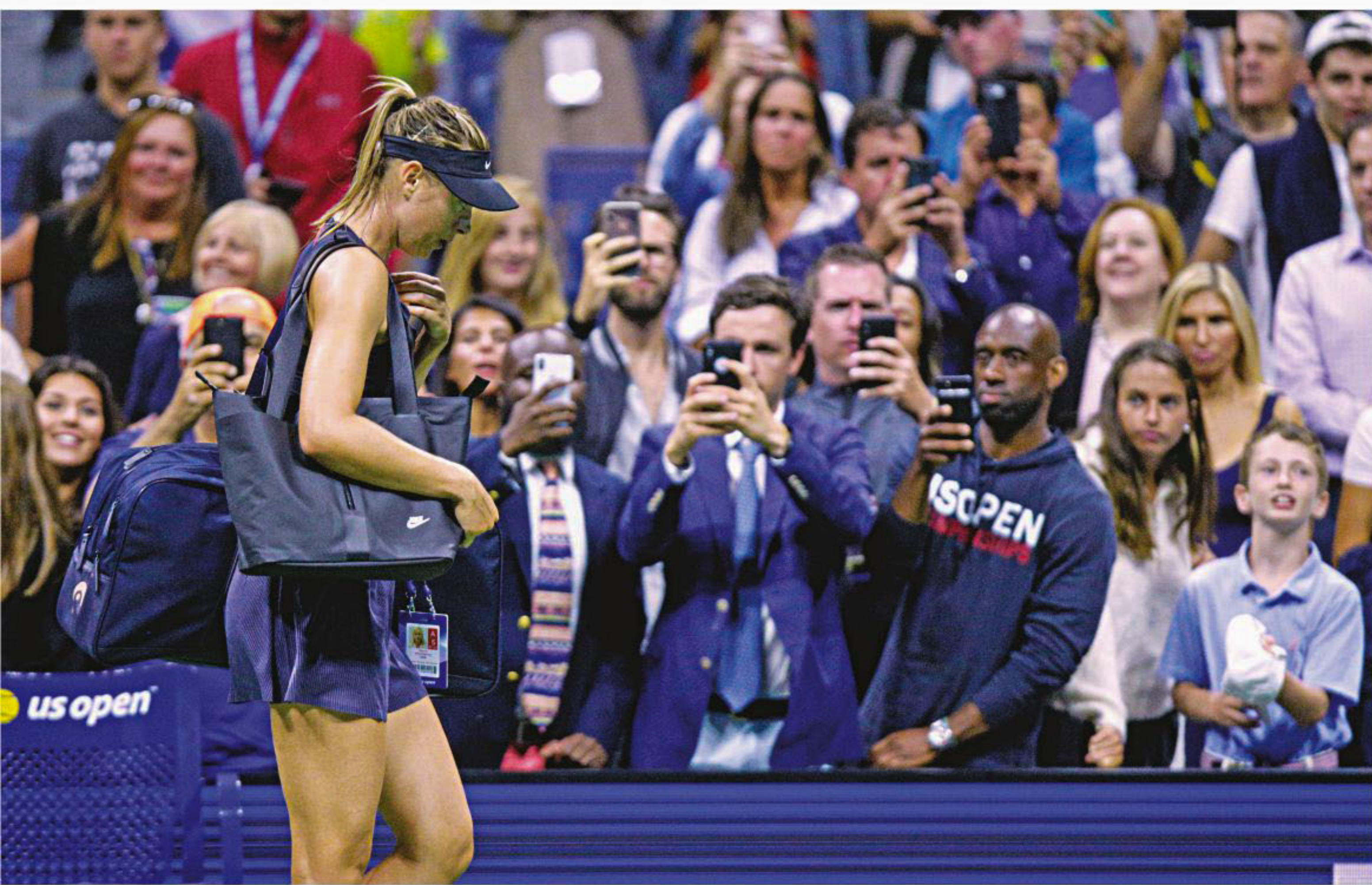


UEFA TO HONOUR CANTONA WITH PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Former Manchester United and France legend Eric Cantona is to receive the UEFA President's Award at the Champions League draw in Monaco on Thursday. The 53-year-old, who won five English championships with Leeds and Manchester United in the 1990s and two French titles with Marseille, joins an illustrious list of previous recipients which includes Johann Cruyff, Alfredo Di Stefano and Eusebio. Cantona is the third Manchester United player to receive the award after Bobby Charlton in 2008 and David Beckham last year. "This award not only recognises his career as a player of the highest calibre, but also honours him for the person he is -- a man who refuses compromise, who stands up for his values, who speaks his mind and in particular puts his heart and his soul into supporting the causes he believes in," said UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin.



A dejected Maria Sharapova leaves the court after losing against Serena Williams in their women's singles first round match of the US Open at Flushing Meadows in New York on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Nervous' Osaka scratches out win

AFP, New York

Reigning US Open champion Naomi Osaka survived a patchy start to her title defense Tuesday to come through in three tough sets against Russia's Anna Blinkova, the world number 84. Osaka suffered a first-round exit last month at Wimbledon and the Japanese star found a spirited Blinkova hard to put away in Arthur Ashe Stadium before she advanced 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 in two hours and 28 minutes. "I don't think I've ever been this nervous in my life and she played really amazing," top seed Osaka said after moving through to a second round meeting with Poland's Magda Linette. "I just came off really slow

and never found my rhythm but I fought as hard as I could and I managed to win. You want to do well after you did well last year," she added. "I definitely didn't want to lose in the third set."

Osaka, who was beaten by Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva in her Wimbledon opener, said the battling nature of her win here would serve her well moving forward.

"It helps me a lot. I learn from the tough matches and it helps me be prepared and try and adjust my gameplan. I didn't smile that much playing this match but hopefully I'll change that in the next match."

RUBLEV OUSTS TSITSIPAS IN FOUR-SETTER

