



Italy talisman Giorgio Chiellini (R) trains with his teammates at the Coverciano Training Ground in Florence on Monday ahead of the European champions' continental clash with South American champions Argentina -- the tie dubbed Finalissima -- at Wembley in London on Wednesday. The 37-year-old, who will retire his Azzurri shirt after this match, will want to end on a high after the disappointment of missing out on another World Cup appearance against Lionel Messi's Argentina.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Captaincy affecting Mominul's basics?

SPORTS REPORTER

Whether the captaincy took a toll on Test captain Mominul Haque's batting was a major talking point during the recently-concluded Test series against Sri Lanka at home and, following a 1-0 loss in the two-Test series, there appears to be a hurry to get the issue sorted. BCB president Nazmul Hassan said that he had spoken to Mominul about his struggles with the bat, adding that there were no issues regarding his captaincy. However, team director Khaled Mahmud publicly wondered whether captaincy was affecting his batting. More and more, it appears that the concept of having a captain underperform in his role as a batter is becoming an issue for the cricket board.

The BCB president told reporters that he was going to sit with Mominul again after the series ended and it appears that the fate of Mominul's captaincy hinges on that meeting.

The 30-year-old was still named captain of the Test side when the squad for the upcoming West Indies tour was announced. But while speaking to



media yesterday, BCB cricket operations chairman Jalal also pointed to that upcoming meeting as pivotal.

Mominul, who has the most Test centuries among Bangladeshi batters,

has averaged just above 14 in his last 11 innings, starting from the Mount Maunganui Tests. In New Zealand, he played a crucial role with the bat in the first innings, but has since been a shadow of himself.

"Captaincy is an extra pressure. When he's not scoring runs, maybe it's becoming an issue in terms of inspiring others. That could be causing an inferiority complex. Maybe it's putting pressure on him when he is batting as well. He will take a decision based on what will be good for him," Jalal said, indicating that any decision would be left up to Mominul.

It is definitely a rough time for one of Bangladesh's most successful batters in Tests although Mominul previously stated that there were no concerns over his form. The left-hander was focused on working on his batting yesterday at Mirpur, with Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a mentor to many national team stalwarts, by his side.

Fahim said that Mominul appeared less fundamentally sound in recent times.

"During a lean patch, a player might

try to do well. But oftentimes it can make the situation worse. Then they stray from the basics. We worked on his basics. I think, at one time, his basics were good. But not at the moment. So, we worked on it and it's looking better than before. After a day or two's work, it will get better," Fahim told reporters yesterday.

"If he was scoring runs, there wouldn't be any talk about captaincy. Since he has found it difficult to score runs, some pressure has built up so there will be discussions. He will have to answer those questions," Fahim said.

Mominul was thrust into the captaincy hotseat during Bangladesh's tour of India in 2019, right after Shakib Al Hasan was banned by the ICC. Since then, Mominul, not always an outspoken character, took the burden of a side limited in Test capabilities.

Whether the BCB feels now is time for a change remains to be seen. But if this was about due process, putting further pressure on both Mominul the batter and the captain ahead of an important series could have unintended consequences.

Djokovic, Nadal brace for epic clash

AFP, PARIS

Novak Djokovic renews his epic 16-year rivalry with Rafael Nadal at the French Open on Tuesday with a semifinal spot at stake and where victory could end the 13-time champion's Roland Garros career.

Nadal, who will turn 36 on Friday, puts his record of 109 wins and just three losses in Paris, since his title-winning debut in 2005, on the line against the defending champion.

The Spaniard was taken to five sets for only the third time in his tournament history by 21-year-old Felix Auger-Aliassime in the fourth round.

In the immediate aftermath of that victory, Nadal admitted that not only was this year's French Open at stake for him but possibly his entire playing future.

"I know my situation, and I accept it. I can't complain much," said Nadal, who arrived in Paris unsure if he would be able to take part after suffering a recurrence in Rome of a chronic foot injury which has plagued him for large parts of his career.

"I am just enjoying the fact that I am here for one more year. And

being honest, every match that I play here, I don't know if it's going to be my last at Roland Garros.

"I went through a tough process again with my foot, so I don't know what can happen in the near future."

Overall, Djokovic leads Nadal 30-28 since their first career meeting at the 2006 French Open.

Nadal has a 19-8 edge on clay and has won seven of the pair's nine meetings in Paris.

Djokovic, however, came out on top in the semi-finals at Roland Garros in 2021 on his way to a second title. That defeat took a physical toll on Nadal who then skipped Wimbledon, the Olympics and the US Open.

