

Felix laughs off ‘Netflix curse’

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime could see the funny side of a supposed Netflix curse that is plaguing competitors at the Australian Open after several players who featured in the docu-series ‘Break Point’ suffered early eliminations.

Casper Ruud, Ons Jabeur and Matteo Berrettini were among the players featured in Netflix series to exit early, while Nick Kyrgios, Paula Badosa and Ajla Tomljanovic were forced to pull out before it began.

Sixth seed Auger-Aliassime, who also featured in the show, secured a thrilling five-set comeback win over Slovakian Alex Molcan.

When asked about the ‘curse’ after his third-round win over Francisco Cerundolo on Friday, the 22-year-old told reporters: “My girlfriend showed me today. I wasn’t aware. I was aware that players were losing, I’d see players were losing, but it didn’t cross my mind until, yeah, she showed me the thing this morning. I thought it was funny.

“I don’t know. I don’t think it’s connected. Maybe the players that lost, maybe they do feel like it’s connected somehow. I don’t think they do. But, yeah, so funny how things work out sometimes.”

Taylor Fritz, another player who appeared in the docu-series, also played down talk of a curse earlier this week, before being eliminated in the second round.

Netflix jokingly addressed the notion of a curse on Twitter, retweeting an image of the players that are no longer in contention at the Australian Open with the caption: “To clarify: this is purely a coincidence..”

However, the curse reared its head again yesterday, this time claiming women’s sixth seed Maria Sakkari, who was shocked 7-6 (7/3), 1-6, 6-4 by an emotional world number 87 Zhu Lin of China.

Zhu had lost all seven of her previous encounters against top-10 players. “Is this real? Am I in a dream?” she sobbed. “Thank you, my team, and thank you for pushing me every day,” she said, looking to her player’s box.

In another stunning upset, though not Netflix-related, Sebastian Korda stunned Daniil Medvedev 7-6(7) 6-3 7-6(4) to evict the losing finalist of the last two years from the Australian Open in the third round yesterday.

The 29th seed, son of 1998 Australian Open champion Petr, prevailed in a thrilling tiebreak to win an 85-minute opening set and needed only one break to seal the second.

There was no wobble from women’s world No. 1 Iga Swiatek though, as crushed Spanish qualifier Cristina Bucsa 6-0, 6-1 in just 55 minutes to set up a showdown with Wimbledon title-holder Elena Rybakina for a place in the quarterfinals.



Bangladesh ODI skipper and Khulna Tigers opener Tamim Iqbal, despite a lacklustre start to the Bangladesh Premier League, appears to have found his touch. The southpaw followed up his unbeaten fifty in the previous game with another 44-run knock in his side’s seven-wicket win over hosts Chattogram Challengers on Friday. The left-hander also reached a milestone yesterday, becoming the first Bangladeshi to score 7,000 runs in T20s. He was five runs shy of the feat before the match and reached the milestone in style with a boundary. Playing in his 242nd T20 innings, the batter from Chattogram became the eighth-fastest to the feat. He also holds the record for most T20 hundreds by a Bangladeshi with four in total and boasts a career-best T20 score of 141, scored in the final of the 2019 BPL for Comilla Victorians.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Barishal make the most of Chattogram leg

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

The Chattogram phase of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) was expected to produce exciting games since the franchise-based 20-over tournament shifted to the port city from Dhaka, and the high-scoring venue of Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium kept its reputation intact.

Fortune Barishal, who made the most out of the Chattogram leg as they registered three wins on the trot since losing the first game of the BPL against Sylhet Strikers, were on course to conclude the phase on a high.

The Chattogram leg kicked off with a bang as Barishal posted 202 in the first game against Chattogram Challengers and eventually won it by 26 runs. And courtesy of their two in-form batters in skipper Shakib Al Hasan and Pakistani big hitter Iftekhar Ahmed, Barishal posted 200-plus totals twice in the Chattogram leg.

However, there were a few low-scoring games since the opening

day of the Chattogram leg. It seemed that the pitch had slowed down a bit as batters were seen to struggle in the middle.

It was Shakib once again led from the front in Barishal’s next game against Comilla Victorians, where Shakib’s unbeaten 45-ball 81 helped his side post 177 for six and eventually win by 12 runs.

The tournament then lit up when Barishal posted the second-highest total of BPL, 238, despite reeling on 46 for four inside six overs and, in the process, Iftekhar and Shakib broke a few records.

Iftekhar went on to smash his maiden T20 hundred off just 45 deliveries, striking nine maximums and six boundaries, while Shakib struck nine boundaries and six maximums to register his best T20 score of 89 runs from just 43 balls.

The pair went on to add a record 192-run stand for the fifth wicket, which was also the third-highest partnership in BPL for any wicket.

Even in the last game of the Chattogram leg, Shakib and Iftekhar combined again to steer the ship

for Barishal yesterday, who were struggling on 44 for three inside the Powerplay.

