

Djokovic unable to play US Open

REUTERS

Former world number one Novak Djokovic said on Thursday that he will not be able to travel to New York to compete at the U.S. Open, the last Grand Slam of the year that begins next week, having refused to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Current rules require travellers to show proof of full vaccination to board flights to and enter the United States.

"Sadly, I will not be able to travel to NY this time for US Open," Djokovic wrote on Twitter. "Good luck to my fellow players! I'll keep in good shape and positive spirit and wait for an opportunity to compete again."

The Serbian previously said he was prepared to miss Grand Slam tournaments that require participating players to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Djokovic was on the entry list for the Aug. 29-Sept. 11 tournament in New York.

The 35-year-old was also unable to defend his Australian Open crown earlier this year after being deported from the country over his vaccination status.

Rybakina's coach immortalises Wimbledon win

REUTERS

Elena Rybakina has sometimes been exasperated by her coach's intensity but the Wimbledon champion has indelible proof that Stefano Vukov is a man of his word.

Vukov has tattooed Rybakina's name and the date of this year's Wimbledon final on his right arm -- keeping up with the bet they made two years ago.

The pair made the bet during the Qatar Open in 2020 that if Rybakina won at Wimbledon, Vukov would have to get a tattoo of her name.

Moscow-born Rybakina pulled off the achievement this year, beating Ons Jabeur 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 in the final in July to become the first player from Kazakhstan to win a Grand Slam singles title.

"I already forgot (about the bet) -- we were laughing around," Rybakina told The Guardian in an interview on Wednesday.

"Before the final, he told me that he would do it. So, he did it. For me, it's still crazy, I can't believe it. But it is what it is. We had a bet."

Rybakina, who has dropped to world number 25 despite her triumph at Wimbledon because ranking points were not on offer at the grasscourt major, is eager to add more major titles to her collection.

"It's never enough, I think. The goal is to win many more Grand Slams," Rybakina said. "For this year, my goal was to be top 10. Still it's the same goal because I didn't move in the ranking."



A focused and in-form Babar Azam (R) appears on a mission during Pakistan's training session yesterday in the UAE. As the opening of the much-awaited Asia Cup draws near, seasoned campaigners from opposition camps, like India's Virat Kohli and Afghanistan's Rashid Khan, catch up on their journeys (top-left) after teams depart (bottom-left) from home with warm send-off, like Sri Lanka did on Wednesday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Drama, misrepresentation and culture of coaches' ungainly exit

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh practiced at ICC Academy in Dubai yesterday, hoping to get a good feel of their new way of doing things under newly-appointed technical consultant Sridharan Sriram and acclimatising to the conditions in the UAE.

However, back in their country, further questions were popping up about coach Russell Domingo's future with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) after news spread in the morning yesterday that Domingo had decided to end his tenure with the BCB.

The precedent, and the stage for the ensuing drama, was set when BCB said they would ask Domingo regarding some comments he made to the media recently.

Domingo had spoken about the environment in the dressing room and interference from BCB.

During an interview with The Daily Star, Domingo said: "I definitely feel there is a lot of talk, speculation and criticism around the team that gets into the media which sometimes can be avoided. I feel the players are trying their best. Constant scrutiny of the team, players and management at times can add to the pressure and the negativity around the team and it's something that Bangladesh as a nation, whether it's the public, the media or the board, need to get a little better at."

His recent discussions with the media in interviews also delved into the relationship he has with seniors and how board directors routinely criticise players.

The BCB did not take any of those remarks lightly.



"We have to look into it. I think the board should send him a letter to explain what he meant by those statements [to the media]. If he explains to us, we will know where the problem lies," cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus told the media on Wednesday.

Although Domingo was not going to get a show-cause notice from the board, Jalal said certain remarks were 'unexpected' and that BCB higher-ups would sit down to discuss the issue.

After news arrived on Thursday that Domingo had said in an interview that his time at BCB 'is done', this newspaper reached out to the head coach to clarify his future.

Domingo informed The Daily Star that his tenure coming to an end was 'fake news'.

The BCB confirmed yesterday amidst the drama that Domingo had not resigned and that there was a miscommunication.

"We spoke to him and there was a miscommunication. The ultimate thing is that he has not resigned and nothing of that sort came up," BCB CEO Nizamuddin told reporters yesterday.

"I am not saying all the information [in the media] was wrong. I am saying that according to him, some of it was wrong. The way he said it, the issue did not come up like that. Not all of it but some aspects [regarding resignation] were misrepresentation," Nizamuddin said.

Amidst that backdrop, Domingo's future remains unstable, especially with the BCB having excluded him from the T20 setup right before the Asia Cup.

Coaches in Bangladesh have a manner of leaving their jobs the wrong way. Meanwhile, it leaves a bad precedent for Sriram to continue into, leaving question marks over how much he will be allowed to do the job he has been brought in for.

Messi's Argentina prove top attraction

AFP, Doha

Tickets for two games featuring Lionel Messi's Argentina have been the top attractions for fans at this year's World Cup in Qatar, according to the chief organiser.