With Djokovic deported from Melbourne on the eve of the Australian Open, Nadal seized the opportunity to claim a record-setting 21st Grand Slam title, breaking a tie with Djokovic and Roger Federer.

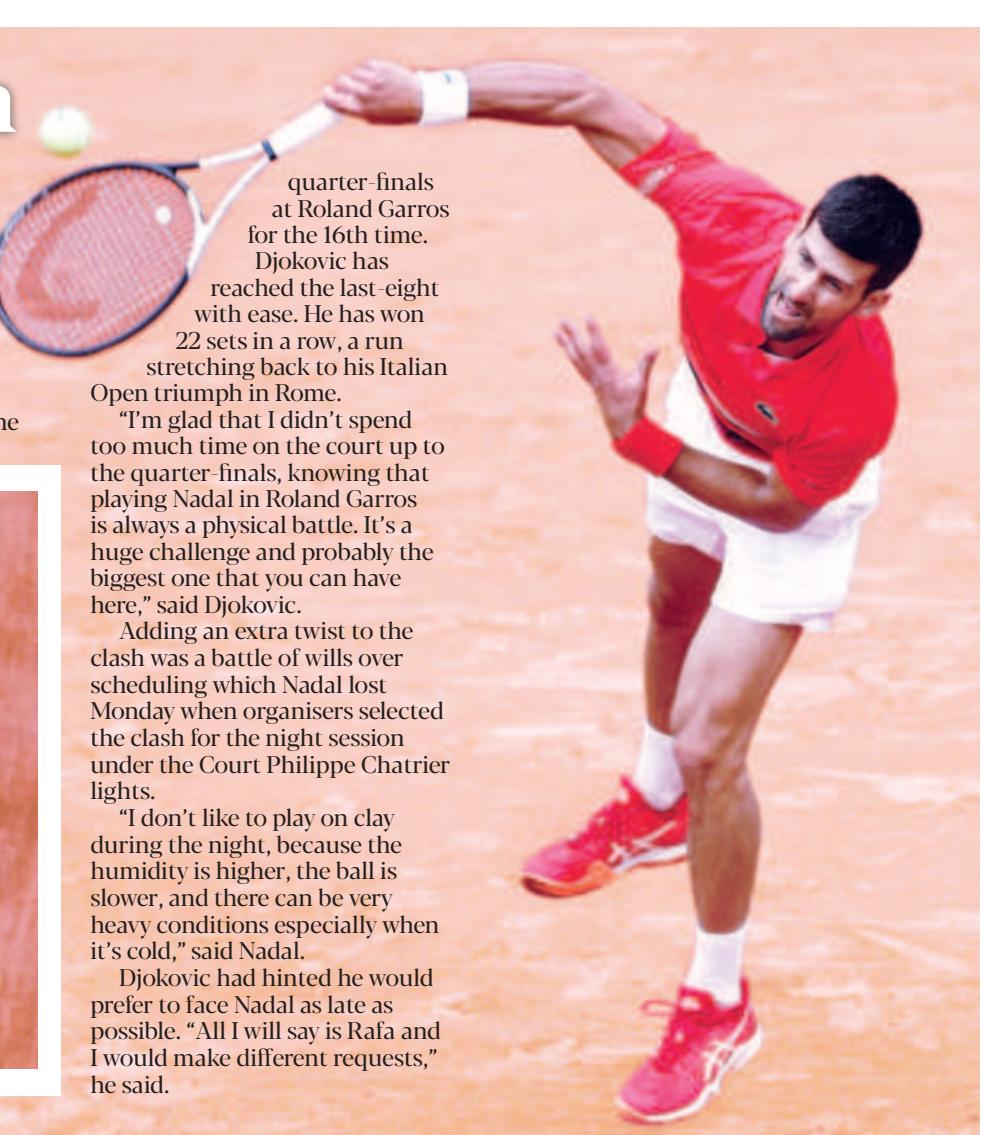
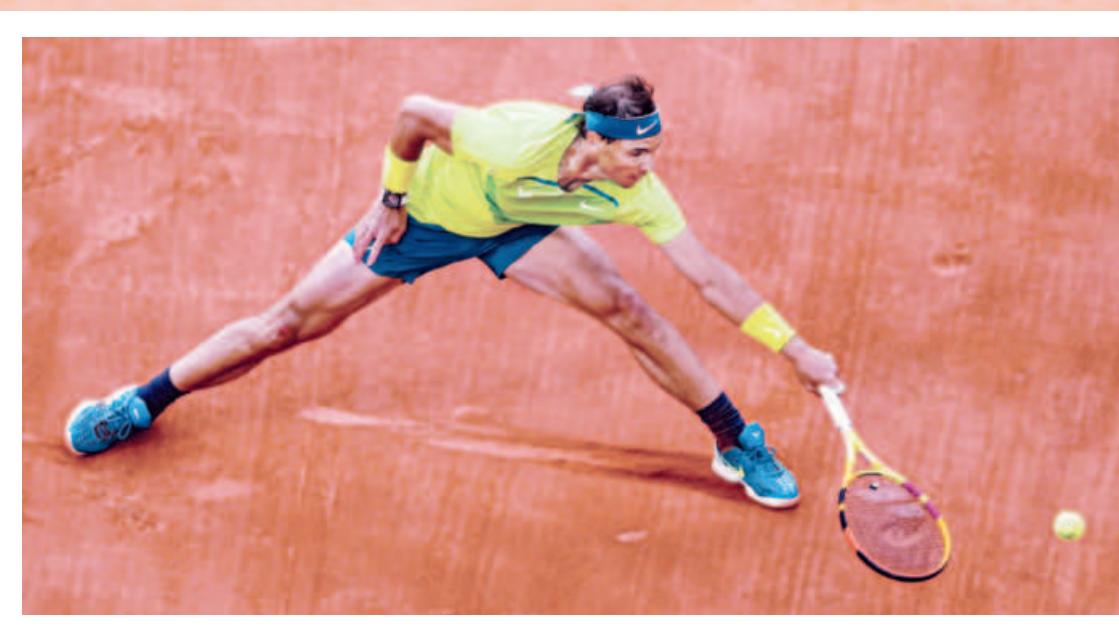
Both men are playing in the quarter-finals at Roland Garros for the 16th time. Djokovic has reached the last-eight with ease. He has won 22 sets in a row, a run stretching back to his Italian Open triumph in Rome.