Although Shakib was bowled out after scoring 30 off 17 balls at the bowling of Muktar Ali, Iftekhar combined with experienced Mahmudullah Riyad to continue his fine run of form.

The right-hander hit two sixes and five fours and went on to smash his second fifty of the tournament off just 31 balls, and remained unbeaten on a 34-ball 56. Mahmudullah also remained unbeaten on 35 off 31 balls as the pair added an unbeaten 84-run stand for the sixth wicket to post 173 for five in 20 overs.

With 275 runs in six games, boasting an average of 91.66 and three fifties, Shakib is the leading run-scorer in the tournament. Iftekhar is also not far behind as he occupies the second position with 256 runs, featuring a strike-rate of 181.56.

Overall, Barishal have utilised the Chattgram leg to their full advantage, and they appear to b the team to beat from here on,

Little rest prior to Ireland series

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will have little time to take a breather after the England series in March this year, with the Ireland series likely to begin just four days afterwards.

Ireland’s first bilateral tour will feature three ODIs and three T20Is against the Tigers followed by a lone Test. The ODIs will be played in Sylhet, Shafiu Alam Chowdhury Nadel, BCB’s women’s wing chairman, confirmed to The Daily Star.

“Yes, the ODIs will be played at Sylhet and we will be prepared,” he said.

According to a BCB draft Itinerary, Bangladesh and Ireland will play the three ODIs on March 18, 20 and 23 respectively at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

The series will then move to Chattogram for the three-match T20 series slated for March 27, 29 and 31 respectively at Chattogram’s Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

The one and only Test is set to be played at Dhaka’s Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur from April 4.

Ireland are expected to arrive on March 12 as per the draft itinerary. The visitors have a warm-up fixture scheduled for March 15.

The final T20I against England will be played on March 14 in Dhaka, two days after Ireland’s expected arrival. The frantic run of games will mean that the Tigers’ T20I and ODI side will be on their toes this March during a busy home schedule.

Can Klopp halt Liverpool slump against Chelsea?

AFP, Liverpool

Jurgen Klopp admitted this week the time for change at Anfield is coming, but he is going nowhere as the revered German coach tries to turnaround an alarming dip in form.

A side that narrowly missed out on an unprecedented quadruple of trophies last season are now battling just to keep their campaign alive.

Liverpool face Chelsea at Anfield on Saturday with both clubs lingering in mid-table, 10 points adrift of the top four.

While the Blues are at the beginning of a new era with free-spending new owners and a manager still finding his feet at Stamford Bridge in Graham Potter, Klopp has faced questions over whether his cycle of success has come to an end.

Liverpool have often looked like a spent force this season. None more so than in a 3-0 thrashing at Brighton last weekend that Klopp described as the worst performance of his managerial career.

An injection of youth steadied the ship in a 1-0 win at Wolves in midweek and Klopp now must decide whether the likes of Stefan Bajcetic, Harvey Elliott and Fabio Carvalho are better bets going forward than seasoned veterans such as Jordan Henderson, Thiago Alcantara and Fabinho.

Klopp dismissed accusations this week that he has been “too loyal” to some of the under-performing stars that have previously been pivotal to his years of glory at Anfield.



But he must look enviously on at the enormous sums being handed to Potter to build a side by Chelsea’s new ownership.

Mykhailo Mudryk could make his debut for the Blues at Anfield after Chelsea met Shakhtar Donetsk’s 100 million euro (\$108 million, £88 million) asking price to beat Arsenal to the Ukrainian international.

That deal took Chelsea’s total transfer spend in the first season under Todd Boehly’s consortium to over £400 million (\$493 million).

By contrast, Liverpool’s American owners have been accused of sleeping at the wheel in failing to refresh an ageing midfield.

“I will be here for as long as I am wanted. If no one tells me to go, I will not go,” said Klopp, who signed a new contract to 2026 last year.

“So that means maybe there is a point where we have to change other stuff. We will see that, but that is something for the future. Like summer or whatever. Not now.”

There is hope for Liverpool in how Klopp turned around a similar slump in form just two years ago.

Six consecutive home league defeats while the gates of Anfield were shut to supporters left Liverpool’s chances making the top four looking forlorn.

But a strong end to the season saw them finish third to not only qualify for the Champions League but go onto reach the final the following season.

“The good thing about a long career – what I obviously had – is it’s not the first time that I’m in a situation like that,” added Klopp.

“I’m sorry to say that but it’s the truth. When things don’t go well, the players look different, the view on us is different all of a sudden, people start discussing – it’s completely normal.”

Just like two seasons ago, a long injury list has taken its toll.

Virgil van Dijk, Diogo Jota, Luis Diaz, Roberto Firmino and Darwin Nunez were among those missing at Brighton.

But Klopp must find the answers from what he has available with time running out to even get back in the race for the top four.

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