

## Colaco storm flattens Kings

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings paid a heavy price for terrible defending in a 4-0 thrashing by ISL giants ATK Mohun Bagan in their second Group D fixture of the AFC Cup at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata on Saturday.

The Bangladesh Premier League champions, who started their campaign with a 1-0 win over Maziya on Wednesday, had enough chances to take control of the game, instead a number of ridiculous defensive errors culminated in their first defeat in Asia's second-tier club competition.

Liston Colaco scored a hatrick before David Williams put the final nail in the coffin of Kings in the rain-affected encounter.

Kings forward Miguel Figueira had the first chance in the opening minute when he dispossessed Sandesh Jhingan in front of the box, but his effort missed the target by a few yards. Then Robson Robinho's freekick hit the far post



As Bangladesh prepare for their series-deciding Test against Sri Lanka, slated to begin from May 23 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, out-of-form Bangladesh Test skipper Mominul Haque was seen sweating it out at the nets in Mirpur yesterday before trying on some delicious street food.

## What to WATCH

T SPORTS & STAR SPORTS 1

Hyderabad vs Punjab

Live from 08:00 pm

T SPORTS

La Liga

Barcelona vs Villarreal

Live from 01:00 am (Monday)  
STAR SPORTS HD 1  
EPL  
Liverpool vs Wolverhampton Wanderers

Live from 09:00 pm  
STAR SPORTS HD 2  
EPL  
Manchester City vs Aston Villa  
Live from 09:00 pm

## Can City hold on in final-day fracas?

AFP, Manchester

Manchester City have the destiny of the Premier League title in their hands heading into Sunday's final day showdown, with the defending champions holding a slender one-point lead over quadruple-chasing Liverpool.

Pep Guardiola's men will claim a fourth English title in five years of a dominant era for Abu Dhabi-backed City with victory over Aston Villa.

"It's difficult to control your emotions when you know what you are playing for," said City manager Guardiola. "The players are human beings but it's football, when you think that it is over it is not over."

City know that to their cost, having been minutes away from the Champions League final only to blow a two-goal lead in their semi-final, second leg against Real Madrid earlier this month.

"The importance is unnecessary to tell them," added Guardiola. "They know it, they feel it." Liverpool will instead face Real in next weekend's battle to be crowned champions of Europe in Paris as they remain in contention for an unprecedented haul of four major trophies in the one season.

Jurgen Klopp's men have already lifted the League Cup and FA Cup.

"Imagine somebody tells you before the season you're going to be in all three cup finals and want to fight for the league," said Liverpool manager Klopp. "The boys did it -- fed by the people here in the building, by our supporters."

## Where to celebrate Milan's only concern

AFP, Milan

Europe's most dramatic title race will finally reach its climax on Sunday when AC Milan take the field at Sassuolo ready to end an 11-year Scudetto drought and announce their return to the top table.

Stefano Pioli's side are two points ahead of reigning champions Inter Milan and only need to draw to claim their first league crown since 2011, and they look almost guaranteed to do so after a hugely impressive run-in.

Consecutive wins over tricky opponents Lazio, Fiorentina and Verona were followed up by last weekend's 2-0 home victory over Atalanta, after which a packed San Siro celebrated as though the title was already theirs.

Pioli has an almost full squad to pick from against a team which beat Milan 3-1 earlier in the season and will have the backing of an estimated 18,000 fans at the Mapei Stadium in Reggio Emilia for a title party which will then spill back into Milan.

The problem is where they will be able to celebrate. Milan's iconic Piazza del Duomo is where fans gather for triumphs but on Saturday night the square hosts a concert and a huge stage has been erected which cannot be completely taken down before the end of Sunday's matches.

As of Thursday afternoon there was still no confirmed plan from the city's public order bodies of when and where to hold celebrations, as the only other viable location is the San Siro and that will be where over 70,000 Inter fans will party should Milan fail at the last.



## Headache arises due to lack of depth in spin department

SPORTS REPORTER

A longstanding fear regarding the Bangladesh national cricket team turned into reality as the Tigers found themselves in deep water due to a lack of depth in their existing pool of players.

