

## New music and rainy stroll lifts Swiatek’s spirit

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Iga Swiatek is not scared to change things up. It's a rare admission from a top tennis player given the sport's penchant for routines and superstition. But the World No.1 is into the third round without dropping a set.

After a physical effort to defeat Jule Niemeier in the first round, Swiatek flew through her second-round match against Camila Osorio, winning 6-2, 6-3.

Having played the first match on Rod Laver Arena on Wednesday, Swiatek's clinical performance opened up a host of opportunities for her to spend her day.

"I'm actually trying to break the routine sometimes because Grand Slams are so long that it's impossible to stay in the rhythm for the two weeks," Swiatek told Jelena Dokic. "Also playing sometimes night session, sometimes day session is really messing up the rhythm."

"Tonight for sure I'm going to have a free evening and it's going to be nicer than yesterday because I was already thinking about the match. So I'm going to try and enjoy it."



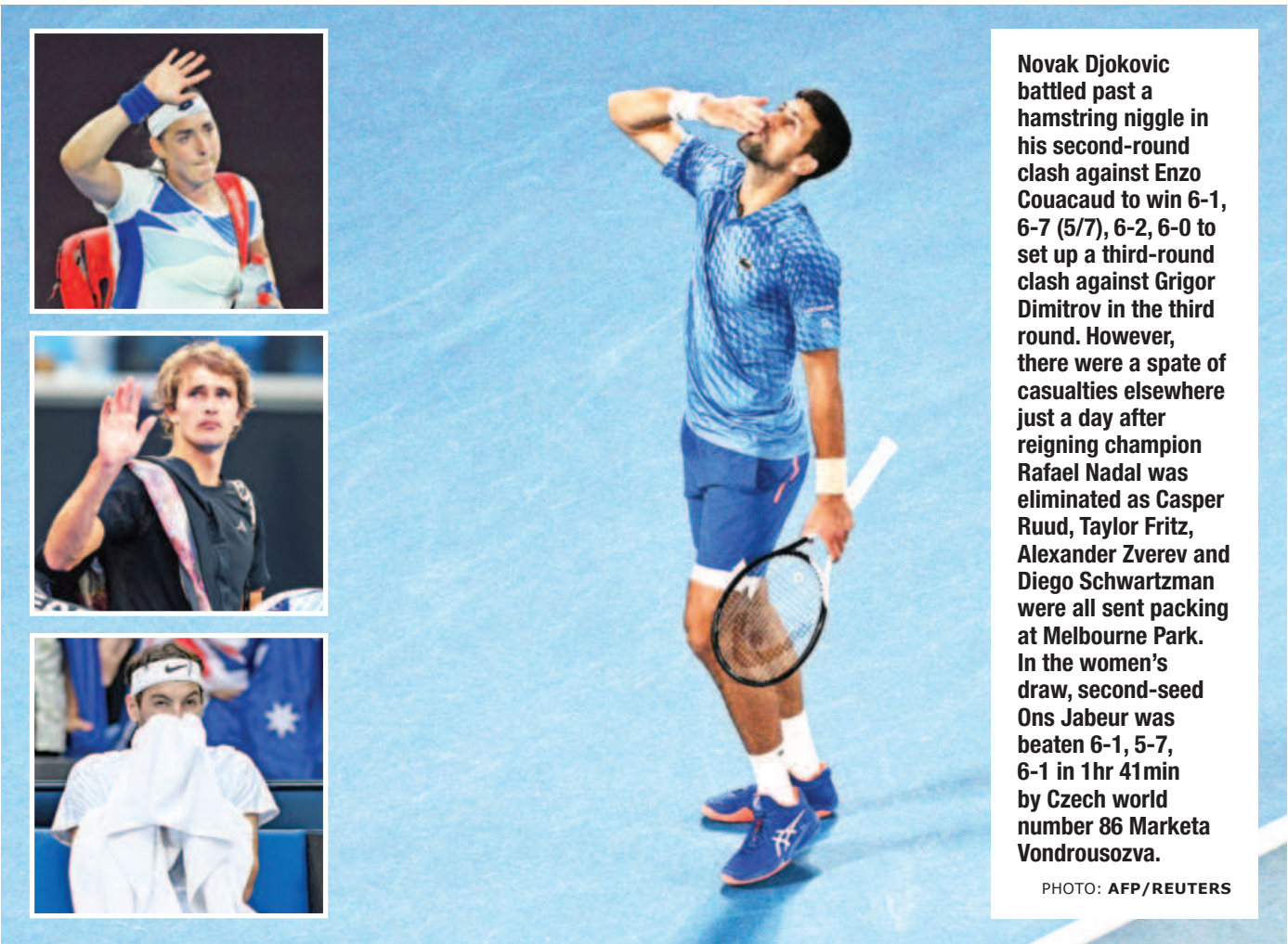
"But I'm not superstitious. I actually changed my playlist before the match. I was listening to the same songs for two years. It's working, so hopefully these songs are not going to mess up my head."

