

'My intention is for 2024 to be my last year'

AFP, Manacor

Rafael Nadal on Thursday withdrew from the French Open because his hip injury has not healed and said he expects 2024 to be his final year in professional tennis.

"It's not a decision I'm taking, it's a decision my body is taking," said the 36-year-old Spanish player, who has played at the claycourt major every year since 2005 and won it 14 times.

Nadal said he was taking a few months off, meaning he will also definitely miss Wimbledon and most likely the US Open, before starting to play again. And he said next year would bring down the curtain on a career that has so far produced 22 Grand Slam singles titles.

"It's probably going to be my last year on the professional tour, I can't say this 100 percent because you never know what's going to happen," he told a news conference. "The injury I suffered in Australia has not healed as we hoped."

"Roland Garros became impossible. I will not be there after many years, with everything that (tournament) means to me."

Nadal said he will not set a date for his return, but said the Davis Cup in November could be a potential target.

The former World No. 1 has not played since the Australian Open in January where he picked up a

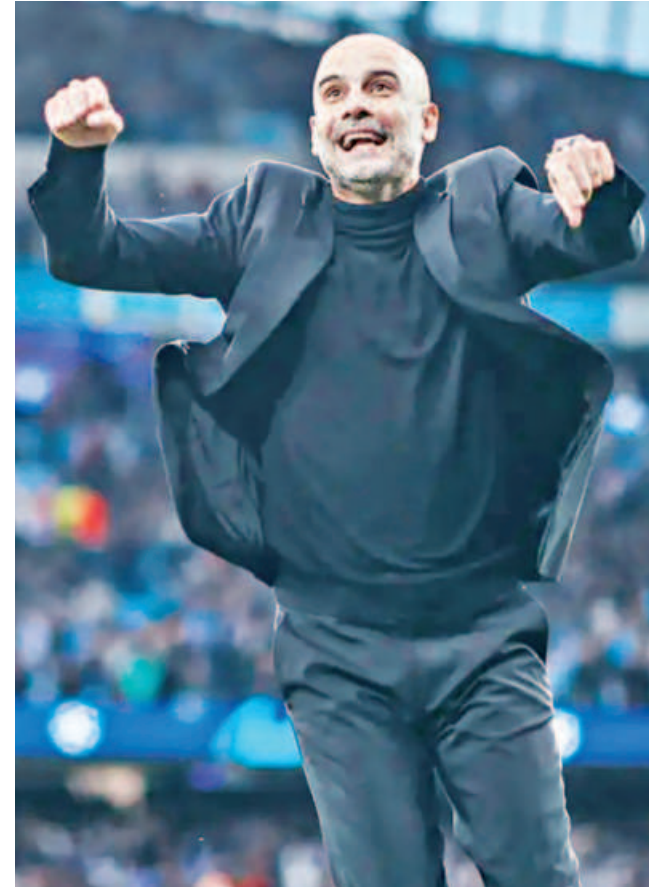


PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY/AFP

Bernardo Silva produced two sublime first-half goals as Manchester City completely outplayed Real Madrid during a 4-0 annihilation in the second leg of the Champions League semifinal at the Etihad on Wednesday. The 5-1 aggregate win over the defending champions was a cathartic victory for Pep Guardiola's men after they were beaten by Real in last season's semifinals.

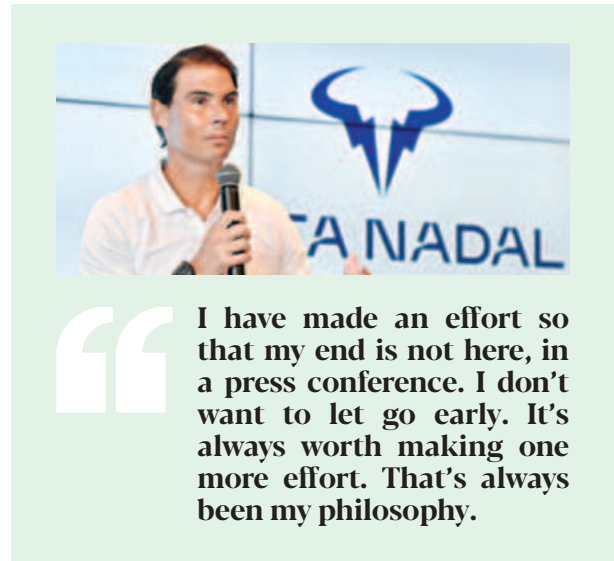
► Real Madrid were so thoroughly outplayed in the opening stages that it took until the 25th minute for the reigning champions to complete a pass in Manchester City's half last night. It eventually came from kick-off following Bernardo Silva's 23rd-minute opener. Madrid completed a total of 13 passes in the first 15 minutes.

► Pep Guardiola became the third manager to win 100 Champions League matches, after Carlo Ancelotti (107) and Alex Ferguson (102).

► Either Julian Alvarez or Lautaro Martínez will become only the 10th player in history to win the World Cup and the European Cup in the same season.

► Bernardo Silva is the third player to score two-plus goals in the semifinal match against Real Madrid, after Lionel Messi (2011) and Robert Lewandowski (2013).

► The second leg was Carlo Ancelotti's 191st game as manager in the UEFA Champions League, the outright most of any coach in the competition's history.



