

Venus stands on the brink of history

AFP, London



Unbowed by age and illness, Venus Williams stands on the brink of a history as the American star bids to become the oldest Grand Slam champion in Saturday's Wimbledon final against Garbine Muguruza.

At an age when her contemporaries have long since retired, Williams is playing some of the best tennis of her glittering career and she can cap her remarkable renaissance on Centre Court this weekend.

Back in the All England Club final after an eight-year absence, the 37-year-old hopes to become both the oldest Wimbledon and major winner since the Open era began in 1968.

Earning a sixth Wimbledon title, nine years after she last lifted the Venus Rosewater Dish, must have seemed like an impossible dream for Williams when she battled an autoimmune disease that left her fatigued and threatened to force her out of tennis.

Yet, in the twilight of her career, Venus has hit a rich vein of form over the last 12 months.

She was Australian Open runner-up in January to sister Serena, only to have her life thrown into turmoil last month



Venus Williams (L) and Garbine Muguruza arrive to attend their respective practice sessions in Wimbledon yesterday, on the eve of their women's singles final.



PHOTOS: AFP

when she was accidentally involved in a car crash in Florida that led to the death of an elderly man.

A less strong-willed personality would have gone into hiding, but Venus, after choking back tears when asked about the incident at the start of Wimbledon, has taken solace in her tennis.

"There were definitely some issues.

There's definitely a lot of ups and downs," she said.

"I just try to hold my head up high, no matter what is happening in life. In sport especially, you have injuries. You have illnesses.

"I feel very focused still. I have one more match that I'd like to be the winner of.

"But I like to take courage in the fact

that I've been playing well this tournament and this year, and all these moments have led to this."

Having crushed Johanna Konta with a masterful semifinal victory that made her the oldest Wimbledon finalist for 23 years, Venus admitted she is relishing her return to prominence when many had written her off.

"I've played some good tennis in

different points of my life. I think it's wonderful to have the opportunity to play well and to be strong," she said.

"Experience can either work against you or for you. I like to think it's working for me.

"This year has been amazing in terms of my play, playing deep into the big events.

"I'm definitely in the position I want to be in. It's a long two weeks. Now I'm knocking on the door for a title. This is where I want to be."

Inspired by her decision to hire compatriot Conchita Martinez as her temporary coach for Wimbledon, Muguruza has enjoyed a revival of her own over the last fortnight.

Since winning her maiden Grand Slam title at the French Open last year, Muguruza had endured something of a sophomore slump as her ranking dropped out of the top 10.

Martinez became the only Spanish woman to win Wimbledon in 1994 and her soothing words of wisdom have guided Muguruza to her third Grand Slam final.

Muguruza's swaggering victories over Angelique Kerber and Magdalena Rybarikova en route to the final showcased her potent blend of power and poise.

FINAL H2H

VENUS WILLIAMS (10) V GARBINE MUGURUZA (14)			
Head to Head (Overall) Played: 4			
3		1	
WIMBLEDON 2017 STATS			
13	Sets Played	13	
1	Sets Lost	1	
18	Return Games Won	22	
28	Aces	17	
143	Winners	141	
8h 24m	Hours on court	8h 11m	

Beating in-form Venus in their first meeting on grass will be her toughest test, but the Spanish 14th seed is convinced she can emulate her coach's memorable triumph.

"All the names that I read on the honours board, I know all of them. For the last years, you see a lot of Williams surname," she said.

"So I look forward to putting a Spanish name back there."

QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition. However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

Younis donates landmark bat
Former Pakistan captain Younis Khan has donated his most treasured possession for the cause of underprivileged children.

Defoe bids tearful farewell to 'best mate' Bradley
The funeral of Bradley Lowery, one of the iconic faces of last season's Premier League season as the devoted Sunderland fan battled a rare form of cancer, drew thousands of mourners onto the streets.

Bonucci nears shock Milan move
Italy international defender Leonardo Bonucci is on the verge of a shock transfer to AC Milan from Italian champions Juventus after he arrived in Milan.

Volkswagen to sponsor Germany

AFP, Berlin

Germany's top automaker Volkswagen will from 2019 replace its luxury-range competitor Mercedes-Benz as the top sponsor of the national football team, the company and sports body said Friday.

