

Azarenka beats 'fears of failing'

AFP, Melbourne

Victoria Azarenka reached her first Australian Open semi-final since winning the title in 2013, then opened up Tuesday about overcoming "anxiety" and "fears of failing" on court.

The Belarusian, who won back-to-back Australian Opens in 2012 and 2013, knocked out third seed Jessica Pegula 6-4, 6-1 on Tuesday.

The 24th seed outlasted her American opponent in a marathon 64-minute first set before running away with the second to set up a last-four encounter against Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina at Melbourne Park.

Asked about her battles with nerves and anxiety, Azarenka detailed what she had been through in recent years and how it had held her back from winning another major.

"I don't think you recognise it right away. I think it builds up until you hit kind of a pretty bad spot where nothing kind of makes sense," she told reporters.

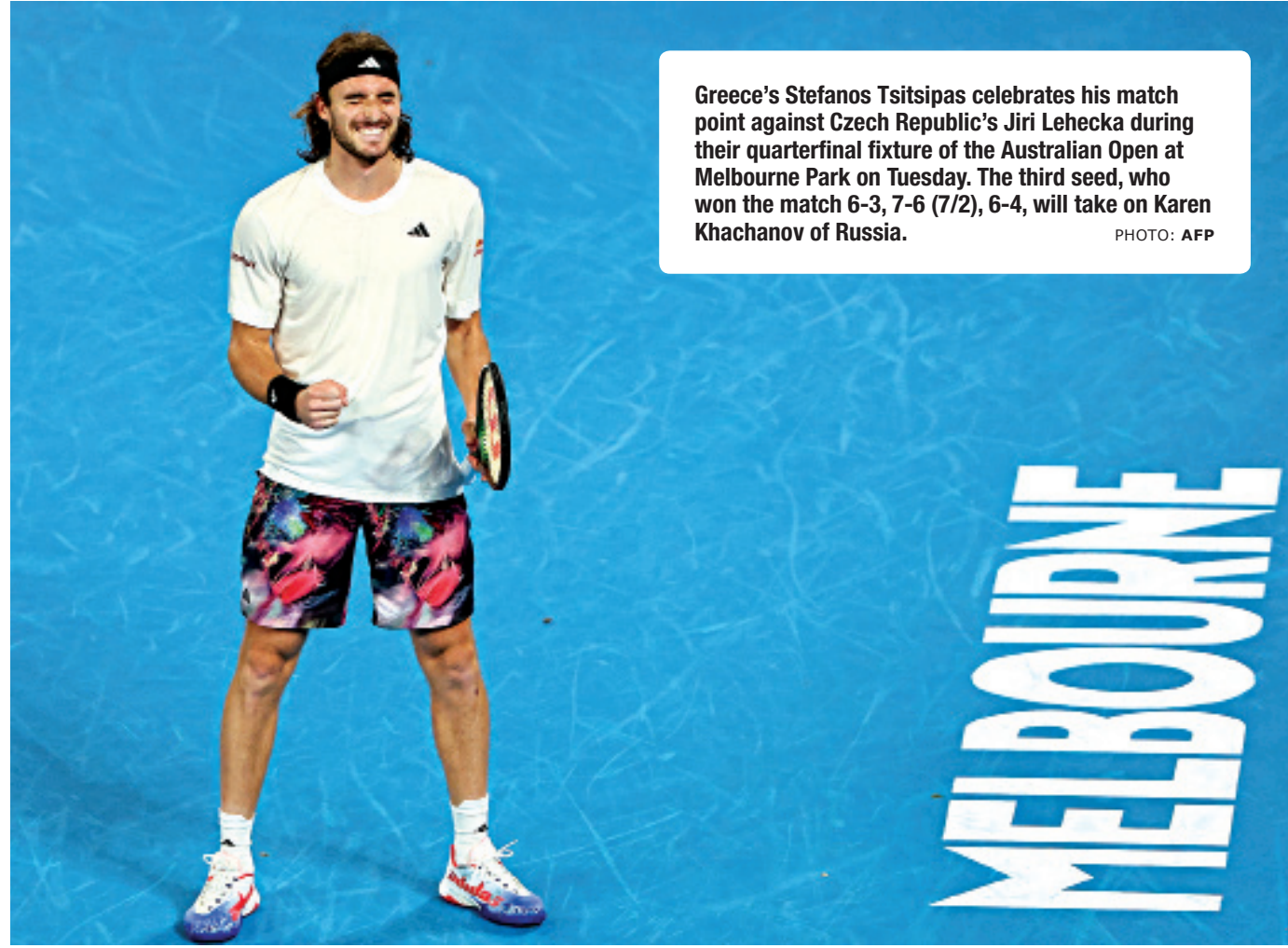
"You feel kind of lost. I was at the point where I couldn't find anything that I feel good about myself, not like even one sentence."

