



Sofia Kenin, the 2020 Australian Open winner, came into the French Open with a wretched record on clay court, but the American fourth seed will be the odds on favourites when she meets Poland's Iga Swiatek today in the final, which will coronate a new queen of Roland Garros. PHOTO: TWITTER

Roland Garros awaits a new queen

AGENCIES

Sofia Kenin defeated Petra Kvitova 6-4, 7-5 to reach the French Open final on Thursday, setting up a final showdown against 19-year-old Iga Swiatek of Poland on Saturday.

Kenin will attempt to capture a second Grand Slam of the year following her Australian Open triumph, but she may face stiff challenge from Swiatek, who became the first Polish woman in 81 years to reach the final after her dominant 6-2, 6-1 win over Argentine qualifier Nadia Podoroska.

The championship match will be the first at the majors to feature two players aged 21 or under since Maria Sharapova beat fellow 20-year-old Ana Ivanovic at the 2008 Australian Open.

"I knew I had to be at my best. I am super happy and proud of myself," Kenin said following her victory over Kvitova. "I have won in Australia and had really tough matches this week so that gives me confidence. I am going to enjoy this moment and then start to prepare for the final tomorrow."

Before this season, Kenin had never gone as far as the quarterfinals on clay. She lost her

SOFIA KENIN (USA)	IGA SWIATEK (POL)
Age: 21	Age: 19
Ranking: 6	Ranking: 54
Career record: 208-119	Career record: 103-31
Career titles: 5 WTA	Career titles: Zero WTA
Previous best in GS: Winner of Aus Open 2020	Previous best in GS: 4R in Aus Open 2020
Roland Garros 2020: Dropped three sets so far	Roland Garros 2020: Hasn't dropped a set yet

only match on the surface this year prior to Roland Garros, 6-0, 6-0 to Victoria Azarenka in Rome.

The 54th-ranked Swiatek, on the other hand, has yet to drop a set at the tournament, conceding just 23 games through six matches.

The last woman to capture the French Open title without losing a set was Justine Henin in 2007. Swiatek has matched the run of compatriot Jadwiga Jedzejowska who finished runner-up at Roland Garros in 1939.

"It seems unreal," said Swiatek. "I never thought at the start I would play so good here but I always knew that if I was going to be in the final of a Grand Slam it would be at the French Open."

NO LOOK SERVES NO PROBLEM Sofia Kenin says she is very

comfortable with her bizarre, no-look service action which has carried her into a maiden Roland Garros final.

The 21-year-old American has developed the habit of throwing the ball in the air while simultaneously staring down at her feet. Only when the ball is at its high point and her racquet is in motion does she then swivel her head back up.

"I've had that my whole career. I know it's a little bit different. I've had great success with it. I think it would be quite wrong to start changing things now," said Kenin. "I've improved my serve. I feel like I'm serving well. I guess maybe it doesn't matter how you serve, as long as you get it in. Yeah, that's worked for me," she added.

STUDIES CAN WAIT

Swiatek decided to put off going to university for two years in order to try to make it in tennis – a decision which was richly rewarded on Thursday when she reached the French Open final.

"Well, right now it's going to be hard to make a decision to go back to studying because I feel like really I can achieve big things," Swiatek told reporters. "I just want to focus on that."

"But really I'm only 19, so a lot can change during few years. We are going to see. Maybe I'm going to be hungry for knowledge or anything. I'm not going to make a decision right now."

Swiatek ousted top seed Simona Halep en route to the final at the claycourt Grand Slam and could become the youngest since Monica Seles in 1992 to lift the Suzanne Lenglen Cup if she is able to beat Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin on Saturday.

"Right now it would be hard for me to study in this tournament and after," she added. "So I'm just going to focus on doing tennis, tennis-related stuff, as good as I can. I'm just going to deal with it later."

"I think if I'm going to be in a few finals of Grand Slams, it would be impossible to study and playing that kind of tennis consistently."

Players look to Salahuddin as last hope for good deal

SPORTS REPORTER



Footballers of the Bangladesh Premier League are now looking to re-elected Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) President Kazi Salahuddin to settle the issue of their payment for the next season as the newly elected BFF executive committee sits tomorrow following the October 3 polls.

In the last of a series of meetings with clubs and players on September 17, the professional football league committee headed by Abdus Salam Murschedy decided to reduce players' payments by a whopping 75 percent of their new contracts, which will be similar to last season, citing the clubs' financial constraints amid the coronavirus pandemic.

The meeting also decided to refer the payment matter to the BFF executive committee for the final decision. However, the players refused to accept the decision of the professional football league and sought the intervention of the BFF boss to deliver a win-win decision for both clubs and players, who had earlier demanded 50 percent of the new contract and clearance of all of last season's dues.

"Although the players' payment is not on the agenda at the first executive committee meeting after the polls, the issue may come up as we are thinking of opening the transfer window late this month," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag. "It is an introductory meeting of the executive committee, which may also form some important sub-committees such as the professional football league, national teams, development, finance, women's, etc."

The representatives of the players were supposed to meet four-time BFF President

Salahuddin last Monday, just a day after the BFF polls, to discuss the matter as they have already expressed their dissatisfaction to the BFF boss.

"What the professional football league did is not [part of] a mutual understanding and we are really disappointed with their decision. The clubs were even supposed to clear 100 percent of last season's dues before signing the new contracts but they now want to clear only 40 percent of the dues. We even accepted that decision for sake of immediate return of football. To be honest, they possess both ball and ground and they will take the decision," said national team goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana.

"We are lastly looking at Salahuddin bhai to settle the payment issue. I talked to him yesterday [Thursday] and he assured that I need not be worried as he has been with us. We are really looking forward to getting something new from the new committee," said the Sheikh Russel KC goalkeeper.

The players also tried to submit a written application to Salahuddin before the elections but the BFF president promised to look into the matter and asked players to keep faith in him.

"The players did not accept the decision of 25 percent payment and are sticking to their demand to be paid 50 percent of the new contracts," former captain and current midfielder Mamunul Islam said. "Salahuddin bhai is our last hope and we will now seek an appointment with him within the next week to discuss the matter."

National defender Tapu Barman said, "We are always ready to sacrifice but we hope to get a respectable payment. You look at the foreign players... they are not suffering from it."

The majority of footballers played the last season for token payments.



Ashraful Islam Rana



Mamunul Islam

Fifty 50-plus scores for Warner

AGENCIES

David Warner etched his name on the record books by becoming the first player in the history of the Indian Premier League to register 50 fifty-plus scores.

The burly Australian opener accomplished the feat during his knock of 52 which helped SRH register a comprehensive 69-run win over Kings XI Punjab in Dubai on Thursday night.

An opening stand of 160 between left-hander Warner (52) and his partner Jonny Bairstow (97) put SRH firmly in control, though they would have been slightly disappointed to



finish on 201 for six given the platform laid for them.

In reply, KXIP were bundled out for 132 inside 17 overs. The win also helped SRH move up to third in the IPL 2020 table while KXIP continue to languish at the bottom.

Warner currently has 46 fifties -- also the most by some distance -- and four centuries in IPL. Second on the list is RCB captain Virat Kohli with 42 fifty-plus scores to his name in the IPL. This was also Warner's 9th consecutive fifty-plus score against Kings XI Punjab in IPL. This was his 11th fifty overall against KXIP and the second one in IPL 2020.



An important win, says Messi

AGENCIES



Argentina got their World Cup qualifying campaign off to the perfect start on Thursday when Lionel Messi's early penalty gave them a 1-0 win over Ecuador in a lacklustre match in Buenos Aires.

The Argentine FA piped fan noise around the empty Bombonera stadium and the chants of "Messi! Messi!" were vindicated as early as the 12th minute when he put Argentina ahead from the spot after Lucas Ocampos was fouled inside the penalty area.

Argentina had lost just one of their last eight World Cup qualifiers against Ecuador and although they could not add to the scoreline they never looked in danger of losing in a scrappy game against limited opponents.

"It was important to start with a win because we know how difficult the qualifiers are. All the matches are going to be as hard as this one," Messi said.

With the South American qualifiers twice pushed back from the scheduled start in March, it was almost a year since either team had played a full international and Messi said that inaction contributed to the poor spectacle.

"We hoped the level of play would be

different but it's been almost a year since we played together, this was our first game back and the nervousness makes it complicated," the Barcelona striker said.

Argentina's next game is on Tuesday against Bolivia in La Paz, while Ecuador return home to face Uruguay, who beat Chile 2-1 in their opener earlier on Thursday, the same day.

The Uruguay-Chile game in Montevideo, though, proved to be controversial, with Chilean footballers berating referees and officials after several penalty decisions went against them. Luis Suarez got Uruguay's first goal from the spot shortly before half time with the aid of VAR. The referee pointed to the spot after the ball bounced off Sebastian Vegas' body and on to his arm as he slid in to block a shot.

Although Alexis Sanchez equalised for Chile early in the second half, substitute Maxi Gomez made it 2-1 in injury time to give the home side a barely deserved win.

The Chileans' ire was exacerbated by the referee's refusal to consider two of their own penalty claims, including one clear handball in the dying minutes of the match.

It was honours even between Paraguay and Peru in Asuncion as Angel Romero for the hosts and Andre Carrillo both scored a brace.

Brazil sweat on Neymar

AFP, Sao Paulo

Brazil said on Thursday they will give Neymar as much time as possible to recover from a back injury so he can face Bolivia in a World Cup qualifier.

The Copa America champions start their bid to qualify for Qatar 2022 on Friday in Sao Paulo.

"It's a health problem that's not entirely resolved," said coach Tite. The 28-year-old's back injury flared up on Wednesday.

"He's a little bit better today than yesterday," said team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar. "We'll see tomorrow how he responds."

PRESIDENT'S CUP

Players tested ahead of opening encounter tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER



The cricketers participating in the three-team fifty-over BCB President's Cup underwent Covid-19 testing at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday and will check in to hotels today.

The members of all three teams will be kept in a bio-secure bubble and their activities will be guided by the Bangladesh Cricket Board's medical team.

Although the BCB has experience with bio-secure bubbles, having made one for the national team's training camp, it will be a bigger challenge to maintain a larger group.

Mahmudullah XI and Najmul XI will train today before locking horns in the opening game of the tournament tomorrow.

All matches will be day-night affairs. The final will take place on October 23.

This tournament will mark Bangladesh's return to competitive cricket after a gap of seven months. It will be the first time since the outbreak of coronavirus in March this year.

Players from the national team, high performance team and members of the 2019 ICC U-19 World Cup-winning team were divided into three teams.

According to the BCB, they are considering this tournament as a test case before trying to resume domestic competition in the country in the coming days.

However, the BCB still feels that it will be a huge challenge for them to resume the league considering the current coronavirus situation in Bangladesh and they are not willing to risk players' health.



Everton forward Dominic Calvert-Lewin headed home England's opening goal in the 26th minute of their international friendly against Wales at Wembley on Thursday night. Later Conor Coady and Danny Ings added two more as Gareth Southgate's men ran out 3-0 winners.

PHOTO: REUTERS