I have made an effort so that my end is not here, in a press conference. I don't want to let go early. It's always worth making one more effort. That's always been my philosophy.

Guardiola's 'belief' underpins Real thrashing

AGENCIES

The one thing that had changed from 12 months ago when Manchester City were at the receiving end of a typical Real Madrid comeback and were knocked out of the Champions League semifinal despite playing better football was the confidence of Pep Guardiola and his troops this time around in the same stage of the competition.

Following a 4-0 thrashing of Real Madrid in the semifinal second leg that ensured a resounding 5-1 win on aggregate, Guardiola was seen pointing towards Rio Ferdinand, who was covering the game as a pundit on BT Sport, and saying: "I told you so."

Ferdinand later revealed what Pep had texted him before the blockbuster clash that saw City exact revenge for the pain inflicted a year ago.

"He text me, Pep Guardiola text me before the game. He said: 'Believe me, we beat them two years ago. We'll beat them again. Believe,'" Ferdinand told BT Sport after the full-time whistle.

Last year in the semifinal second leg played at the Santiago Bernabeu, City conceded two late goals before losing in extra-time, leading to claims Guardiola's players lacked character.

The City boss believes this ruthless demolition of holders Real should silence any remaining doubters.

"We had what happened in our stomach for one year. I think today everything came out," he said.

"It was so painful last season,

when people said these players lacked character and in one year we've shown again how special this group of players is."

As evident from Guardiola's text to Ferdinand, the urge was more among the players of the blue half of Manchester.

"Madrid, what a team, but we wanted to win. What happened last

Only a hat-trick of stunning saves by Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois to deny Haaland his 53rd goal of the season saved the visitors from a historic humbling.

Bernardo Silva's first-half double was the least City deserved from a near flawless first-half.

"From the start we expected them to press and not let us play



season happened. We didn't have the luck.

"But today we had the feeling that the people were ready. The players made a lot of jokes, I didn't feel tension and I had the feeling we were ready to give this performance," Guardiola added.

For City, victory against Inter Milan in the final in Istanbul next month could complete a treble of Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League, matching local rivals Manchester United's historic achievement in 1998/99.

The collective brilliance of Guardiola's side shone through on a night when stars Erling Haaland and Kevin De Bruyne were kept scoreless.

our way out with the ball. They pushed a lot of players up to keep us in our box," Courtois, who had to deal with a flurry of attacks on the night, said.

"Initially we managed it well but we weren't able to play our game, create chances or cause them danger. That allowed them to be even more comfortable.

"Then in the 20th minute they scored and it became increasingly difficult for us to get into the game."

Even when City took their foot off the gas after the break, Manuel Akanji's deflected goal and Julian Alvarez's cool finish in stoppage time gave the scoreline a fair reflection.



Brazil's World Cup winning forward Ronaldo and FIFA president Gianni Infantino graced the 2026 World Cup official logo unveiling ceremony on Wednesday in Los Angeles. PHOTO: AFP

Familiar foes for Under-17 girls

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh were drawn against familiar foes in their group for the AFC U-17 Women's Asia Cup Round 2. The girls were pitted against Australia, Vietnam, and Philippines in Group B, while Group A consists of South Korea, Thailand, Iran, and India.

The top two teams from each group will qualify for the final round.

Bangladesh will attempt to reach the final round for the third successive time, having reached the eight-team final round in 2017 and 2019. Coach Golam Rabbani Choton was hopeful of repeating the feat.

Replying to a query, Choton said, "During the last edition of Championship, we drew against Australia in the final round after having beaten Vietnam and Philippines 2-0 and 10-0 in the Round 1 and Round 2 respectively. But since then everyone has improved. So, it won't be an easy task to repeat the feat but we have the capacity to fight against them."



Bangladesh Cricket Association players celebrate their 53-run win against Unisurv Disable Cricket Team of Bangladesh in the final of the Physically Challenged Cricket Tournament at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday. BCB president Nazmul Hassan was present on the occasion and had distributed prizes among participants after the game. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

All-round ability in focus for No. 7 spot

SPORTS REPORTER

The number seven spot in Bangladesh's batting order has come into focus ahead of the World Cup, with several players vying for the important position. The experienced Mahmudullah Riyad is waiting in the wings alongside younger stars like Afif Hossain, Yasir Ali and Mosaddek Hossain.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan talked to the media yesterday and opined that all-round abilities would provide significant value at that position in the batting order.

"If we play five bowlers, we have an opportunity to play an extra batter. Yasir is with the squad and Afif, Mahmudullah and Mosaddek, who are not currently with the squad, may enter at any time. If we play with five bowlers, who will we turn to in case one gets injured during a match? It's better if we find an all-rounder," the BCB president said.

Mahmudullah was dropped from the ODI side after the England series as the team management looked to gauge other players.

The top six in the batting order looks almost settled, but all-round capabilities may set Afif and Mosaddek apart.

"In terms of batting, Afif and Mahmudullah both have a case. Yasir hasn't performed notably since returning from injury. In terms of bowling, Afif and Mosaddek and Mahmudullah will have an edge. On the field, Afif is above them while Mosaddek can be a better prospect on the field than Riyad," the board president opined.

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