

‘I’m here to win the US Open’

REUTERS, New York

Frances Tiafoe said his days of flying under the radar were over after his stunning fourth-round upset of Rafa Nadal at the US Open on Monday.

“That’s over, man. There’s no dark horse anymore,” American Tiafoe told reporters with a laugh after his 6-4, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 win over the 36-year-old Spaniard.

“But it’s all good. It helped me play well. I still feel no pressure. I still feel like I’m not supposed to do anything. I’m just here to play great tennis and enjoy it.”

Tiafoe, 24, came into the match having failed to win a set, or even force a break point, against Nadal in their two previous meetings.

But with his confidence boosted by an improved serve and increased fitness, Tiafoe sees no reason why he cannot go all the way at Flushing Meadows.

“A couple years ago I would have played Rafa and been like, ‘oh, it’s cool to play him,’” he said.

“But today when I got out there I looked at my team I said, ‘let’s get a win today’.

“I’m here to win the U.S. Open. I want to go all the way.”



Frances Tiafoe jumps into the stands to celebrate his victory against Rafael Nadal, who fell to his earliest US Open loss in six years, in the US Open Round of 16 match on Monday. “I need to go back. I need to fix things. I don’t know when I going to come back,” said Nadal after the defeat.

PHOTO: AFP

Bavuma back to captain SA at T20 World Cup

REUTERS, Johannesburg

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma has recovered from injury and will take charge of the team for the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia later this year.

He has made a full recovery from a left elbow injury suffered in the T20 series against India in June, Cricket South Africa said on Tuesday as they named the 15-player squad and three travelling reserves for the tournament in October and November.

Rassie van der Dussen, however, has been ruled out after requiring surgery to fix a fracture of his left index finger, sustained during the second test against England last week.

South Africa included 22-year-old Tristan Stubbs following an impressive outing in the recent T20 series against England but there is no place for teenager Dewald Brevis, who was signed for this year’s Indian Premier League but has yet to play for the national T20 team.

“This has been a really tough squad to select, simply because we had so many players in excellent form over the past few months and performing at a level that made the selectors sit up and notice them,” said convenor of selectors Victor Mpitsang.

South Africa will play a warm-up T20 series against India later this month, followed by a three-match ODI series in early October for which a squad was also named on Tuesday.

Afghans hope for revival against spirited Pakistan

SPORTS REPORTER

Afghanistan will want to rediscover their group stage dominance but might find it to be a steep task against a spirited Pakistan when the two sides meet today in Sharjah in what is anticipated to be a high-voltage T20 clash in the Super 4 stage of the Asia Cup.

Pakistan defeated arch-rivals India by five wickets in their first Super 4 stage match last Sunday and a win for them today could all but confirm their tickets to the final of the continental tournament, scheduled for September 11 at the Dubai International Stadium.

The Babar Azam-led side avenged their five-wicket defeat to India in the group stage with the same margin victory over Rohit Sharma’s side and will only be looking to build on the confidence gained from that match.

The top-ranked batter in T20Is, Babar, is yet to make his mark in the continental championship. He scored just 14,9 and 10 in the three games played in this edition of the tournament. The right-hander would definitely hope today’s game to be the one in which he could get going.

However, Babar’s opening partner, Mohammad Rizwan, has been in tremendous form throughout the tournament. Having scored two consecutive fifties in the last two matches and a 43-run knock in the first game against India, Rizwan has been the standout performer not only for Pakistan

ASIA CUP				SUPER-4			
PAKISTAN				AFGHANISTAN			
							
M	W	L	NR	HEAD TO HEAD IN T20IS			
2	2	0	0				
M	W	L	NR	HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP			
2	2	0	0				
LAST MEETING IN ASIA CUP: ABU DHABI, SEPTEMBER 21, 2018. PAKISTAN WON BY 3 WICKETS.				LAST MEETING IN T20IS: DUBAI, OCTOBER 29, 2021. PAKISTAN WON BY 5 WICKETS.			

but also in the marquee event. He is the top-scorer with 192 runs at a staggering 96 average, and Pakistan would once again need the 30-year-old to provide the platform at the top.

Meanwhile, Afghanistan, who had dominated the group stage with comprehensive wins over Bangladesh and hosts Sri Lanka, now find themselves at the bottom of the table with a negative net

run-rate of -0.589 after being upstaged by the Lankans in their first Super 4 game last Saturday.

Afghanistan skipper Mohammad Nabi rued falling ‘20-25 runs short’ in their game against Sri Lanka despite getting off to a blistering start. That is something the Afghans would be hoping to rectify when they face a relatively stronger Pakistan bowling attack at the same venue today.

