

## Nadal, Medvedev lament Djokovic's absence

REUTERS, New York

Rafa Nadal said it was sad news that his great rival Novak Djokovic will be missing from the U.S. Open, adding that the absence of a player of the Serbian's calibre was an important miss for the hardcourt Grand Slam.

Djokovic, who won Wimbledon to take his major singles titles to 21, has opted not to be vaccinated against COVID-19. He said on Thursday he could not fly to New York for the year's final Grand Slam. Read full story

Rules require travellers to show proof of vaccination to board flights to enter the United States.

"From my personal perspective, it's very sad news," Nadal, who leads the men's Grand Slam race with 22 titles, told reporters on Friday.

"It's always a shame when the best players of the world are not able to play a tournament because of injuries or because of different reasons.

"In this case, not having one of the best players of the history in the draw of Grand Slam is always an important miss, no?"

The 35-year-old Djokovic was also unable to play the Australian Open at the start of the year after being deported from Melbourne over his vaccination status just ahead of the tournament.



Nadal said it was tough for both players and the fans as everyone want the best players to compete at big events.

"But on the other hand, I repeat what I said plenty of times: the sport in some ways is bigger than any player," added the 36-year-old, who has been plagued by injuries during the last two seasons. "The tournament continues.

"Even if it's not a good news for everyone, the world continues and tennis will continue after me, after Novak, after Roger (Federer).

"Without a doubt, Novak is one of the most important players of the last 20 years, the history of our sport. In a personal way I feel sorry for him that he's not able to travel here."

World number one Daniil Medvedev said he was disappointed his U.S. Open title defence at Flushing Meadows would kick off without Djokovic.

The lanky Russian pulled off one of sport's greatest upsets with cat-like agility a year ago when he denied Djokovic a calendar Grand Slam in a straight sets win on Arthur Ashe Stadium to collect his first major title.

"I wish he would play here," Medvedev told reporters ahead of the U.S. Open main draw, which starts on Monday.

"The rivalry against Rafa is really I feel like heating up in a way. Twenty-two, 21 (Grand Slams), a joke of a number," he said.

"It's a pity he (Djokovic) is not here. It would be a great story I think for tennis. Not only tennis-wise, but it's not us tennis players, it's American government rules. Completely understandable also."

Medvedev rolls into the U.S. Open after a handful of uneven performances, winning at Los Cabos before suffering a shock early exit in Montreal. He reached the semi-finals at Cincinnati, where he has often thrived. Read full story

His hunger for a second major title is as fierce as ever after losing a five-set thriller to Nadal in the Australian Open final. The six-foot six-inch, power-serving Russian said he wanted to try "something big" in New York.

"I'm working well. I'm working well with my team. I'm confident in myself," he added.



Captain Jamal Bhuiyan runs towards the ball as coach Javier Cabrera keeps a close eye during the first day of a training camp in Uttara's APBN Ground on Saturday. The team will train for three weeks before leaving the country for two FIFA friendly matches away to Cambodia and Nepal.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## 'I feel sorry for the football lovers'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football team's captain Jamal Bhuyan said he feels sorry for the low FIFA ranking of the country but expressed his team's desire to improve on that with wins against Nepal and Cambodia next month.

Talking to reporters after the first session of a three-week long training camp at the Armed Police Battalion ground in Uttara on Saturday, the 32-year-old said matches against two close-ranked sides will give them a chance to improve on their ranking.

Bangladesh will play against Cambodia on September 22 before playing against Nepal five days later, with both matches away from home.

"I feel sorry for the football lovers of Bangladesh as we are way too low (in FIFA ranking)," Jamal said when asked about his opinion on the team's latest FIFA ranking of 192.

Bangladesh's ranking, like most other teams didn't change in the latest update as there wasn't any FIFA window after June. With no competitive matches in foreseeable future, these two matches will be of paramount importance in the team's bid to rise up the ladder.

"We have two matches, so we have the opportunity to improve our ranking if we get six points from these matches," Jamal said.

Despite Cambodia (174) and Nepal (176) being higher in ranking compared to Bangladesh, the men in red and green have been able to beat these two sides in recent times. Jamal feels there is not much of a difference between these sides, so it will be an opportunity to earn valuable victories.

"If we play against a much higher ranked team like Bahrain, the chances of victory are very small, like 30 or 20 per cent. But against Cambodia and Nepal, we have a better chance of winning, like 50-50.

"We all have come here because we want to win. We want to win these two matches, but for that we need a good camp and good preparation first," Jamal concluded.

## BFF U-18, U-16 leagues to start in mid-Sept

SPORTS REPORTER

A meeting of the Professional League Management Committee of Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday decided to start the BFF Under-18 League, featuring under-18 teams of the clubs that played in the most recent Bangladesh Premier League, from September 15.

The registration window for this tournament has been extended to September 10.

The meeting also decided to start the BFF Under-16 League, featuring under-16 teams from the clubs of the Bangladesh Championship League, from 20 September, with its registration window closing on September 7.

These information were disclosed by the committee's chairman and BFF's senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy at a press conference at the BFF House.

The matches of the two leagues will be played at different venues also Dhaka, said Murshedy, who also informed of his desire to leave the chairman's position.

The former national footballer, who has been at the helm of the committee since its formation in 2008, stated his busy schedule in politics and business as the reason for leaving the post.

Murshedy's letter of resignation will be evaluated in a meeting of the executive committee next month.

He will, however, continue to head the finance and referees' committees while holding the senior vice-president's role.



PHOTO: TWITTER

Manchester United midfielder Bruno Fernandes celebrates after scoring against Southampton in a 1-0 Premier League win on Saturday.

## 'You must battle and we did'

REUTERS, Southampton

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag hailed his side's fighting spirit after they claimed a slender 1-0 win at Southampton in the Premier League on Saturday but added that there was still much to improve, especially in possession.

Bruno Fernandes' second-half strike was the difference between the two sides as United notched up their second straight win and ended a seven-match losing streak on the road stretching back to last season. Read full story

"At the start of the game we could have created more. It is the start of the season, it is tough. You have to battle and we did that today so we were rewarded," Ten Hag told reporters.

"I think the players learnt some lessons from Brentford. We were more compact on the long balls. Of course, we were really happy. The goal we created, we could have made more."

United failed to add a second and were sloppy in possession in the final half hour, with Southampton twice coming close to a deserved equaliser.

"We kept control straight after half time, moved it around and we created three really good chances straight after half time. I still feel there's room for improvement, to control more, but we are not that long in our way," added Ten Hag.

"You hope to have more control in the last 30 minutes of the game."

Asked about Cristiano Ronaldo's future at the club, Ten Hag said he was still part of his plans amid speculation that the Portugal forward wants to leave Old Trafford to play in the Champions League.

"We plan with him. We want him to stay. I hope (he stays)," he said, adding that United were looking to strengthen their squad before the transfer window closes next Thursday night.



England pacer James Anderson celebrates after taking the wicket of South Africa's Dean Elgar during the second Test at Old Trafford yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Keegan, Rassie keep England at bay

AFP, Manchester

South Africa's Keegan Petersen and Rassie van der Dussen batted through an entire session to frustrate England's bid for a series-levelling win with more than two days to spare in the second Test at Old Trafford on Saturday.

The Proteas were 141-3 in their second innings at tea on the third day, 123 runs adrift of England's first innings 415-9 - a total built on Ben Foakes's 113 not out and Ben Stokes's 103, his first hundred since being appointed England captain.

Petersen (42 not out) and Van der Dussen, unbeaten on 41 despite batting with a finger injury, had come together before lunch, with South Africa 54-3.

England's frontline pace trio of James Anderson, Stuart Broad and Ollie Robinson had all taken a wicket apiece before lunch to leave South Africa 88-3.