After switching her playlist over to more rock like The Red Hot Chili Peppers, Black Sabbath, AC/DC and Led Zeppelin, Swiatek is feeling as relaxed as ever as she competes at her fourth straight Slam as the World No.1.

Adaptation has been a key element of Swiatek's mental training over the past three years, and her ability to problem solve and go with the flow has been the bedrock of her rise to the top of the women's game. Because for Swiatek, rigidity and routines can easily morph into a mental crutch.

"In Melbourne it's usually sunny, except today and yesterday. So I need to change my plans. Yesterday I went for a walk at 7 p.m. and then it started raining and I was just hiding under a tree waiting for like 30 minutes. So if anyone sees me tonight walking in the rain, please save me and give me an umbrella."

"But maybe tonight maybe a nice dinner because I've been eating sushi the whole week and I can't look at it anymore. It wasn't superstition. It's the only thing you can take away from here so it just happened."



**Novak Djokovic battled past a hamstring niggle in his second-round clash against Enzo Couacaud to win 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2, 6-0 to set up a third-round clash against Grigor Dimitrov in the third round. However, there were a spate of casualties elsewhere just a day after reigning champion Rafael Nadal was eliminated as Casper Ruud, Taylor Fritz, Alexander Zverev and Diego Schwartzman were all sent packing at Melbourne Park. In the women's draw, second-seed Ons Jabeur was beaten 6-1, 5-7, 6-1 in 1hr 41min by Czech world number 86 Marketa Vondrousova.**

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

## Soumya’s misery continues

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Right from the start of their international careers, the two batters who were once rated as one of the brightest talents in Bangladesh cricket and were expected to become the next big thing were Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar.

While Liton did manage to prove his worth in recent times, having had developed himself as a consistent batter for the Tigers, Soumya unfortunately is struggling to live up to expectations and has certainly turned out as a big disappointment.

Soumya burst into the scene with his lazy elegance and the ability to tackle the world class bowlers with ease at the top-order for the Tigers, but the southpaw's current batting form reflects a sheer lack of confidence.

The 29-year-old continued to struggle for Dhaka Dominators in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League, where he was dismissed for a second consecutive duck in the tournament against Comilla Victorians yesterday.

With scores of 16, 6, 4, 0, and 0 in five games, Soumya's place at the moment seems to be in danger with the Dhaka side, who have lost four out of the five games so far after their 33-run defeat to Comilla.

Apart from Soumya not being able to score significantly, the manner in which the left-hander has been getting out recently is also alarming for the cricketer on his road to recovery from the lean patch.

When things are not going well for batters, coaches prescribe them to spend more time at the crease to gain confidence and return to basics. But in Soumya's



case, he appeared in some sort of hurry, as if taking things too easy, after coming in to open the innings against Comilla yesterday.

After facing just three deliveries while chasing 185 runs, Soumya went for a square-drive to Pakistani pacer Hasan Ali's delivery, one that was shaping away from his body. But with hardly any foot movement, Soumya handed a simple catch at point to leave without troubling the scores.

The pattern of dismissal remained pretty similar for Soumya throughout the

tournament as he never looked confident in constructing his innings. He batted at number three in the first three games before being promoted to open the innings in the last two matches, but his fate remained unchanged.

"I think Soumya knows how to overcome such a situation as he has played a lot of cricket over the years. I am sure he is talking to his coaches over his game, but it's up to him now. I think it's more of a mental adjustment rather than technical," Dhaka skipper Nasir Hossain told The Daily Star.

The cricketer from Satkhira did score 71 in one of the two innings that he played in the Bangladesh Cricket League, a first-class competition, and scored 19 in the other game before the start of the BPL.

Soumya was lacklustre in the BCL fifty-over competition too. There, he managed to score 19, 0, and 11 since losing his place from the Tigers T20I side in the ICC T20 World Cup in Australia last year.

The stylish batter managed to score 14, 15, 0, and 20 in the T20 World Cup, where he batted at number three and also opened the innings on occasions.

Soumya's inclusion in the World Cup was more of a wild card entry despite having under-performed in New Zealand ahead of the mega event, scoring 23 and 4 in two games. Before that tour, Soumya was sent to West Indies with the A team to regain confidence but he managed to score 30 in a rain-curtailed fifty-over competition, following up with scores of six and 15.

It will be interesting to see whether Soumya overcomes from the lean patch, or else things look very difficult for him to make a comeback in the national team anytime soon.

## ‘Netflix curse’ rampant in Melbourne

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Tennis players can be particularly superstitious, so it does not bode well that there is one thing that links a whole bunch of withdrawals and upsets from this year's Australian Open.