The new deal to sponsor the current world champions comes as VW struggles with the fallout of its "dieselgate" emissions cheating scandal and Mercedes-maker Daimler also faces accusations it rigged air pollution tests.

The advertising marriage of VW and "Die Mannschaft", as Germans call their team, starts on January 1, 2019 and runs until July 31, 2024, meaning it will include the Russia World Cup finals next year.

No financial details were released, but German media said Wolfsburg-based VW would pay the German Football Association DFB 25 million to 30 million euros (\$28-34 million) a year.

Faraaz the inspiration as tournament declared open

SPORTS REPORTER



Walton Inter-University Football Tournament, organised by Sonali Otiti Club and Green

University, was officially declared open yesterday at the Bangabandhu National Stadium with a big festoon carrying the image of a smiling Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain, who sacrificed his life to save his friends during last year's militant attack at the Holy Artisan Bakery in Gulshan, to inspire boys playing 'his favourite sport of football'.

The trophy, which will be handed to the ultimate champions, has been named the Faraaz Challenge Cup to embolden the youths to be fearless like Faraaz as well as keep them away from the dangers of drugs and radi-

calism.

The official opening of the 20-university football tournament turned into an emotional occasion when Faraaz's elder brother -- Zaraif Ayaaz Hossain -- delivered a brief speech as the special guest.

Zaraif, sporting the red jersey of Manchester United with a sentence on the back reading 'We are Faraaz' said: "Faraaz was a real fan of football as well as Manchester United. It is a pleasure for me to attend the game Faraaz loved most."

"On behalf of Faraaz's family, I want to thank those who are participating in the tournament -- students, footballers and sponsors. A special thanks to Sonali Otiti Club for naming the trophy after Faraaz, who is a big inspiration to the young generation as he refused to leave without his

friends during the Holy Artisan Bakery attack, despite being told that he was free to go," said Zaraif to deafening applause from the participating students and organisers.

"Now Faraaz is the best symbol against radicalism and we, on behalf of our family, hope the tournament will be a success," said Zaraif before releasing the pigeons and balloons to signal the tournament open.

Bashundhara Group's vice chairman Safwan Sobhan Tasvir was present as the chief guest while sponsor Walton's additional director FM Iqbal Bin Anwar, Green University's treasurer Lt Gen (rtd) M Moinul Islam, Sheikh Jamal DC governing body's chairman Manjur Kader and ATN Bangla's chairman Mahfuzur Rahman were among other present on the occasion.



Zaraif Ayaaz Hossain (C) elder brother of Faraaz Ayaaz Hossain inaugurates the Walton Inter-University football tournament at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. (INSET) A big festoon carrying the image of a smiling Faraaz in the stands.

PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED

Serena 'loves' Murray for casual sexism reply

AFP, London



Serena Williams says all women players "love" Andy Murray after the British star won plaudits for slapping down a Wimbledon reporter over "casual sexism".

Murray's defence of his Wimbledon title came to an end at the hands of America's Sam Querrey in the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

In his post-match press conference, the 30-year-old was asked for his thoughts on Querrey who was described by a reporter "as the first American to reach a Grand Slam semi-final since 2009".

However, Murray quickly corrected the questioner.

"First male player," he shot back.

Williams, the winner of a record 23 Grand Slam singles titles -- 12 of which have come since Andy Roddick was the last US man to make the semifinals of a Slam at Wimbledon in 2009 -- hailed Murray as a great champion of women's sport.

"There should not be a woman athlete or tennis player who is not totally supportive of Andy Murray," Williams told ESPN's SC6 programme.

"He has spoken up for women's rights and issues especially in tennis forever.

"He's done it again. That's who he is and that's the thing we love about him. He has done so much for us on the tour. We love Andy Murray."

Williams, 35, won her seventh

Wimbledon title in 2016 but has skipped the tournament this year as she prepares to give birth to her first child next month.

Big sister Venus is keeping the family flag flying at the All England Club, reaching Saturday's final where she will face Spain's Garbine Muguruza.

Victory would give Venus a sixth Wimbledon title.

