

Djokovic top seed for Wimbledon

REUTERS, London

Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic will head into next week's tournament as the men's top seed with Russian world number one Daniil Medvedev banned from taking part while Germany's second-ranked Alexander Zverev is out injured.

Djokovic, who was unable to defend his 2021 Australian Open title and the 2,000 ranking points he earned due to his non-vaccinated status against COVID-19, recently lost his world number one spot to Medvedev.

The Serbian, who has won the last three editions of the grasscourt major, will slip further down the rankings after Wimbledon as he will lose another 2,000 points with the ATP and WTA stripping the tournament of points.

Poland's world number one Iga Swiatek will be the women's top seed.



A Bangladesh player, being pulled back by his Nepalese counterpart, passes the ball to a teammate during their first match of the three-match friendship series at the Army Stadium in Banani yesterday. Bangladesh blanked the visitors 20-0 in this seven-a-side match, which was the first-ever international rugby match held on Bangladesh soil.

PHOTO: STAR

Top-order debacle proving Siddons' biggest challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's batters had shown the approach needed in Tests in alien conditions during their win in Mount Maunganui in January this year and executed a plan as a unit against the Kiwis, who boast arguably the best pace attack in the world in their home conditions.

But that famous win, instead of becoming the catalyst for how Bangladesh would approach Test cricket, became an anomaly. Subsequent Tests have seen batters fail to find the same mindset and approach.

Before the New Zealand Tests at the start of the year, team director Khaled Mahmud was able to drill into the players the most important basic of leaving deliveries in those foreign conditions and it culminated in the Tigers' first win in any format against the hosts in their own den.

But the most recent batting debacle in Windies, which comes after similar collective failures from the batters against South Africa away and Sri Lanka at home, led Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan to admit that



the team did not have many technically sound batsmen. But there also seems to be a collective failure to adjust to different challenges.

Former national captain Naimur Rahman Durjoy lamented the lack of that attribute. "If you bowl in a conventional process in Tests like you do in T20Is or ODIs, it will not bring results. A delivery which behaves a certain way at home will not behave the same on the wickets in the West Indies or South Africa. You need a different approach and strategy for those conditions. You have to create your luck with more focus," he told reporters yesterday.

Whereas a team director had ingrained certain tactical and mental mottos in New Zealand, the majority of batters have not shown the requisite approach on subsequent tours, even with Jamie Siddons in the team management after returning as batting consultant following his stint as the Tigers' head coach from 2007 till 2011.

Former captain Akram Khan felt there were real dangers of becoming mentally unsettled if batters did not respond collectively. "In shorter formats, you can recover in two-three overs. But in Tests, you have to

pull up collectively as a unit. If we let them dominate, our performances will keep being bad," he said yesterday. "The players will have to be mentally at ease and not take pressure."

When asked about change in approach compared to the Mount Maunganui Test after the top-order's collapse in South Africa, batting consultant Siddons had said that players were advised to play their own game. "Everyone is encouraged to play their own game. If they see a ball that's there to be hit, they are encouraged to play aggressively," he had said.

It is not clear from Bangladesh's approach what their natural game might be. More to the point, several batters have shown obvious weaknesses to certain deliveries. Najmul Hossain Shanto has been troubled by incoming deliveries. The use of wobble seam has left batters wondering how to rectify their approach.

"There is a mental readiness needed. You can't always rely on the seam position out of a fast bowler's hand as the only cue on how to play a delivery. If in doubt, the instinct is to cover the line of stumps and go from there. They [batters] need to back their own beliefs since bowlers don't even know how the ball may behave [when bowling with a wobbling seam]," Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a mentor to many national team stars, told The Daily Star yesterday.

In this situation, it remains to be seen whether the team management, especially the batting consultant, can get batters back to their roots and solve their issues against swing or wobble seam deliveries and prepare for further challenges.

Mane lands in Munich

AFP, Berlin

Sadio Mane arrived in Germany on a private jet on Tuesday in order undergo a medical with the Liverpool forward reportedly on the verge of signing for Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich.

Broadcaster Sky showed footage of the 30-year-old touching down at Munich airport before being taken to a hospital in the city centre for a medical exam.

According to media reports, Mane's transfer will cost Bayern around 41 million euros (£35 million, \$43 million).

The Senegal forward is expected to sign a three-year contract and is set to hold his first Bayern press conference Wednesday.

Mane would be a replacement for wantaway Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski, who has been linked to a Barcelona transfer, and winger Serge Gnabry, who is stalling over a contract extension.

Basketball crying for a home

ATIQUE ANAM

Basketball is one of the most popular sports in the world. Some of the biggest names and highest earners in the sporting world are basketball players. It is an Olympic sport, represented in two disciplines for both men and women.

Yet, in Bangladesh the sport is widely neglected, despite having a big fanbase that follows international basketball, especially the NBA, and the fact that the game is played by a measurable size of urban school- and college goers as well as by Dhaka-based clubs and teams from the defence forces.