U-20s aim to banish two decades of torment

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are dreaming of qualifying for the AFC Youth Championship proper after 20 years as they leave for Bahrain today to participate in the AFC U-20 Championship Qualifiers, starting on Saturday.

Bangladesh have been placed in Group B alongside Qatar, hosts Bahrain, Nepal and Bhutan, with nine group champions and the five best runners-up set to join Uzbekistan in the 16-team AFC Youth Championship, to be held in 2023.

Bangladesh have only made it to the event proper six times. They played directly in 1975, 1977, 1978 before qualifying successfully in 1980, 1996 and 2002. In the two decades since, Bangladesh have participated in the qualifying round nine times without making it to the next stage. Cruelly, they were denied passage twice by virtue of goal difference.

But this time around, Bangladesh see a possibility, especially considering the team finished runners-up in the SAFF U-20 Championship a month ago and boasts a strong squad. 15 players ply their trade in the country’s top-tier Bangladesh Premier League while five feature in the second-tier Bangladesh Championship League. Three others are from the BFF Academy.

“After achieving our target in the SAFF U-20 Championship by qualifying for the final, we are now aiming to utilise that experience in the AFC U-20 Championship Qualifiers,” head coach Rashed Ahmed Pappu said.

“We are going to the tournament with a target of qualifying for the finals. We have worked on the formations we want to use, especially against Bahrain and Qatar, although there are two more opponents.”

In the previous edition in 2019, Bangladesh finished bottom of their group under the supervision of English coach Andrew Peter Turner, losing 0-3 to Bahrain and 2-1 to Bhutan before a 1-1 draw against Jordan.

‘Green is a really calm character’

AGENCIES

Emerging star Cameron Green held his nerve with a career best 89 not out in Australia’s thrilling two-wicket victory over New Zealand in the first one-day international on Tuesday in Cairns.

After Glenn Maxwell starred with four wickets and a spectacular catch to restrict New Zealand to a modest 232-9, Australia slumped to 44-5 against inspired new ball bowling from quicks Trent Boult and Matt Henry under lights.

A composed Green and Alex Carey (85) turned the match on its head with a brilliant 158-run partnership to overwhelm an increasingly ragged New Zealand attack.

“It was an amazing effort in his 11th (ODI) game to play a match-winning knock,” Australia skipper Aaron Finch said of 23-year-old Green. “I couldn’t really walk for a second there. Groin, calf, hamstring and forearm – the whole lot was going. Not ideal but that’s ok,” Green told Fox Cricket after Australia’s two-wicket win.

“He’s a really calm character,” Carey told reporters in Cairns on Tuesday. “Bat and ball and in the field; (he) just goes about his business and he’s really focused.”

Women eye winning start

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be looking for a winning start in the 6th SAFF Women’s Championship when they take on Maldives today at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu in the first of their two Group A matches.

The game will get underway at 5:45pm after a clash in the same group between archrivals India and Pakistan, the latter set to play their first international women’s tournament in eight years.

However, Bangladesh are upbeat ahead of the game against Maldives, an opponent they bested in their previous two meetings, beating them 3-1 in 2014 before delivering a 6-0 thrashing in the 2016 semifinal.

Bangladesh will play Maldives six years after that emphatic win, hoping it will kickstart their campaign in the seven-nation tournament. Bangladesh’s aim is to initially ensure a semifinal berth from Group A.

“The girls are focused on tomorrow’s

match and will give their best for the start. We want to put on a good show and leave with an outright win,” head coach Golam Rabbani Choton said in a video message relayed by the Bangladesh Football Federation.

“The first match is always challenging but the girls are ready for the challenge since they have been preparing for the past six weeks,” said Choton.

Maldives have won just three of their 14 games across five editions of the SAFF Women’s Championship. They beat Afghanistan in 2014 before defeating both Sri Lanka and Bhutan in 2016 to secure a semifinal berth.

Bangladesh midfielder Maria Manda wanted to start the campaign on a good note. “Since our target is to qualify for the semifinals first, we want to win the first two matches. We want to get a good result against Maldives with a good display on the field,” Manda said, adding that they had adjusted to the weather in Nepal after spending three days in Kathmandu.



Barcelona’s Polish forward Robert Lewandowski is enjoying a rich vein of form at the moment and would be expected to produce another influential display when the Catalan giants entertain Viktoria Plzen at the Nou Camp tonight in the Champions League encounter with a focus on collecting maximum points in front of their home fans.

PHOTO: AFP