



Abahani fought tooth and nail with Sheikh Russel to secure a single-goal win, courtesy of (inset) Nabib Newaj Jibon, and exact revenge for their first leg defeat against the same opposition in a Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Halep stands in way of Serena's GS record

AFP, London



Simona Halep is the last woman standing between Serena Williams and achieving her long held ambition of equalling Margaret Court's Grand Slam title record after both recorded easy victories in their Wimbledon semifinals on Thursday.

Seven-time champion Williams made short work of plucky unseeded Czech Barbora Strycova, whose experience of her first ever Grand Slams singles semifinal in her 53rd campaign lasted just under an hour as she lost 6-1, 6-2.

Former world number one Halep's clash with Ukrainian Elina Svitolina lasted a bit longer but the 27-year-old ran out a 6-1, 6-3 victor to become the first Romanian woman to reach the Wimbledon final.

Williams has missed the chance to equal Australian Court's record on two occasions since returning from giving birth -- losing last year's Wimbledon final and then a bad-tempered defeat in the US Open final.

"It feels good to be in the final again after the year I have had," said 37-year-old Williams.

"I have just needed matches to feel good and do what I do best and that is

play tennis.

"I love what I do. I have a great job and I am still pretty good at it. I get a remarkable experience every time."

Williams produced a dominant performance on Thursday which has not always been the case during the Championships and she said she would not be taking seventh-seeded Halep lightly.

"She's a tough opponent," said Williams. "We always have great matches. I look forward to it."

Strycova, who never managed to impose her delightful stroke-filled game on her opponent, at least has the consolation of perhaps winning the women's doubles.

Halep, who was French Open champion in 2018, will be playing in her fifth Grand Slam final.

"It's an amazing feeling but I am also excited and nervous. It is one of the best moments of my life," said Halep.

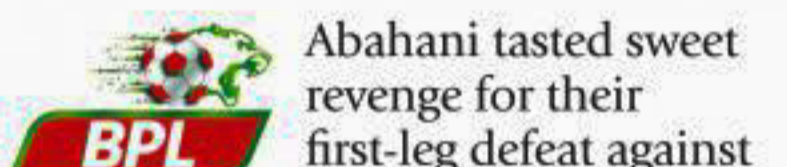
"The match was not easy, the games were long and went deep.

"I fought hard to win this match and I was strong mentally and physically and had the right tactics."

Halep, who had knocked out new star, 15-year-old Coco Gauff in the last 16, lost in her previous semi-final appearance at Wimbledon to Eugenie Bouchard in 2014.

Abahani exact vengeance

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani tasted sweet revenge for their first-leg defeat against Sheikh Russel KC when they handed the side a single goal defeat in a Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Nabib Newaj Jibon scored the winner in the 59th minute to help six-time champions Abahani close the gap with leaders Bashundhara Kings with 51 points, just one shy of the newcomers who have, however, played two matches less than the Abahani's 20 outings.

Sheikh Russel, who beat Abahani 2-0 in Sylhet, remained at third position with 39 points and four defeats from 19 matches.

On the slippery ground following showers, Sheikh Russel were the better side in terms of possession and creating opportunities. However, Sheikh Russel's forwards could not break Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel, who thwarted at least five attempts from Ukrainian forward Valerii Hrysher, Nigerian forward Raphael Odoyin and winger Khalekurzaman.

After surviving the first-half scares,

Abahani took the lead through a counter attack from the right flank as right-back Raihan Hasan played a forward-pass to Jibon, who darted into the box to nutmeg Nigerian defender Udoka Alison and score from inside the box.

BROTHERS 2 - 1 NOFEL SC

Brothers Union notched three valuable points in their attempt to exit the red zone by registering a 2-1 win over NoFel SC, thanks to a clear strike from Sudanese forward James Moga at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The overall fourth win in 19 matches helped Brothers equal Rahmatganj MFS and NoFel SC on 16 points, just eight ahead of bottom-placed Team BJMC.

Brothers made a positive start on the rain-soaked ground before Mannaf Rabbi gave them a 19-minute lead after availing a defensive fumble from NoFel.

NoFel equalised the margin five minutes into the second half when Jamir Uddin found the back of the net with a left-footer, courtesy of a deflection off a Brothers defender inside the box.

However, Moga made a surprise strike from 35 yards as he mustered a

dipping shot with goalkeeper Saiful Islam Khan unable to go back return from the edge to stop the shot in the 80th minute.

TEAM BJMC 0 - 1 MUKTIJODDHA

At the Shaheed Bulu Stadium, BJMC badly needed an outright victory over Muktiyoddha Sangsad to close the gap with the other relegation-threatened sides but they ultimately conceded their 14th overall defeat, and four in a row, after Japanese forward Yousuke Kato struck the all-important goal nine minutes from time. BJMC remained at the bottom with eight points from 20 matches while Muktiyoddha raised their tally to 21 from 19 matches to stay in the middle of the 13-team table.