As Bangladesh prepare for their second Test against Sri Lanka, starting from May 23 in Mirpur, the major concern for the Tigers remain their bowling department -- more specifically, the spin department.

Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan, who was called into the squad for the Sri Lanka series as a replacement for injured Mehedi Hasan Miraz, another off-spinning all-rounder, was ruled out of the second Test after fracturing his finger on the fourth day of the first Test.

The news of Nayeem's injury came as a huge blow to the team management, who do not have another back-up off-spinner to fall back on.

The latest squad announced for the High-Performance unit, which serves to prepare players for the national team, has only four spinners, none of whom are off-spinners.

The pertinent question now is how the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), which has time and again gloated about its

'rich pipeline', was unable to avert such a predicament despite all the warning signs over the years.

A meeting including national Test skipper Mominul Haque, national selectors and members of the team management was held at the BCB premises yesterday. Among other issues, the team combination for the Dhaka Test was discussed.

**If history is anything to go by, the surface at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium is going to be conducive to spin unlike the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, the venue of the first Test, which ended in an expected draw.**

As things stand, despite Bangladesh also missing two of their frontline pacers in Shoriful Islam and Taskin Ahmed due to injuries, the spin attack was the major concern.

If history is anything to go by, the surface at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium is going to be conducive to spin unlike the

Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, the venue of the first Test, which ended in an expected draw.

Even in Chattogram, Bangladesh depended heavily on spinners to bowl the bulk of the overs. And even on a docile pitch, the likes of Nayeem, Tajul Islam and Shakib Al Hasan accounted for 15 of the 16 wickets that the Tigers were able to scalp.

When it comes to dependency on spinners, the second and the series-deciding Test in Dhaka will definitely see more of it from both sides. Sri Lanka have already made clear their intention to play three frontline spinners.

Even if Bangladesh had frontline pacers Taskin and Shoriful available, their involvement would have been minimal considering the trend of Mirpur surface that suggests more wear and tear with each passing day.

It is clear that the team that wins the toss and has a more productive spin attack will have a significant edge in the Dhaka Test. Will Bangladesh play batting all-rounder Mosaddek Hossain to make up for their dearth in the spin department? If they do, how much variation and support will the part-timer be able to bring in for the side? The BCB has a lot to ponder over the next few days.

## Will Alcaraz and Swiatek steal the show?

AGENCIES

Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal, with 41 Grand Slam titles between them, will attempt to derail the growing hype surrounding teenage sensation Carlos Alcaraz at the French Open from Sunday.

All three have been placed in the top-half of the draw, meaning only one will make the Roland Garros final.

Defending champion Djokovic is seeded to face 13-time winner Nadal in the quarter-finals. Alcaraz is a potential semi-final opponent.

Djokovic, who turns 35 on Sunday, captured a second French Open title in 2021.

Djokovic has played only five tournaments in 2022 but arrives in Paris buoyed by a sixth Italian Open title, becoming just the fifth man to win 1,000 career matches in the process.