In a continuation of what has famously been dubbed the 'Netflix curse' on social media, Taylor Fritz followed fellow 'Break Point' documentary co-stars Matteo Berrettini and Casper Ruud out of the 2023 Australian Open yesterday.

In the women's draw, Tunisian star Ons Jabeur, the second seed, dropped out in the second round as well after being featured in the same series, which follows emerging stars behind the scenes as the sport moves on from a golden era.

Among those featured in the series, which follows one player's journey per episode, are top 10 stars Casper Ruud, Taylor Fritz and Maria Sakkari as well as the likes of Matteo Berrettini, Paula Badosa, Nick Kyrgios and Thanasi Kokkinakis.

Three players -- Badosa, Kyrgios and fellow Aussie Ajla Tomljanovic -- picked up injuries in the lead-up to the Slam that resulted in them withdrawing their names.

Matteo Berrettini was the first casualty of those who played, losing an epic first-round tie against three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray.

Casper Ruud was the next to fall as he went out in four sets against American youngster Jenson Brooksby in the second round in the second-biggest upset of the tournament ranking-wise.

American Taylor Fritz had rubbished suggestions of a curse after beating Nikoloz Basilashvili in the first round, saying: "I noticed people pulling out of the tournament, but I didn't know it was a thing. I'm not going to lose my first-round match because I'm in the Netflix show."

He was right, but unfortunately, the world No. 9 became the latest chip to fall yesterday, going down against home hope Alexei Popyrin in front of an ecstatic Rod Laver Arena crowd in the second round.

## Dzeko inspires Inter to Super Cup win

AFP, Riyadh

Inter Milan retained the Italian Super Cup on Wednesday after Edin Dzeko inspired his team to a 3-0 victory over local rivals AC Milan.

The damage was done in the opening 21 minutes in Riyadh thanks to Dzeko, who played a defence-splitting pass for Federico Dimarco's 10th-minute opener and doubled Inter's lead 11 minutes later. Lautaro Martinez then added a brilliantly taken third in the 77th minute.

"We put in a great performance, the boys were brilliant from the first minute until the final whistle," Dzeko told Mediaset. "We won the Super Cup last season so we knew how great it is to win it... I'm really happy that we're bringing home another trophy, and I hope there will be more in the future."

Without the raucous soundtrack of a packed San Siro, Wednesday's match in Saudi Arabia was an unusual Milan derby but that won't stop Inter fans claiming local bragging rights as well as the Super Cup for the seventh time.

"We weren't up to the task in the first half, we made too many mistakes and from there it was difficult to turn the match around," Milan coach Stefano Pioli said.



## Former footballers urged to become referees

SPORTS REPORTER

Refereeing has long been an issue among the clubs in domestic football and there was no exception yesterday when the working sub-committees for BFF's professional league management committee sat with club representatives of the Bangladesh Premier League.

Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu, along with other club officials, were vocal over the performance of referees who are giving out varying decisions over apparently similar offenses. The club representatives requested the committee to appoint a separate referees' assessor for each match to find out the mistakes. The clubs also asked the committee to consider grooming match commissioners and referees' assessors from outside the pool of former referees.

Currently the match commissioner is performing the responsibilities of the referees' assessor apart from his own duties.

"The meeting was dominated by discussion over refereeing. We got some new proposals regarding the referees, and we are going to send the proposals to the referees' sub-committee and hope those will be implemented in future," BFF vice-president and sub-committee convenor



Ataur Rahman Bhuiyan Manik told media after the meeting.

"We have already appointed a referees' consultant from India and will try to resolve the issues regarding the referees. We are hoping the issues will be solved soon," he added.

In the last edition of the BPL, one particular referee conducted most of the matches of a big club while the game's governing local body refrained from appointing him in matches of another big club. Manik, however, claimed that they did not receive any such allegation.

The referees' committee has also kept a couple of good referees and assistant referees away from conducting the ongoing league matches, raising questions over the fairness of the committee.

"The issues were discussed at the meeting. Our referees' consultant noted those down and promised us to wipe out these types of issues. The consultant also suggested to increase the number of referees to a minimum of 500 from the existing 70," Manik said, adding that they would invite former footballers to become referees, match commissioners and the referees' assessors.



Fortune Barishal batter Iftikhar Ahmed smashed nine sixes and six fours, powering his way to a maiden T20 century against Rangpur Riders yesterday to become the third centurion in the ongoing edition. He forged a 192-run stand with Shakib Al Hasan, the third-highest partnership in terms of runs in BPL. Skipper Shakib also reached a landmark as he scored his highest-ever T20 score, smashing a 43-ball 89 to set the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram alight. The duo smashed 15 sixes between them, propelling Barishal to 238-4, the joint second-highest team total in BPL history with Chattogram Challengers.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED