

Nadal ousts Federer

AFP, Paris

ROLAND GARROS

Defending champion Rafael Nadal powered past Roger Federer in the French Open semifinals on Friday, to move within one victory of a record-extending 12th Roland Garros title after handing his oldest rival his worst Grand Slam defeat in 11 years.

The 33-year-old produced a masterful performance to get past Federer 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 in the last four on Court Philippe Chatrier and set up a final clash with either world number one Novak Djokovic or Austrian fourth seed Dominic Thiem on Sunday.

It will be Nadal's 12th appearance in the championship match, which he has never lost before.

Nadal made only 19 unforced errors, crushing 33 winners as Federer struck 25, although that amount could easily have been doubled against any opponent other than the 11-time champion.

A topsy-turvy start saw the Spaniard race through the first three games before Federer broke back as the wind played havoc with the players' serves from one end.

But Nadal grabbed a 4-2 advantage in a marathon sixth game as Federer, looking to become the oldest Grand Slam finalist

since Ken Rosewall at the 1974 US Open, dumped a forehand into the net.

The crowd were roaring on Federer as he saved a set point, but gasped in appreciation of a rasping Nadal backhand winner which clinched the opening set.

The Swiss turned on the style to take the first two games of the second set, only to be broken straight back as Nadal curled a trademark forehand up the line.

Federer was throwing everything he had at Nadal, but the indomitable left-hander was simply too strong.

The key moments came towards the end of the second set, when second seed Nadal managed to hold under severe pressure to level at 4-4, before putting the pedal down to break despite having trailed 40-0.

The defending champion confidently served out the set to love to move one step closer to the final, where he will look to lift the trophy for a third successive year.

Federer's chances were slipping away quickly, and he received a warning after angrily hitting the ball into the upper reaches of Philippe Chatrier after a flick off the net chord helped Nadal break in game three of the third set.

Another break in Federer's next service game effectively signalled the end of the contest, and Nadal wrapped up an impressive victory as his rival fired a return long.



Rabiul Islam is the toast of his teammates as his superb goal ensured Bangladesh a 1-0 win over Laos in their first round of joint qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup and the 2023 Asian Cup at the New Lao National Stadium in Vientiane on Thursday. PHOTO: BFF

Booters bring home big advantage

Rabiul's goal gives Bangladesh 1-0 away win against Laos

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh took a massive step towards qualifying for the group stages of the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup with a 1-0 win away to Laos on Thursday.

Second-half substitute Rabiul Hasan scored the all-important goal in the 71st minute of the match, where the home team dominated the first half before the visitors upped the ante after the break and eked out a crucial win to silence a few thousand Laotian fans at the New Lao National Stadium.

The young forward from Arambagh Kriya Shanga replaced Arifur Rahman 10 minutes after the break and gave Jamie Day's men a massive boost 16 minutes later with a wonderful goal, picking the corner of the net after receiving a long-ball from skipper Jamal Bhuiyan.

The goal not only gave the men in red and green relief after having been on the back-foot

right through the first half, but it also forced the opposition to attack in numbers, allowing Bangladesh forwards opportunities on the break.

Rabiul, however, had a chance to break the deadlock five minutes after coming off the bench, but he failed to take advantage of a miscommunication in the Laos defence.

The biggest opportunity though was wasted by Tawhidul Alam Sabuz, who replaced Matin Mia in the 66th minute and almost scored with his first touch of the game. The veteran forward raced into the box on a fine cross from Rabiul, but he failed to connect properly with the ball with only the keeper to beat, allowing a defender to clear it for a corner.

However, Rabiul was not to be denied five minutes later when his speculative yet precise and powerful shot from the edge of the box beat the keeper at his near post. The Bangladesh forwards were probably a bit too excited after the goal and failed to add to their tally despite the opposition players giving their

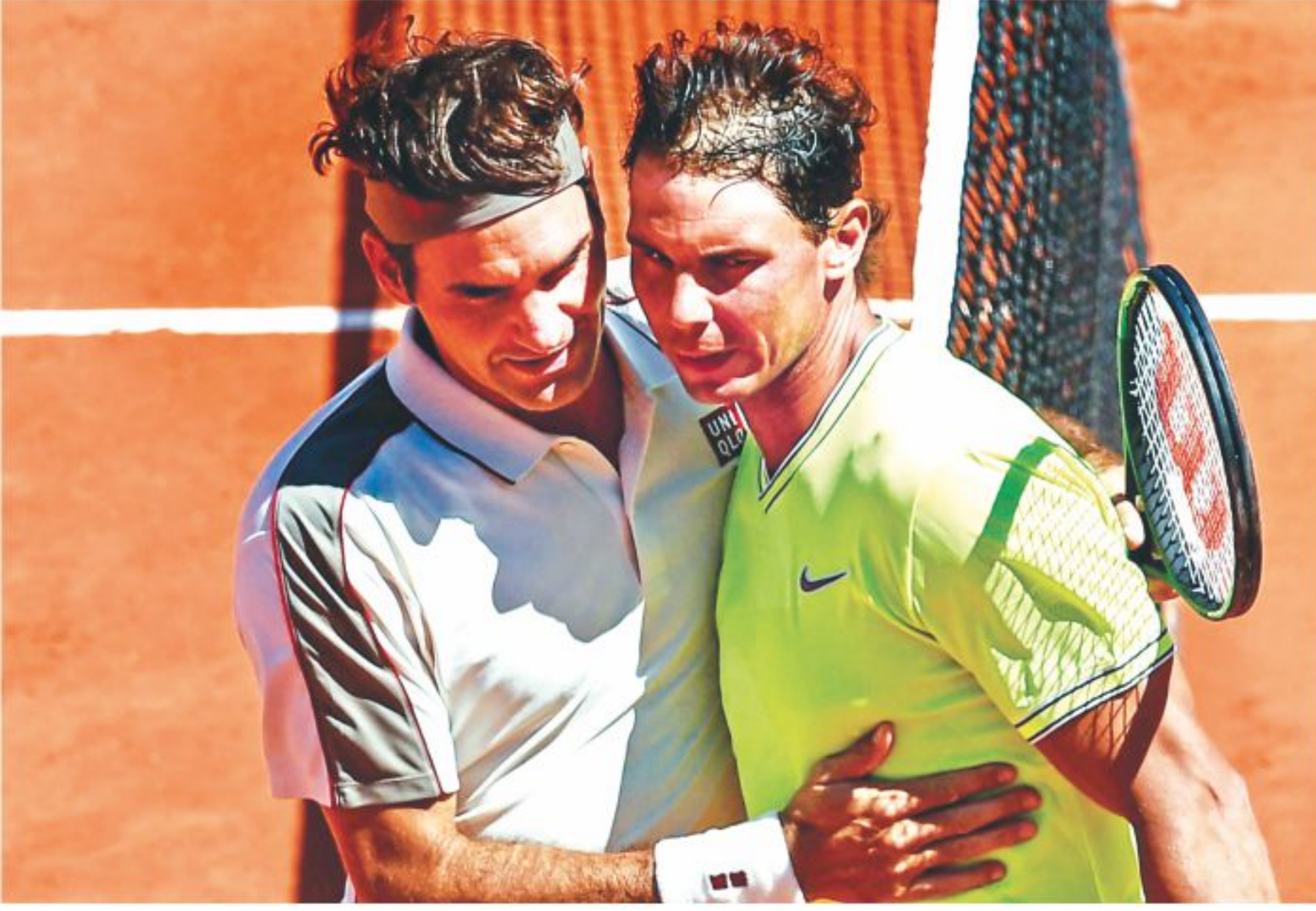
all in search of an equaliser.

However, the fact that Bangladesh went into the second half with a clean sheet owed a great deal to some excellent glove work from goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana.

The Sheikh Russel KC custodian made a number of fine saves from dangerous set-pieces in the first half as the Laotians looked deadly from free-kicks and corner kicks. There was not much threat from open play but Bangladesh defenders negotiated the tricky passages of play with great discipline and organisation.

The win will surely be a massive confidence boost for Jamie Day's charges, who returned home in the early hours of Saturday, for the second leg at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka on June 11.

The winners over the two legs will qualify for the group stages of the joint qualifiers while the losers will be all but devoid of AFC/FIFA-sanctioned competitive matches for the next four-year cycle.



Rafael Nadal (R) hugs Roger Federer after dispatching the Swiss in straight sets in the semifinal of the French Open at the Roland Garros yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Portugal, Netherlands in final

AFP, Porto

Cristiano Ronaldo hit a hat-trick as Portugal withstood a huge moment of VAR controversy to beat Switzerland 3-1 and reach the Nations League final on home soil in Porto.

Ronaldo's free-kick opened the scoring midway through the first half, but the Swiss levelled when the referee overturned his decision to award Portugal a penalty to give a spot-kick at the other end after a VAR review, and Ricardo Rodriguez levelled.

The game seemed destined to head for extra time, but as ever Ronaldo stepped up to be the hero with two expert finishes in the final two minutes.

The hosts will now face the Netherlands in Sunday's final.

Ronaldo pulled his first big chance wide early on, but made the breakthrough on 25 minutes.

Swiss goalkeeper Yann Sommer was fooled by the wicked swerve as Ronaldo's free-kick from the edge of the area flew into his bottom left-hand corner.

Switzerland had posed a threat themselves in the first half with Xherdan Shaqiri, fresh from winning the Champions League with Liverpool, particularly lively.

However, it took the help of VAR to get them back in the game in a moment of huge controversy just before the hour mark.

Portugal thought they were the ones with the chance to extend their lead from the penalty spot when referee Felix Brych pointed to the spot.

However, the German referee then reviewed a Swiss penalty appeal he had waved away for a foul by Nelson Semedo on Steven Zuber and overturned his initial decision.

Rodriguez drilled home the resultant spot-kick much to the fury of the home supporters at the Estadio do Dragao.

But Portugal's greater star power eventually shone through as Silva squared for Ronaldo to drill home his second of the night.

Moments later the hosts sealed their place in the final on the counter-attack as Ronaldo curled into the far corner to take his tally of international goals to 88.

Meanwhile, England's long wait for a trophy since 1966 was extended on as the Netherlands beat them 3-1 win after extra-time in Guimaraes.

Marcus Rashford's penalty gave the Three Lions a first-half lead against the run of play, but Matthijs de Ligt made amends for his error in leading to the spot-kick to level 17 minutes from time.

Jesse Lingard thought he had won the game late on for England only for his strike to be ruled out for offside by VAR and the Dutch took full advantage of that reprieve to deservedly earn their place in the final.

England contributed to their own downfall with a comedy of errors for

Depay particularly wasteful in front of goal.

However, the introduction off the bench of Promes and Donny van de Beek offered the Netherlands more dynamism and England were eventually punished for sitting deep when De Ligt made amends by powering home from a corner.

Van de Beek then missed a glorious chance to completely turn the game around.

Yet, just when there seemed only one winner, England produced their best move of the game as Stones, Ben Chilwell, Barkley and Raheem Sterling moved the ball from one end to the other before Lingard slotted home.



Portugal's inspirational skipper Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates his hat-trick against Switzerland during the semifinal of UEFA Nations League in Estadio do Dragao in Porto on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

both goals in extra-time with John Stones and Ross Barkley at fault as Kyle Walker's own goal and Quincy Promes's tap in sent Holland into the final.

De Ligt had a moment to forget just after the half hour mark. The 19-year-old failed to control a simple pass and then chopped down Rashford in his attempt to recover.

With Harry Kane left on the bench by Southgate, Rashford took responsibility from the spot to send Jasper Cillessen the wrong way for a barely deserved lead.

The Netherlands dominated possession throughout, but lacked a cutting edge up front with Memphis

The celebrations were cut short, though, when the Manchester United midfielder was ruled offside by the finest of margins after a VAR review.

Depay blazed over another fine Dutch chance to win the game before extra-time, but the Netherlands finally took complete control in the extra 30 minutes.