Argentina's first round group games against arch-rivals Mexico on November 26 and Saudi Arabia on November 22 were the "most requested", Nasser Al-Khater, CEO of the Qatar organising committee, told the QNA national news agency late Wednesday.

Both matches will be at the 80,000-capacity Lusail stadium, where the World Cup final will be staged on December 18.

The official did not give figures but the Argentina-Mexico match was sold out in the first round of online sales at the start of the year.

FIFA said this month 2.45 million tickets have been sold for the first World Cup in an Arab nation, which Al-Khater promised would be "a great carnival".

There are 3.2 million tickets in total with more than one million going to sponsors and FIFA partners.

Argentina and Mexico have been named among the top ticket-buying countries along with Qatar, the United States, England, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, France, Brazil and Germany.

Qatar has said it expects about 1.2 million visitors at the 32 nation event that starts November 20.

Boult retains Test hopes

REUTERS, Melbourne

Trent Boult has not given up hope of playing Test cricket again despite declining a central contract with New Zealand Cricket (NZC), the left-arm seamer said on Thursday.

Boult has negotiated a "significantly reduced role" with the Black Caps citing the need to spend time with his family though he remains open to stints in Twenty20 leagues.

Aware that not having a central contract would affect his chances of national selection, Boult hoped the Leeds Test against England in July would not prove his last.

"I hope not," said the seamer, who was picked for the three-match Chappell-Hadlee ODI series in Australia beginning on Sunday. "I'm fully aware that with the decision I made to give that contract back, it's going to affect that selection. I'm taking it almost week by week really."

"I know the next series is in Pakistan and then at my home ground against England in the new year, but it's too far away to tell. I'm going to leave that with NZC and respect their decision."

The paceman, who was part of the New Zealand squads that finished runners-up in the last two editions of the 50 overs World Cup, wanted to have another shot at winning one-day cricket's biggest title in India next year.

"It's only a few months around the corner and there's a lot of hunger to try to have another crack at that trophy."

Boult reiterated he gave up his central contract primarily to be able to spend more time with family. "I've got three young boys that only see dad for eight weeks a year at the current moment."

"If I don't play any international cricket - obviously I still want to - then that might be a couple of leagues a year and 10 months at home rather than the other way around."

Jibon 'unsuited' to Cabrera's plans

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite a long-standing problem when it comes to scoring goals, Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera has pinned his hopes on inexperienced strikers for the two FIFA-sanctioned friendlies next month and excluded Nabib Newaj Jibon, the country's most experienced forward.

The 37-year-old Spaniard yesterday revealed a 27-member preliminary squad for clashes against Cambodia and Nepal on September 22 and September 27 respectively.

Emon Shahriar of Mohammedan was the only fresh face while the returns of fit-again Tariq Raihan Kazi, Masuk Mia, Suman Reza, Matin Mia and Hemonta Vincent Bishwas were virtually guaranteed after they missed the Asian Cup Qualifiers due to injuries.

But Jibon's return was doubtful, especially considering he was initially dropped from the squad in June after failing to report on time for a training session ahead of the Asian Cup Qualifiers.

It seemed that despite being among the top-scoring local players with nine goals in the just concluded season, his punishment was set to continue, but Cabrera clarified that Jibon was not dropped due to disciplinary issues but because he simply did not suit the game plan.



After taking charge of Bangladesh, Cabrera has had little time to work with the booters. He brought Jibon on as a substitute in two friendlies against Maldives and Mongolia in March and that was all Cabrera needed to see from the striker who was a crucial part of the team under previous coaches.

"During the minutes I was on the field against Maldives and Mongolia, I believe I played according to the game plan. I was instructed to hold up the ball, strike goals and distribute and I think I played well,"

Jibon told The Daily Star when asked about what instructions Cabrera had given him in March.

"Cabrera's idea is to play with possession and attack the opponents," Jibon said. "If I am not a good ball-player, then how does a top team like Abahani played me in different positions?"

"Not being part of the squad is unexpected because I scored five goals in the league after returning from injury and I was expecting a call," Jibon said.

Since his debut for the national team in 2015, Jibon was excluded just once from the national squad during the Asian Cup Qualifiers play-off matches against Bhutan by Belgian coach Tom Saintfiet, who also dropped Jamal Bhuiyan and other players in 2016.

Asked whether Jibon did not suit his style of play, the Cabrera stated: "It's not that he doesn't match our system. But we believe the strikers we called are better suited to the ideas we want to implement."

Cabrera also informed that they had discussed several times with the technical staff and technical director Paul Smalley to set the general criteria before picking up the 27 players, who are requested to report to the team manager today with the training getting underway on Saturday at the Police ground in Uttara.



England pacer James Anderson floats in the air in jubilation after scalping the wicket of South Africa's Keshav Maharaj in the second Test at Old Trafford on Thursday. On his 100th Test at home, the legendary pacer took three wickets for 32 runs in 15 overs as England reduced the visitors to 143 for eight at Tea.

PHOTO: REUTERS