a 2-0 lead.

Federer had two break points in the next game but Nadal fought them off and then broke again as his rival struggled for accuracy under the Spaniard's onslaught.

Four big forehands gave the Swiss a break back but Nadal held firm to serve out the set and Federer needed three aces to save three break points at the start of the third.

The momentum had swung, though, and Federer stepped up a gear and rattled off the next two games with Nadal left scrambling to fend off a second break in a marathon fourth game.

He was unable to repeat the feat in the sixth game and Federer, his crosscourt backhand causing Nadal all sorts of problems, secured a two sets to one lead with a drop volley.

The pendulum had not finished swinging yet, however, and Nadal broke for 3-1 in the fourth and held under huge pressure in the next game with a brilliant crosscourt forehand winner at full stretch.

Nadal again closed out the set and Federer took a medical timeout before the start of the decider, returning to court only to give up his first service game.

Federer was not prepared to give up easily on a first Grand Slam title since Wimbledon in 2012, though, and upped his aggression to put the set back on serve at 3-3 when Nadal sent a rasping forehand wide.

He needed another five break points on Nadal's next service game before the Spaniard finally cracked as Federer sealed the title with a forehand winner that Hawk-Eye confirmed hit the line.

U-16s end tour on a high

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh U-16 women's football team completed their J-Green Sakai Lady's Football Festival campaign on a happy note as they notched up two victories alongside defeat on the concluding day in Osaka, Japan yesterday.

The girls in red and green started the second day making light work of Amagasaki Ladies by posting a comprehensive 4-0 win, with Sirat Jahan Swapna scoring a brace. The prolific striker scored in the 12th and 16th minutes before captain Krishna Rani Sarker widened the margin one minute ahead of the break and Marzia wrapped up the victory netting six minutes before the end of regulation 40-minute game.

However, Bangladesh surrendered the lead to suffer a 4-2 defeat in a penalty shootout against Thailand U-16 team in their second match of the day after regulation time ended in a 1-1 draw. Swapna put Bangladesh ahead in the 11st minute but the lead lasted only three minutes with Chaisiola

Penpitcha leveling the margin.

In the day's third match, Bangladeshi girls bounced back to put up another brilliant performance to post a 4-0 win over Tokai University Shoyo Team, thanks to another brace from Swapna after Akhi Khatun and Sheuli Azim struck one goal apiece.

Bangladesh team, who took part in this festival as part of their preparation for September's AFC U-16 Women's Championship in Thailand, had a good campaign overall as they won four matches including a warm-up match, drew one and suffered two defeats in seven matches.



Five players of the Bangladesh under-16 women's football team pose for photographs during the last day of the J-Green Sakai Lady's Football Festival in Osaka, Japan yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

'Don't want to miss the golden chance'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Cricket Board's sports physician Debashis Chowdhury made an interesting statement with regards to Imrul Kayes on Saturday. He said that although Imrul was recovering well, his pain could return since it was a muscle injury.

A day later Imrul arrived at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur and went through the prescribed rehabilitation process. He ran for a bit and then hit the gym for a while. Upon being enquired about his injury, Imrul did not seem too concerned. However, his reply was a bit more diplomatic when asked if he would be able to play in the warm-up game against India, scheduled to begin on February 5.

"I don't have any pain. It does not hurt like before. I ran a bit today. I did some cycling as well. I don't have any kind of pain. I spoke to the doctor as well. The Test is on the ninth. I think I will be fine before the start of the game," said the batsman, who had kept for nearly 150 overs in the first innings of the first Test in New Zealand in the absence of Mushfiqur Rahim before injuring his thigh while batting in the second innings.

"Whether I will play the practice match or not will depend upon my physio. If the physio gives the management a good sign, then maybe I will be able to play the tour. If I don't get selected, then that's a different issue. But other than that, I will play if the physio deems me fit.

"There are still five to six days left. If I train hard in the coming days, I am sure something good will happen," added the left-hander.

It's not a series that Imrul will want to miss. This is the first time that Bangladesh is playing a bilateral series against India in India and that fact itself makes it historic.

"Everybody is looking forward to the India series. We don't get to play that often over there... we don't get too many chances. Everyone wants a golden chance like this. Me and everyone else... we are all excited about this series," said Imrul.

A thigh injury forced Imrul to return home midway through the New Zealand series. While he described his premature return as unfortunate, he has learnt to accept the fact and look beyond it. At the moment the New Zealand blues seem to have disappeared and all he is thinking about is the India series.



IMRUL KAYES

Liton double-ton puts East on top

SPORTS REPORTER



A double-century from Liton Das dominated proceedings on the second day of the first round of the Bangladesh Cricket League, the country's premier four-day cricket competition.

The wicketkeeper-batsman scored 219 off 241 balls to help Islami Bank East Zone take a 133-run lead over Walton Central Zone at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra yesterday. While Liton prospered at one end yesterday, the rest of the batsmen failed to score. Had it not been for Abul Hasan's 40 at number eight, Liton probably would not have been able to reach his double-hundred, his personal best.

A batsman who had smashed more than 1000 runs in the Dhaka Premier League back in 2015, Liton has had a stop-start international career. He managed to debut in all three international formats in 2015, but has not been a part of the team since that year.

The 22-year-old's exquisite on-drives are worth watching and he hit many of those during his 241-ball knock. He hit 26 fours and four sixes before becoming one of the three victims of spinner Taibur Rahman in the 86th over. They were eventually bundled out for 367 in 88.3 overs.

Walton Central Zone's Shuvagata Hom was the main reason why East Zone did not run away with the game. It was thanks to his five for 101 that the lead was kept in check. Taibur chipped in with figures of three for 50. After the exchange, Central lost the wicket of Saif Hassan and finished the day on 65 for one, trailing by 78 runs.

Meanwhile, BCB North Zone continued their dominance against Prime Bank South Zone at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. Veteran batsman Naem Islam stepped up for North Zone and scored an unbeaten 176 off 457 balls, finishing the



LITON DAS ... 219

day with a low strike rate of 38.51.

That is not a surprise though, since that is essentially how Naem likes to bat. He managed to score 12 fours and two sixes during the knock so far. This is also partially the reason why North Zone managed to score 474 runs in around 184 overs. They have batted out the first two days at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, but will need to declare soon if they want to push for a win.

34-year-old Abdur Razzak still seems to have plenty of stamina. He has so far bowled 60 overs in the first innings and has scalped three wickets. He bowled in tandem with Shohag Gazi, who took two wickets in his 49 overs. If nothing spectacular happens, this game is likely to be a draw.

'Bring on the clay'

REUTERS, Melbourne

Rafael Nadal's hopes of a 15th Grand Slam title were crushed by an inspired Roger Federer in the Australian Open final on Sunday but the rejuvenated Spaniard was already rubbing his hands together with the prospect of a "special" season on clay.

"I believe that playing like this, good things can happen. (They) can happen here on this surface, but especially can happen on clay.

"On clay I (can) recover better than here, then the opponents don't get that many free points, and I am playing from the solid baseline.

"If I made that happen, I think I can keep having success in hard courts, but on clay can be special."



NAEEM ISLAM ... 176 not out



SHUVAGATA HOM ... 5 for 101

SCORES IN BRIEF

WALTON CENTRAL ZONE VS ISLAMI BANK EAST ZONE
WALTON CENTRAL ZONE: 224 and 65 for 1 (Shamsur 29 not out, Rakibul 29 not out; Ebadat 1-25)

ISLAMI BANK EAST ZONE: 367 all out in 88.3 overs (Liton 219, Mehedi 41; Shuvagata 5-101, Taibur 3-50)
BCB NORTH ZONE V PRIME BANK SOUTH ZONE