England inflicted much of the damage themselves as Stones dallied on the ball and after Pickford made a great save to deny Depay, Promes's follow-up deflected in off Walker.

Barkley's underhit backpass then teed up a third for the Dutch as Depay squared for Promes to slot into an empty net.

'Win makes the away Eid worth it'

SPORTS REPORTER

Young Bangladesh forward Rabiul Hasan was elated after scoring the all-important goal against Laos in their 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup qualifiers in Vientiane on Thursday. The 19-year-old Arambagh KS skipper, who had also scored the decisive goal against Cambodia in a FIFA friendly in Phnom Penh in March, said the win makes spending Eid away from home worth it.

"It gives me immense pleasure and happiness to think that the team won due to my goal. My happiness knows no bounds at the moment," Rabiul said in his post-match reaction.

The young forward came off the bench in the 55th minute and had an immediate impact as his darting runs down the left unsettled the Laos defence. 16 minutes later, his wonderful goal broke the deadlock and may eventually turn out to be the most important goal in Bangladesh football's history due to the significance of it.

"We are spending our Eid away from home. This win makes the hard work and sacrifice worth it. I am pleased to have made my countrymen happy," the nippy forward said.

Bangladesh coach Jamie Day praised Rabiul's talent, but reminded that he expects even better from the youngster.

While Rabiul created another chance for fellow forward Tawhidul Alam Sabuz, he

failed to take advantage of the opposition's fumbles.

"Rabiul has the potential to be a good player," Day said. "What Rabiul has to learn is not to get carried away, keep his feet on the ground and listen to older players like Jamal [Bhuiyan] and Mamunul [Islam]," Day said, perhaps referring to Rabiul's bare-chested celebration which earned him a yellow card.

The coach showered praise on goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana and the defenders, but was not happy with the team's first half performance.

"Rana was fantastic in the first half dealing with the set-pieces and crosses. We defended well against set-pieces but I felt we were a bit hesitant," Day said.

"Sometimes it's good to win and not play well. Laos are a good side and showed that in good spells of the game. They might feel a little unlucky today while we need to make sure we improve in order to qualify," the English coach, who just recently extended his contract with the BFF, added.

Skipper Jamal Bhuiyan was of the same opinion as his coach regarding the need for improvement in the return leg on June 11.

"It was a hard match. We didn't play very well, especially in the first half. We will have to be different in the second match because we know they would come hard at us as they will need to score. We have to be more prepared. Today was not good enough; we have to be much better," Jamal said.



(From L) Yeasin Khan, Rabiul Islam and Jamal Bhuiyan chilling at the swimming pool at the team hotel yesterday prior to their departure for Bangladesh. PHOTO: BFF

WHAT TO WATCH

GTV, BTV & MAASRANGA
ICC CRICKET WORLD CUP
ENGLAND V BANGLADESH
LIVE FROM 3:30PM
AFGHANISTAN V NEW ZEALAND
LIVE FROM 6:30PM

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1
FRENCH OPEN
WOMEN'S SINGLES FINAL
LIVE FROM 7:00PM

Neymar in trouble

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil's Neymar went to a Rio de Janeiro police station Thursday to give a statement in a probe into whether he broke the law by posting intimate pictures of a woman who accused him of rape.

The football megastar went to the station in an attempt to defend himself, sitting in a wheelchair after spraining his ankle the night before in a pre-Copa America friendly that has ruled him out of the tournament.

As he made his way out through a media scrum after giving his statement to police, the star striker expressed gratitude to his fans for their support.

"I felt very loved," he said.

The injury to Neymar is a huge blow to host nation Brazil's preparations for the South American continental championship, which begins on June 14.

Neymar hobbled off the field in the 20th minute of Brazil's 2-0 win over Qatar in Brasilia on Wednesday. A large ice pack had been strapped to his lower right leg.

Neymar's club, Paris Saint-Germain, tweeted Thursday that the player "suffered a severe sprain of the outer lateral ligament of his right ankle," and will be "reassessed by the club's medical department within the next 72 hours."