ARAMBAGH-BASHUNDHARA TIE POSTPONE

Following heavy showers at the Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh, the tie between hosts Arambagh KS and Bashundhara Kings was postponed to today after the match lasted only eight minutes. It is the second match to be postponed this season after the Abahani-Mohammedan match. The match will resume from where it left off but the schedule has not been decided yet.

Women's C'ship from today

SPORTS REPORTER

The final round of the JFA U-14 National Women's Championship will get underway today at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur with eight districts vying for the title.

The Six zonal champions and two runners-up teams will be split into two groups and play round-robin league matches to determine the top two teams who will advance to the semifinals, to be held on June 18 while the final will take place the following day.

On the opening day of the women's football tournament, Tangail District will face Thakurgaon in the first match while Rajshahi and Magura will compete later on.

Halep follows snooker champ

AFP, London

Simona Halep became the first Romanian woman to reach the Wimbledon final on Friday but then found herself answering questions -- about snooker.

The 27-year-old has 288,000 followers on Twitter.

However, she only follows two -- former coach Darren Cahill and three-time snooker champion Mark Selby.

"I have no idea how you play snooker. But I appreciate him," said Halep.



Simona Halep celebrates after securing a 6-1, 6-3 win over Elina Svitolina in a Wimbledon semifinal match yesterday.

Roger, Rafa braced for epic

AFP, London



Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal battle for a place in the Wimbledon final on Friday, 11 years after they mesmerised Centre Court in a Grand Slam championship match widely regarded as the greatest ever played.

Nadal emerged triumphant that day, winning in five sets in a four-hour 48-minute epic of fluctuating fortunes that stretched out over seven hours because of constant, momentum-shifting rain interruptions.

The Spaniard won 6-4, 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-7 (8/10), 9-7 as the clock ticked past 9pm and with the famous stadium in near-darkness.

Over a decade later, the sport's two most successful players now have 38 Grand Slam titles between them and more than \$100 million in prize money each.

Nadal, the 2008 and 2010 champion at Wimbledon, has the edge overall, leading

his great rival and friend 24-15 and 10-3 at the Slams.

However, it is eight-time champion Federer who just edges their Wimbledon head-to-head 2-1 after winning the 2006 and 2007 finals before Nadal famously broke the spell in 2008.

Nadal, who demolished Federer in straight sets in the semi-finals at Roland Garros last month on his way to a 12th title in Paris, admits his game has developed since 2008.

Mostly, that's due to his age as well as the desperate need to protect his creaking knees which so often conspired against him on the low-bouncing lawns of the All England Club.

"I am running less so I need to serve better. I probably cannot play 20 weeks a year any more," said 33-year-old Nadal.

"I am serving better. I am hitting the backhand better. Maybe volleying better, slicing better."

INDOOR HOCKEY ASIA CUP Bangladesh leave today

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The Bangladesh team will depart for Thailand today to participate in an the Indoor Hockey Asia Cup, where they aim to gather experience, set to be held from July 15 to 21 in Chunburi.

Bangladesh will begin their campaign in the six-a-side tournament by taking on three-time runners-up Malaysia on the opening day before going on to face seven-time champions Iran the following day.

Bangladesh's next two group matches against Philippines and hosts Thailand will be held on July 17 and 18 respectively.

The team were originally scheduled to leave yesterday but had to cancel their scheduled departure following a visa crisis.



Bangladesh national team cricketer Shathira Jakir Jessy delivered an inspirational speech to young girls at an event called 'Panel Discussion on Women's Empowerment through Sports' at The American Center yesterday.

Jessy, Mridha inspire youths

SPORTS REPORTER

Although social, mental, physical or even biological barriers may hold back women from building a career as a sportsperson, a story shared by Shathira Jakir Jessy -- a Bangladesh national team cricketer -- during an event titled 'Panel Discussion on Women's Empowerment through Sports' at The American Center yesterday could help change that fact.

"Actually nothing comes easy for a woman. There is a time in a woman's life when they have to focus on studies and here in Bangladesh another time comes when they need to get married followed by the time when they need to have a baby. Even I have a baby. But for me I don't think of it as a huge barrier. I was even about whether I could carry on playing cricket when I was about to have a baby. But I started playing within five months of having my child," said Jessy.

Another important message which could have inspired the 50 or so teenage girls present at the event was conveyed by Ashreen Mridha -- a member of

the Bangladesh Women's National Basketball Team.

"Often in Bangladesh we think that sports is such a thing that you take as a hobby during your school days but gradually you let go of it when you move to your professional life. So it is something you let go of, not something you carry it with you.

"Carry it with you. Whether or not if somebody encourages you, you need to carry it throughout your life as it is something that defines you," said an optimistic Mridha, who is also the co-founder of a group called 'Desi Ballers' -- a platform for women of all age groups and all backgrounds to encourage and help women to continue playing basketball.

When the youths present were handed the opportunity to ask questions by host Joshua Kamp, the response was delayed, which could be an ideal representation of how if broader audience paid more heed to women's sports, perhaps could change the landscape.

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