Although not affluent or very active, the Bangladesh Basketball Federation (BBF) still runs several domestic events, including the premier league, annually. It also hosts international tournaments every few years and during these tournaments the Dhanmondi Wooden Floor Gymnasium, the home of Bangladesh basketball, takes on a party atmosphere.

But all that could turn into a thing of the past as the establishment, situated next to the Abahani club, is being razed to make space for a multi-sport complex, to be named the Sheikh Kamal Sports



Complex.

Not only as a venue for tournaments, the two-story building was a year-long home for budding basketball players and basketball enthusiasts from schools and colleges across the capital.

Now the place is a bare concrete structure, bereft of the court and equipment, counting the days before it is razed to the ground. All that remains for basketball officials and players are memories forged over almost three decades.

Sudesna Biswas, who played for the Bangladesh women's basketball team from 2011-2018, still could not digest the fact that the place was gone forever.



"The memories will never be replaced, but now when I pass by Abahani, I won't be able to look back and point out the gym and tell others what that place is and what it meant to me. So, it feels very hollow. I think it's the same for most people," the 26-year-old told The Daily Star.

The irony is that Sheikh Kamal, the eldest son of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after whom the complex is being named, was a leading basketball player in the country in the pre- and post-liberation era.

It is not that the sports complex sprung out of nowhere overnight. In fact, it was in the offing for years.

Yet the BBF, the National Sports Council -- which gave the BBF the authority to run their activities at the Dhanmondi facility -- and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the guardian of sports federations of the country, did little to find a new home for the popular sport.

"We have been hearing since 2018, when they began to revamp the field, that Abahani would take back the gym and that it would be under them and not the federation. But we were all hoping for a miracle or at the very least that it would be a lot longer. But in four years, the gym is gone," Sudesna exclaimed.

Ranajit Das, a member of the federation's executive committee,

welcomed the initiative to build a complex named after Sheikh Kamal but could not accept that they were being made homeless.

"We are all happy and welcome the building of a sports complex named after Sheikh Kamal. But we have become helpless. We desperately need a new place to conduct our daily activities and organise tournaments. Now I am doing my office work from home," Das told The Daily Star recently.

On June 15, the BBF was sent a written notice to move their belongings to the Mirpur indoor stadium, which is supposed to be their new home, and jostle for space and time with a few other federations.

Parimal Singha, the recently-appointed secretary of the NSC, told The Daily Star that the BFF would have to come to negotiations with other federations to run their training and official activities at the indoor stadium for the time being.

While he did not give any assurances about a permanent home for the sport, BFF officials were hopeful that the NSC and sports ministry would empathise with their plight and look for a permanent solution sooner rather than later.

Brazilian duo powers Kings

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a disappointing AFC Cup campaign, defending champions Bashundhara Kings perfectly resumed their Bangladesh Premier League season as they handed a 2-0 defeat to 10-man Rahmatganj MFS at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

Before the resumption of the league after a five-week break, Kings' Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon was a bit anxious of the state of Rajshahi pitch amid the rainy conditions. However, there was no rain yesterday and Kings' Brazilian forward duo -- Robson Da Silva and Miguel Figueira -- struck one goal apiece under dazzling light. The game also saw the referee give Rahmatganj goalkeeper Ziaur Rahman a marching order for intercepting a Nuha Marong lob from outside the box in the 33rd minute.

Rahmatganj, who suffered a 3-2 defeat in the first leg, could hold their mighty opponents Kings after being a player down. And King did not waste time to grab the opportunity with both hands as they struck two goals within two minutes after the incident.

Substitute goalkeeper Rakibul Hasan Tushar first watched Brazilian Miguel find the near post from a free kick outside the box and two minutes later, Robson struck his league's 12th goal to make it 2-0. The inspirational Kings forward drove home from inside the box with a low right-footer after right-back Rimon Hossain whipped a low cross.

Kings could not widen the margin in the second half but the result meant they had

extended their winning streak to five. With 41 points from 16 matches, Kings sit pretty at the top and nine points ahead of nearest rivals

Abahani, who will face their archrivals Mohammedan SC in Cumilla today.

At Bashundhara Kings Arena, struggling Sheikh Russel KC pulled off a surprising 3-1 win over Sheikh Jamal DC, who under the supervision of Joseph Afifi suffered their second defeat in five matches.

With the second defeat in 16 matches, Sheikh Jamal are 11 points behind leaders Kings while big-spending Sheikh Russel notched up their fourth win to raise their point tally to 19 from 16 matches.

Sheikh Russel took the lead in the 20th minute when out-of-favour national player Hemanta Vincent Biswas drove a low shot home from close range after Nigerian forward Ismaeal Akinade released a low cross from the left wing. And three minutes before half time, Jonov Outek levelled the margin with a curler.

Sheikh Russel were quick to respond as they restored the lead one minute into the first half stoppage time when Charles Didier slotted a left-footer home, availing an assist from Hemanta from the left flank. Former champions Sheikh Russel sealed off the match three minutes from time when substitute forward Mannaf Rabbi ran down the left flank and cut inside around the box to deliver a brilliant shot into the far post's top corner.