


Federer heads to Miami

AFP, Indian Wells

 Roger Federer departed Indian Wells empty-handed for a second straight year, but the Swiss great sees no reason he can't get back on track at the Miami Masters.

"Sure, it's frustrating and disappointing and sad to some extent," Federer said after falling 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 to Austrian Dominic Thiem in Sunday's final.

Thiem, 25, denied Federer a record sixth Indian Wells title and returned to his career-high of fourth in the world -- bumping Federer down to fifth going to the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" of Indian Wells and Miami.

But Federer, the 20-time Grand Slam winner who claimed a remarkable 100th career title in Dubai last month, can afford to take the defeat in stride -- especially when he's playing well and feels his 37-year-old body is fully fit.

"It's just not as dramatic," he said of falling to a player who was "just a bit better when it mattered".

"Whereas, when you're hurt and things are difficult, maybe those hurt more.

"I'm going to Miami. The body is perfectly fine. That also always keeps me upbeat, and I feel it's a privilege when I feel

this way leaving a tournament.

"I have been playing every single day for the last three weeks. I can be very happy and proud of that fact."

As at Indian Wells, Federer could meet fellow Swiss Stan Wawrinka in the third round in Miami.

Federer is a three-time winner at Miami, but he lost his second-round opener last year after falling to Juan Martin del Potro in the final at Indian Wells.

With that in mind, Federer shied away from predicting he would bounce back in a big way from his loss to Thiem, with the Miami event's move to a new venue adding to his sense of uncertainty.

"Now it's totally different," Federer said of the tournament moving from its long-time home on Key Biscayne to the Hard Rock Stadium -- home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins.

A new stadium court inside the actual stadium is the centrepiece of the new venue, which also features a secondary grandstand court and two smaller show courts and practice courts.

"Everybody's got to get used to centre court or the conditions at the new site," Federer said. "I'm eager to find out how it's going to be like. There are still a lot of open question marks. Right now I feel really good."



Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (C) warms up with his teammates during a training session at "City of Football" training camp in Oeiras yesterday ahead of their Saturday's Euro 2020 qualifier against Ukraine. PHOTO: AFP

U-23s draw 1-1 against Al-Arabi

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh under-23 football team wrapped up their eight-day training camp in Doha with a 1-1 draw against the under-23 team of Qatar Stars League outfit Al Arabi SC yesterday.

The men in red and green conceded the lead from a spot-kick in the 37th minute, but equalised in the 61st minute through substitute Mohammad Rocky.

The result is a decent outcome for Jamie Day's charges, who will fly to Bahrain today for the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers.

Bangladesh will play against Bahrain on March 22 before taking on Palestine and Sri Lanka on March 24 and 26 in their Group B fixtures of the qualifying campaign.

The Bangladesh team had earlier beaten Qatar's Al-Shahaniya Club's under-23 team 1-0 in their first practice match on Friday.

Loew gambles on youth

AFP, Berlin



Germany coach Joachim Loew hopes to prove his critics wrong and open 2019 with a win when his new-look team host Serbia in a friendly in Wolfsburg on Wednesday.

Loew, who arrived in Wolfsburg later than expected due to a dental operation this week, is hoping to bounce back from a painful 2018, in which Germany suffered an early World Cup exit and were relegated from the top tier of the UEFA Nations League.

The friendly against Serbia is a warm-up for Sunday's prestigious opening Euro 2020 qualifier away to the Netherlands with the Germans hunting revenge after a 3-0 thrashing at the hands of the Oranje last October at the Amsterdam Arena.

Amid fears that German football is in decline, the 59-year-old Loew is under pressure to show that he can build a new era of success around a younger generation of players.

Yet he has also faced fierce criticism for his decision to strike veteran World Cup winners Mats Hummels, Jerome Boateng and Thomas Mueller from the national team set-up, falling offside with their club Bayern Munich in the process.

The controversial call has been seen

as a gamble, which has heightened the pressure ahead of Wednesday's game.

Yet the Germany boss has insisted that the right conclusions have been drawn from the failures of last year.

"We have had a think since the World Cup," he admitted on Friday. "We need to be quicker, more ambitious and more dynamic. We lost all that at the World Cup and our game became quite predictable."

Loew has given three young players their first international call-up.



Germany winger Leroy Sane (L) shakes hands with coach Joachim Loew ahead of a press conference in Wolfsburg yesterday on the eve of their international friendly against Serbia. PHOTO: AFP

Jamal buoyed by Kolkata win

SPORTS REPORTER



With the Bangabandhu Cup Golf Bangladesh Open scheduled to start in the first week of April, golfer Jamal Hossain Mollah feels he got a timely boost with victory in the Bengal Open Golf Championship in Kolkata earlier this week.

The 34-year-old, who had made a relatively slow start to the event with scores of 68 and 69, came roaring back with eight-under-62 and seven-under-63 over the next two days to clinch the title by one shot at 18-under-262.

"This is a timely boost for me. This victory will be a massive confidence boost for me ahead of the Indian Open later this month and the Bangabandhu Cup Golf Bangladesh Open at home in early April," Jamal told The Daily Star yesterday.

This was Jamal's third title on the PGTI, breaking a seven-year jinx on the tour. He had won the 2009 Bangladesh Open as an amateur at the Kurmitola Golf Club before winning the same tournament at the same venue in 2012 as a professional.