"I feel like I'm there, in a weird way. I feel like I've been there for the whole journey," said Serena, who has faced her sister in four Wimbledon singles finals.

They have also won six women's doubles titles together.

"We talk every day and we text every day, not about tennis always -- our relationship isn't based around tennis so it's just been



ANDY MURRAY

really great. I miss her a lot and I look forward to her coming back.

"All my energy is towards making her want to be great and making her want to win. It's just a totally different feeling."

AFC U-23 C'SHIP QUALIFIERS

Ord wants a win

SPORTS REPORTER



Coach Andrew Ord was looking forward to improved performances from Bangladesh after the team suffered a 3-0 defeat to the Qatar U-23 side in their third and final practice match on Thursday, ahead of their AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers scheduled to begin from July 19 in Palestine.

Ord's charges will take on Palestine, Jordan and Tajikistan on the back of the experience gathered from the three practice matches against Dhaka Abahani, the Nepal U-23 team and the Qatar U-23 team, although the boys in red and green tasted defeat in the last two encounters.

"The last two games have been vital. Without those matches we would have had no chance in Palestine. We beat the champions of Bangladesh [Abahani] and controlled the game but now we are outside, in the real football world," Ord was quoted as saying by a BFF statement after the Qatar fixture.

"I'm sure we will improve from these games. Bangladesh has never won a game at this U-23 tournament level so our goal is to create history and bring a victory back from the championships," he continued.

Although Ord is dreaming of returning home with a win, he did not make it clear who he wanted to upset. Ord may be targeting Tajikistan as the central Asian nation are the lone team who, while ahead of 190th Bangladesh in the FIFA Rankings, are close in terms of performance. Tajikistan are ranked 149th, while Palestine and Jordan are ranked 94th and 108th respectively.

After playing against the Nepal U-23 side on July 11, Bangladesh travelled to Qatar the next day and played their U-23 side on July 13, forcing Ord to make a lot of changes to the team.

During that encounter, Bangladesh were punished whenever they lost concentration and Ord believes the game helped him see the difference in quality between the two sides.

"We played on the counter and limited Qatar to very few chances in the first half while breaking away dangerously ourselves, but they were very well prepared as they played in a very competitive tournament before this game," Ord explained.

"When we lost our concentration and became tired, they punished our mistakes. In the second half, we pushed them back for nearly 20 minutes and trapped Qatar in their own half but they produced a move of real class and quality to score the third goal and that is what separates us from countries at this level at the moment," the coach concluded.

U-16 girls score nine!

SPORTS REPORTER

After suffering a 6-0 defeat at the hands of the South Korea U-16 women's team, the Bangladesh U-16 women's team bounced back as they posted a massive 9-0 win over Yulmyun Middle School Women's football team in their second practice match in South Korea yesterday.

Bangladesh dominated the match throughout the 90 minutes after taking a comfortable 3-0 lead with strikes from Anuching Mogini, Misrat Jahan Mousumi and Nargis Khatun going into half-time.

After resumption, the girls in red and green added six more. Monica Chakma struck a brace while Shamsunnahar, Akhi Khatun, Razia Khatun and Maria Manda netted one goal apiece.

The Bangladesh U-16 women's team have gone to South Korea as part of their preparations for September's AFC U-16 Women's Championship in Thailand and they will play two more matches against school teams on July 17 and 19.

C'WEALTH YOUTH GAMES

BD athletes denied visas

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladeshi athletes lost the opportunity to represent their country in the Commonwealth Youth Games after failing to obtain transit visas of the United States en route to the Bahamas, which will host the Games from July 18.

A six-member Bangladesh contingent comprised of four athletes -- swimmers Ariful Islam and Dhothi Proo Marma and boxers Azharul Islam and Farzana Akter -- along with team leader MA Kuddus Khan and coach-cum-manager Rabeya Khatun were supposed to fly for the Bahamas today.

"The US embassy refused to issue port-entry visas last Sunday for the second time and we needed the visa to reach the Bahamas. So we had to give up on the hope of taking part in the Games after being refused," said Kuddus, adding that they submitted all relevant documents including the Government Order.

The Bangladesh Olympic Association had conducted a two-month training camp to prepare the athletes and took all necessary preparations to send the contingent to the Bahamas.