"I'm glad that I didn't spend too much time on the court up to the quarter-finals, knowing that playing Nadal in Roland Garros is always a physical battle. It's a huge challenge and probably the biggest one that you can have here," said Djokovic.

Adding an extra twist to the clash was a battle of wills over scheduling which Nadal lost Monday when organisers selected the clash for the night session under the Court Philippe Chatrier lights.

"I don't like to play on clay during the night, because the humidity is higher, the ball is slower, and there can be very heavy conditions especially when it's cold," said Nadal.

Djokovic had hinted he would prefer to face Nadal as late as possible. "All I will say is Rafa and I would make different requests," he said.



Lewandowski's Bayern days over?

AFP, WARSAW

Robert Lewandowski said Monday that his time with Bayern Munich was over, without specifying his future plans, amid reports that Barcelona have made him an offer.

"Today it is certain that my story with Bayern has come to an end," the Polish star striker told reporters in Warsaw.

"I can't imagine further cooperation, after what has happened over the last few months," he added.

"A transfer will be the best solution. I trust that Bayern won't stop me, just because they can."

With a year left on Lewandowski's contract, Barcelona have reportedly made an offer of 32 million euros (\$34.5 million) to sign him.

In an interview with Polish broadcaster Eleven Sports PL, Lewandowski dropped a teaser about how he would enjoy living in Spain.

"I think it's a really good place -- not just to go on holiday there," he said, adding that he has a house in Mallorca.

Bayern CEO Oliver Khan and director of sports Hasan Salihamidzic have both publicly stated the club will not let Lewandowski leave before 2023. Lewandowski was top-scorer in the Bundesliga last season for the fifth year running after netting 35 goals in Germany's top flight.

On Monday, Bayern also confirmed the exit of France midfielder Corentin Tolisso whose contract has expired after five years in Munich.



Berlusconi's Monza in Serie A

REUTERS

Lombardy club Monza, owned by former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, will play in Serie A for the first time next season after winning a promotion playoff at Pisa 4-3 after extra time on Sunday to secure a 6-4 aggregate victory.

Monza had beaten Pisa 2-1 in the first leg of the Serie B playoff on Thursday but a thrilling second leg saw them fall 2-0 behind before levelling, only for a Giuseppe Mastinu goal for the hosts to send the tie into extra time at 4-4.

Luca Marrone and Christian Gytkaer were the extra-time heroes for Monza who held on despite having Eugenio Lamanna sent off.

"We fought for a year and we reached a historic milestone: Monza since (being founded in) 1912 had never been in Serie A. We got there today. It's a wonderful thing for us and for all the citizens of Brianza," Berlusconi told Sky Sport Italia.

Monza were in Serie C when Berlusconi's Fininvest Group took over in 2018 and secured promotion from the third tier in their second season. They lost out in the Serie B playoffs last term.