Russia's Andrey Rublev upset Greek eighth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas in four sets in a matchup of 21-year-old rising stars.

World number 43 Rublev

defeated a cramping Tsitsipas 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (9/7), 7-5 after three hours and 54 minutes to book a place in the second round against the winner of a later match between France's Gilles Simon and American Bjorn Fratangelo.

EARLY STRUGGLES NO WORRY FOR FEDERER

Earlier, Roger Federer suggested his sluggish display in Monday's first-round win over Indian qualifier Sumit Nagal was "not a bad thing."

The Swiss third seed, a five-time champion in New York, produced 19 unforced errors to surprisingly drop the first set against a player ranked 190th and without a tour-level win. The 38-year-old recovered to progress 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 and clinch his 1,224th career victory that set up a meeting with Bosnia's Damir Dzumhur.

"Maybe it's not a bad thing to go through a match like this. It was

very similar at Wimbledon when I dropped the first set there in the first round," said Federer. "At the end you look at the last three sets, and they were good."

"I just wanted to pick up my game really, start to play better. I was able to do that. That was a relief, going up 3-0 in the second set, realizing that it is in my racquet, how I also felt it in the first set.

SERENA CONTINUES SHARAPOVA DOMINATION

Also on Monday, Serena Williams overwhelmed Maria Sharapova 6-1, 6-1 on Monday to reach the second round of the US Open in search of her 24th Grand Slam title. Six-time champion Williams crushed the five-time major winner from Russia in only 59 minutes.

"Whenever I play her I bring out some of my best tennis," Williams said. "When you play her you have to be super focused."

Nepal defeat pushes U-15s to the brink

SPORTS REPORTER



Holders Bangladesh's bid of defending the title of the SAFF U-15 Championship suffered a heavy blow when they suffered a massive 4-1 defeat against Nepal in their third match at the Kalyani Stadium in West Bengal yesterday.

Following convincing wins against Bhutan and Sri Lanka, the boys in red and green put in a below-par performance against Nepal, who have always proved a bogey side for Bangladesh since the introduction of the event in 2011. Bangladesh only managed to beat Nepal once [in the last edition] while drawing once [inaugural edition] and losing twice in the semifinals of the 2013 and 2017 editions.

The defeat means Bangladesh and Nepal are now equal on six points from three matches each while India, following a 5-0 win over Bhutan yesterday, topped the round-robin group with maximum nine points. But none of the three teams are yet confirmed of a final berth as Bangladesh and Nepal still have the possibility to catch India, subject to victories wins over India and Bhutan respectively in the final group matches tomorrow.

However, Bangladesh's chances of making it to the final look very slim as they must beat India by a big margin to take an edge in head-to-head/goal-difference/goals-scored count if more than two teams

finish on top with equal points.

Bangladesh, though, will go through with a draw against India if Nepal lose against minnows Bhutan in their last match.

The boys in red and green were poor throughout yesterday's match, being unable to either expose the Nepal defence or keep possession of the ball while the defenders failed to stop the Nepalese forwards and Sabbir Gazi was poor between the sticks.

Nepal took the lead from a counter-attack in stoppage time of the first half, with substitute Krishna Adhikari Yadav, availing a long-ball, racing past two defenders to easily beat Gazi before captain Pradip Lamsal's shot was tipped into the net by Gazi in the 52nd minute.

Bangladesh hit back through a 79th-minute strike from substitute Badsha Mia, raising hopes of a comeback, but Nepal scored two more goals in span of five minutes with Pradip beating Gazi from a long-range effort in the 83rd minute and Yadav tapping home a rebound in the 87th minute.

"We could not avail the chances we created early in the game while mistakes from the goalkeeper and defenders forced us on the backfoot. We came back in the match at one stage pulling a goal back, but again we missed scoring chances and lost the match," said coach Mostafa Anwar Parvez, who had guided Bangladesh to the title in the last edition.



Bangladesh goalkeeper Sabbir Gazi (R) looks back helplessly as defender Apurbo Mali's desperate effort fails to stop Nepal from scoring their fourth goal in a SAFF Championship encounter at the Kalyani Stadium in West Bengal yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF



Red Star Belgrade fans bring tank to stadium

AFP, Belgrade



Red Star Belgrade fans stirred controversy after parking an army tank outside their stadium ahead of their Champions League play-off second leg against Swiss side Young Boys on Tuesday.

The tank, a refurbished T-55 purchased from an army depot, was parked outside the stadium as an "attraction", the Serbian club said on their Facebook page.

However, the move divided fans and drew strong condemnation in neighbouring Croatia, who saw the tank as a symbol of the assault by Serb forces on the city of Vukovar at the start of the Croatian War of Independence in the 1990s.

An article in leading Croatian sports daily Sportske novosti slammed the "morbid provocation from Belgrade". "They want to play in the Champions League as they celebrate one of the worst crimes," the newspaper wrote.

Online news site Index.hr also accused Red Star of "displaying a Vukovar tank in front of their stadium",

although neither the club nor its supporters presented it that way.

On their own website, redstarbelgrade.rs, fans said the tank was meant to represent the "machine" of the club, and the nickname of their supporters, who are known as the Northern Army.

The controversy comes amid already high tensions after a Serb-owned bar in Croatia's Knin region was attacked by masked men while patrons were watching the first leg between Red Star and Young Boys last week.

The relationship between Croats and the Serb minority in Knin is still tense almost 25 years after the end of the 1991-1995 independence war that separated Croatia from Serbia and the rest of the former Yugoslavia.

On Facebook, one commenter called Milan Bizic welcomed the "phenomenal response to the attack on Red Star supporters in the Knin region".

Another user, Milos Stancic, said the act was in "bad taste" and that a "tank has nothing to do with the club".

Red Star are hoping to secure progress to the Champions' League group stage for the second season running after a 2-2 draw in the first leg in Switzerland last week.

'Out-of-reach' Abahani play in April 25's den

SPORTS REPORTER



Six-time time Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani will hope to make a piece of history by making it to the inter-zone final of AFC Cup when they play against April 25 SC of North Korea in the crucial second-leg of the semifinal playoffs at the Kim Il Sung Stadium in Pyongyang today.

Following a thrilling 4-3 win in the first leg at home, Abahani need at least a draw to get the better of their North Korean counterparts and become the first Bangladeshi club to book a place in the inter-zone final.

However, the Sky Blues will face an uphill task on the astro-turf in Pyongyang, a surface the Bangladeshi players are not used to playing on too often. The 18-time North Korean league champions are hungry after the away-match defeat and are expected to come hard at Abahani to make it to the inter-zone final for the second time in three seasons after losing to Bengaluru FC 3-0 on aggregate in the

semifinals last season.

Abahani will take inspiration from their stunning performance in the first leg and will also draw courage from Bengaluru FC's goalless draw against April 25 in Pyongyang in the last edition.

Ahead of the crucial tie, the Sky Blues were, however, out of reach due to communication difficulties since flying out for Pyongyang via China on early Sunday. Abahani's assistant manager Tanvir Ahmed informed that they could not communicate with the team.

Tanvir, however, informed that team manager Sattayjit Das Rupu talked to his son over phone for a minute on Tuesday afternoon, informing that the team reached Pyongyang safely and were doing well.

It was not possible to learn about the team's strategy or preferred eleven regarding today's game, but as per information received prior to their departure, the Sky Blues may bring a couple of changes to the starting eleven from the first leg, with Egyptian defender Alaeldin Nasr Elsayed

Eissa, who missed the first leg due to suspension, likely to start while midfielder Mamunul Islam is likely to return too, subject to his availability for selection.

Abahani coach Mario Lemos had earlier told The Daily Star that he believes the club can reach the inter-zone final by producing a good result in the away match.

"I think it [playing the inter-zone final] is possible. We know it is going to be a very hard match. April 25 will come back even stronger. We made some mistakes in the last game that we want to fix; there is always room to improve with the way we play. I believe it will be very important for us to score in away match," Lemos said.

"The strategy will be similar. Maybe more caution and less risk because we have a slight advantage going into this match. We still believe we cannot just defend; we also need to attack and create chances through counter attacks and hopefully get a goal. The attitude of the players must be the same. We are just one step away from the final," the Portuguese coach added.



Inter Milan forward Antonio Candreva (C) celebrates his goal with teammates Romelu Lukaku (L) and Nicolò Barella during their Serie A clash against Lecce at the San Siro on Monday.

PHOTO: AFP

Conte's Inter reign starts in style

AFP, Milan



Belgian forward Romelu Lukaku scored on his Inter Milan debut as new coach Antonio Conte's reign got off to a perfect start with a 4-0 win over promoted Lecce on Monday.

"There was a spark, but now we must become dynamite," said Conte as he begins his campaign to topple eight-time holders Juventus.

Lukaku -- a 65 million euros (\$73 million) summer signing from Manchester United -- scored the third goal on the hour mark at the San Siro. Croatian Marcelo Brozovic had opened the scoring after 21 minutes with a powerful strike for his 15th goal in his sixth season with Inter.

But another new signing Stefano Sensi, a summer loan from Sassuolo, also found a way through three minutes later.

Antonio Candreva blasted in the fourth goal on 84 minutes, allowing Inter to match champions Juventus and runners-up Napoli who both won their opening league matches at the weekend.

Calefato to keep Tigers in shape

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board appointed Julian Calefato as physiotherapist of the Tigers, replacing Thiham Chandramohan.

The 40-year-old South African, who is also an Italian national, has been contracted until the end of November 2021 and is expected to join the Bangladesh team ahead of the one-off Test against Afghanistan in Chattogram next month.

Calefato has previously worked with Gloucestershire CCC, Derbyshire CCC and Western Province Cape Cobras. He had also provided his services to the England and Wales Cricket Board as both a physiotherapist and a strength and conditioning coach.

He has also worked for organisations in other sports.