Asked what her biggest worries were, Azarenka gave a blunt answer.

"Fears of failing is a big one. To not be able to do what I want to do," she said. "I've had panic attacks before."

The Belarusian said she now has a process to cope when the nerves rear up, and she has cut a noticeably calmer figure at Melbourne Park this year.

"I kind of tried to take it more simple. Kind of working through it," said the 33-year-old Azarenka.



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas celebrates his match point against Czech Republic's Jiri Lehecka during their quarterfinal fixture of the Australian Open at Melbourne Park on Tuesday. The third seed, who won the match 6-3, 7-6 (7/2), 6-4, will take on Karen Khachanov of Russia. PHOTO: AFP

Haller on right track

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund coach Edin Terzic said on Tuesday the club was taking it "day by day" with striker Sebastian Haller's return to the starting line-up.

Haller came off the bench in Dortmund's thrilling 4-3 home victory over Augsburg on Sunday, his first competitive game since battling testicular cancer.

The 30-minute cameo was Haller's debut appearance for Dortmund and his first competitive match since May 2022.

Speaking ahead of Wednesday's league visit to Mainz, Terzic said Haller would "play an important role tomorrow" but was as yet unsure about a starting berth.

"(Haller feels) better from day to day, but whether it is enough for the starting XI, we will see," Terzic said.

Terzic confirmed English teenage midfielder Jude Bellingham would miss the game, having picked up a yellow card in the Augsburg clash.

Dortmund captain Marco Reus returned to training on Tuesday, but Terzic did not confirm whether the forward would return for Wednesday's game.



"I'm pretty happy that the process that I'm going through makes me feel confident about myself, happy about myself, and helps me to be more open, be more accepting, be compassionate.

"Compassionate" was a very hard word for me to understand."

Pegula was in her third Australian Open quarter-final and had never reached the semi-finals of a Slam in four previous attempts, failing to win a set in any of them.

It was a sorry statistic that was to be extended under the roof at Rod Laver Arena.

"Well, it hurts to beat her because I always want her to do well," said Azarenka, who is close friends with Pegula.

"Today I knew I have to play fast, I have to not give her opportunity to step in, I have to mix it up because if you don't there's nobody better than Jess, she just doesn't miss."

Pegula was immediately put under the pump by the relentless groundstrokes of her opponent.

Azarenka sped into an early 3-0 lead then forced Pegula to save six break points in an attritional 10-minute fourth game. She saved two set points on her serve to get to 3-5, two more in the next game, broke back to 4-5 but eventually succumbed after 64 relentlessly physical minutes.

Early breaks were exchanged in the second set before Azarenka made the decisive move. She broke for 3-1 and held her own service game, with an increasingly frustrated Pegula complaining to her player's box.

"I don't know what to do. The ball's not going anywhere," she said.

Serving for the match, Azarenka brought up two match points but only needed one as she powered through in 1hr 33min.

Shanto answers his critics

SPORTS REPORTER

He is probably the most criticised Bangladeshi cricketer on social media, but Najmul Hossain Shanto has seemingly managed to deal with the situation and transform himself into a consistent performer in recent times, reflecting the player's strong character.

The left hander, who has been in good touch in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League, helped Sylhet Strikers clinch a crucial two-run win over Fortune Barishal with a brilliant unbeaten fifty under tremendous pressure yesterday.

Shanto has shown great consistency since finishing as Bangladesh's leading run-getter in the ICC T20 World Cup last year in Australia after scoring 180 runs.

With two fifties from seven games, Shanto is now the third-highest run-getter in this edition of the BPL, having scored 281 runs at an average of 56.20. However, despite his performance on the field, he has often been criticised on social media, which, Shanto conceded, affected him mentally at times.

"I think the trolling on social media is more difficult for my family [to deal with] because my family doesn't take it like I do. They get hurt and feel bad when they go out. I get upset about it at times and I have felt bad to be honest," Shanto told the media yesterday.

The 24-year-old clarified that he welcomed constructive criticism, but not attacks on his character.

In the match, Sylhet were tottering on 15 for three after being rattled by Barishal's Pakistani pacer

Mohammad Wasim and it never looked they would go on to post 173 for five after 20 overs.

But Shanto remained unbeaten on a 66-ball 89 that featured eleven fours and a six, finding the perfect blend of defence and aggression.

After absorbing the early pressure with great patience, Shanto ensured he kept his composure and remained calm,

an accurate assessment the pitch helped him keep his composure.

"I think I had to spent some time at the crease initially because we lost three quick wickets so I took my time. But once I had the partnership with Moores, I think we got a platform to open up. I was always given the role to play till the 14-15th over, even in the national team in T20s. General people or



adding 81 runs for the fourth wicket with Tom Moores, who departed after scoring 40.

Shanto let loose after reaching his fifty off 48 balls, scoring his next 39 runs off just 18 deliveries as Sylhet added 49 runs in the last four overs, a total that proved enough to clinch a close win over an in-form Barishal side.

According to Shanto, quick adjustments in the middle and

even journalists might not know the role given to me, but I try to play for my team," he said.

Under inspirational skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza Sylhet have appeared unstoppable in the tournament so far and recorded their sixth game from seven matches. According to Shanto, Mashrafe gave him the license and freedom to play his natural game, which was reflected in his batting.

Young Tigresses face a stiff challenge for semis berth

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh face a steep task as they need to win big in their final Super Six encounter against the UAE in Potchefstroom today in order to make it to the semifinals of the ongoing ICC Women's Under-19 T20 World Cup.

The Disha Biswas-led side stormed into the Super Six with wins in all three group stage matches, including a stunning victory against tournament favourites Australia in the tournament opener.

However, a five-wicket loss in a low-scoring affair against hosts South Africa in their first Super Six game saw Bangladesh drop down to number four in the six-team Super Six Group 1 table.

India and Australia are currently top of the table with six points each – both with much superior net run rate than Bangladesh. India finished their Super Six stage with 2.844 net run rate while Australia ended the stage with a 2.210 net run rate.

According to the tournament by-laws, the teams to progress to the semifinals will be the ones with the greatest number of wins in their Super Six Group.

With both India and Australia winning one of their two Super Six games, a win against the UAE for Bangladesh, which is very much expected, will see the young Tigresses accumulate six points and also equal India and Australia in terms of most number of wins in the Super Six stage.

However, with the current net run rate of 0.268, Bangladesh will definitely need more than just a win today.

Ucchash sends Police packing

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russel exacted some revenge for their Bangladesh Premier League defeat at the hands of Bangladesh Police FC, handing them a single-goal defeat in the Federation Cup at the Bishreshtha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium yesterday.

Substitute Nihat Jaman Ucchash struck the all-important goal in the second half.

A maiden triumph in their first cup match saw Sheikh Russel progress to the quarterfinals from Group C. Yesterday's result also confirmed Abahani's quarterfinal berth while condemning Police FC, semifinalists of the Independence Cup, to elimination after two straight defeats.

Bangladesh Police rested all their foreign players, who played a key role in beating Sheikh Russel 2-1 in the BPL, but failed to replicate their win in the league as the Independence Cup runners-up dominated Police throughout.

Boosted by a full-strength side, Sheikh Russel got off to a fine start and enjoyed more possession. They created at least three chances to open their account but Mfon Sunday Udoh, Charles Didier and Timur Talipov squandered those opportunities in the first half.

After resumption, Sheikh Russel appeared to have broken the deadlock in the 51st minute when Mohammad Ibrahim drove home a rebound which ricocheted off the post from a Talipov free-kick, but the goal was ruled out for offside. Finally, Ucchash, who replaced Hemanta Vincent in the 68th minute, nodded home a Charles Didier free-kick from close range in the 77th minute.



Although there weren't many high-profile matches in Europe on Monday night, two special players achieved special feats in their respective matches. (L) French star Kylian Mbappe scored five goals -- the highest single-game haul in the history of PSG -- in a 7-0 rout of Pays de Cassel, a sixth-tier outfit, in a French Cup fixture. (R) Meanwhile, England captain Harry Kane became the joint-highest scorer for Tottenham, taking him level with Jimmy Greaves on 266 goals as his strike earned his side a 1-0 win over Fulham in a Premier League fixture. PHOTO: TWITTER/AFP