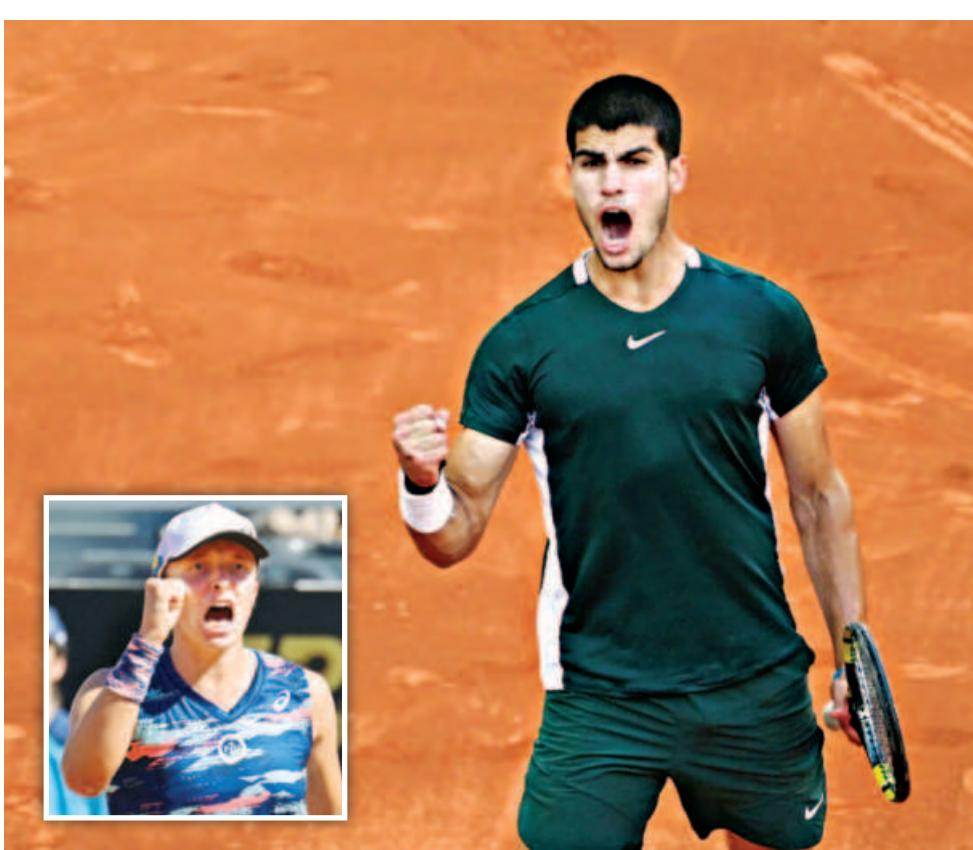
It was his 38th Masters triumph, two more than Nadal at the top of the all-time list.

Djokovic starts his French Open against 94th ranked Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan.

Nadal began the year with a 20-match winning run, capturing a second Australian Open title to claim a record 21st Grand Slam and move ahead of Djokovic and Roger Federer.

The 35-year-old's record at the French Open stands at a staggering 105 wins and just three losses since his 2005 title-winning debut.

Nadal takes on Australia's Jordan



Thompson in the first round.

Alcaraz, just 19, has rocketed to six in the world on the back of four titles -- three on clay -- in 2022.

He won a second Masters title in Madrid, sweeping Nadal, Djokovic and Zverev on the way.

Alcaraz, who has 28 wins and just three

defeats this year, opens his campaign on Sunday against Argentine lucky loser Juan Ignacio Londero, ranked at 141 but who made the last 16 in 2019.

Russian world number two Daniil Medvedev, who gave up a two-set lead to lose to Nadal in the Australian Open final, only returned to action in Geneva this week after undergoing a hernia operation.

The US Open champion has 13 titles to his name but has yet to master the draining demands of clay.

At Roland Garros, he was winless in his first four visits before managing to stop the rot with a quarter-final run in 2021.

Greek world number four Tsitsipas has enjoyed a solid clay season.

He defended his Monte Carlo title before making the last eight in Barcelona, semi-finals in Madrid and final in Rome.

Meanwhile, Iga Swiatek is the undeniable favourite for a second French Open title after winning her past five tournaments but says she won't be "heartbroken" if her 28-match unbeaten run comes to an end at Roland Garros.

Since the shock retirement of world number one Ashleigh Barty, the 20-year-old Swiatek has swept aside all-comers and transformed herself into the player to beat in women's tennis.

The Pole hasn't lost since falling to another former Roland Garros champion, Jelena Ostapenko, in Dubai in February. Her winning streak is the longest on the WTA



**"What happened in Rome is something that happened very often in my practices. But yeah, I was suffering after that for a couple of days, but I feel better. That's why I'm here."**

Rafael Nadal



**"I feel I am always in contention to fight for any Grand Slam trophy. Reliving the memories from last year is something that obviously gives me goose bumps and motivation to try to replicate that."**

Novak Djokovic

tour since Serena Williams won 34 matches in a row in 2013.

Swiatek became only the second player to win four WTA 1000 titles in a season after defending her Rome crown last week.

Williams, who turns 41 in September, has not played since retiring in the first round at Wimbledon last year, and her long-time coach Patrick Mouratoglou is now working with two-time Grand Slam champion Simona Halep, who won her first major in Paris in 2018.