He had come close to winning a couple of times in the last few years, but failed to make it eventually. His performance in this



month's Chittagong Open was also not satisfactory as he barely managed to make the cut.

This week's victory at Tollygunge is more impressive as it was his first win outside Bangladesh, and it came with Asian Tour events right around the corner.

"I did not putt well in the first two days, but the putting was really good in the last two days and that made the difference. If I can putt like that I hope I can be among the best in the Bangabandhu Cup next month," Jamal said.

The win lifted Jamal to sixth position in the PGTI Order of Merit as he pocketed a paycheck of 4,84,950 rupees. Badal Hossain, another Bangladeshi golfer, finished fifth just three shots behind Jamal.



Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman (L) makes a move against fellow Grandmaster Enamul Hossain Rajib during the fifth round of the Asian Zonal Chess at the Engineers Institute Building in Dhaka yesterday. The game ended in a draw, helping Zia to hold on to his solo lead with 4.5 points. Rajib was tied second with four points. PHOTO: BCF

BFCA demands participation money

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Football Clubs Association (BFCA) yesterday threatened they might ask clubs under its banner not to participate in the second leg of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and the Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) if the clubs are not paid participation money in full.

The newly-formed association's general secretary Mominul Haque Sayeed, who is also president of Bangladesh Premier League outfit Arambagh, said: "We are thinking whether to participate in the second leg. Unless we are paid participation money before the second leg, eight clubs might not play."

He made the statement during the association's second meeting at a hotel in Dhaka.

The association's president Tarafder Ruhul Amin, meanwhile, demanded the game's local governing body to hold its

Annual General Meeting (AGM) as soon as possible. "We are demanding the Bangladesh Football Federation to declare a date for the AGM within the next 15 days. The AGM has not been held for the last three years, which keeps the clubs in dark, giving no scope to voice their issues."

According to the association officials, seven of the 13 BPL clubs and most clubs in the lower leagues have representation in the association.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, when contacted, said they were hoping to pay the participation money before the start of the second leg of the two leagues.

"We are hoping to get sponsors within the next month. As soon as we get sponsorship, we will pay off the participation money to the clubs of the BPL and BCL on the basis of the decision of the league committee," Shohag said.

The first leg of the BPL is scheduled to end on April 20 while the first leg of BCL is scheduled to be finished by the end of this month.

Chinese media slates Cannavaro

AFP, Shanghai

Fabio Cannavaro's first task as China coach may be to win over a sceptical public after his appointment was met with criticism and even anger.

Former players and state media questioned the credentials of the 2006 World Cup winner and world player of the year, who is yet to claim a major trophy as a coach.

The Chinese Football Association has not made it clear if it was a permanent or temporary role for Cannavaro, who will remain in charge of Chinese Super League giants Guangzhou Evergrande.

"In his time as a player, Cannavaro was great, but as a coach, he still has achieved nothing," the Youth Daily commented, saying his appointment had "caused public uproar".

"Cannavaro's achievements as a player are undisputed," former international Li Yan told the newspaper.

"However, his decisions during games and performance as a head coach are not convincing enough."

The 45-year-old Italian's ascension to the post -- with mentor and predecessor Marcello Lippi remaining as an adviser -- was widely predicted in Chinese media.

Struggling Vallecano sack coach Michel

Rayo Vallecano on Monday sacked coach Miguel Angel Sánchez Munoz, known as Michel, after a desperate run of seven straight La Liga defeats which has them staring relegation from in the face.

"Rayo Vallecano have taken the decision to dismiss Michel as coach of the first team," the club said in a statement.

Rayo did not name a new coach or say who will be in charge of training in the coming days.

Michel was sacked the day after losing 3-1 at relegation rivals Villarreal on Sunday, a defeat that leaves Rayo second from bottom and six points from safety.

The 43-year-old led the club to Spain's top flight last season after winning the Segunda Division title.

Mueller warns title rivals Dortmund

Bayern Munich forward Thomas Mueller has warned title rivals Borussia Dortmund that they cannot afford to slip up as a nail-biting Bundesliga title race enters the final stretch.

"They know they can't afford to make any mistakes, because we are in really good shape," Mueller told Germany's top-selling newspaper Bild on Tuesday.

Having been six points behind Dortmund at the beginning of the year, Bayern are now level on 60 points with eight games to play, but the defending champions top the table with a superior goal difference.

In recent weeks, Bayern have nudged their way into first place on goal difference, having scored 17 goals in their last three games in their bid to win a seventh straight league title.

Ospina out of hospital after head injury scare

Napoli goalkeeper David Ospina has been discharged from hospital and is recovering from his frightening collapse after a knock to the head at the weekend, the Serie A club announced on Monday.

The 30-year-old, who is on loan from Arsenal, will miss Colombia's international friendlies against Japan on March 22 and South Korea four days later after suddenly falling to the ground 41 minutes after receiving treatment following his collision with Ignacio Pussetto during Sunday's 4-2 win over Udinese.

"David Ospina was discharged this afternoon from the Pineta Grande Clinic where he had been admitted last night for a series of checks," Napoli wrote in a statement.

"Checks have ruled out any problem. The player was advised to take a few days of rest."



France star Kylian Mbappe (R) poses for selfies with fans before a training session in Clairefontaine on Monday as part of the team's preparation for the upcoming Euro 2020 qualifiers against Moldova and Iceland. PHOTO: AFP