

Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuiyan made his debut for Argentine third-tier club Sol de Mayo against Germinal at the Estadio Sol de Mayo yesterday. Having lately received his clearance from the BFF, the midfielder donned the captain's armband for the Argentine club on his much-hyped debut appearance.



PHOTO: FACEBOOK

'FOLLOWING INSTINCTS' now key for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

Liton Das' illness at the last minute came as a huge blow for Bangladesh, who are set to begin their Asia Cup campaign against Sri Lanka on August 31 in Kandy.

Liton, suffering from a high fever, missed the Tigers' scheduled flight to Colombo yesterday.

Although Liton tested negative for dengue, the 28-year-old is not in the best of shapes to catch the flight today. As things stand, chances are that the opener could well miss Bangladesh's tournament opener against Sri Lanka.

This Asia Cup is being considered as an ideal platform for selectors to fine-tune the squad ahead of the ODI World Cup in India in October-November, but now the selectors face a serious time crunch in order to prepare back-up options to get by in the continental showpiece event.

It will be important for the selectors to find the perfect balance in the squad, and Liton's illness at such a moment surely hampers the plan of the selectors, who had to deal with Ebadot Hossain's injury just a few days ago by adding young pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib to the Asia Cup

squad.

Selector Habibur Bashar did seem concerned regarding the Liton issue but the former Bangladesh captain informed that the Tigers will need to cope with the situation and keep their confidence in the rest of the players in the Tigers' camp.

"Look, this is exactly the reason we have formed a bigger pool of players. But, obviously, it would have been great if Liton was fully fit but if he is unable to recover on time, we have to accept as it is what it is. But since it's a viral fever, we expect Liton to recover quickly. Let's see whether he is able to play the first game or not," Bashar told The Daily Star.

Bashar put faith in the younger players to step up.

"We are willing to have our faith in the likes of Tanzid Hasan Tamim, but, obviously, it would have been easier for him if he had someone like Liton alongside him. Since we are already without Tamim Iqbal, it won't be easy for the youngsters to cope immediately but they are capable," Bashar added.

The bilateral series against New Zealand after the Asia Cup will be the



final platform to prepare backup options in the squad. The Tigers, however, will have experienced opener Tamim back for the series.

Meanwhile, prominent coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim still remains optimistic and is ready to bet on the aggressive mentality of the young guns.

"I think this young lot of cricketers has got that strong backbone and the winning mentality which makes me optimistic. They play with a lot of aggression. If I talk about junior Tamim, Towhid Hridoy, or even Shamim Hossain, who is still not established in the team, they can go out and play their game," Fahim said.

Fahim also added: "I think the mindset is very important and someone like Tamim, he will not change his style of batting. Hridoy's approach also helped to bring the change in the mentality of the team and they are now willing to win matches for Bangladesh."

According to the mentor to many stalwarts of Bangladesh cricket, it will be important that the youngsters do not alter their style of play.

"No doubt the youngsters like Tanzid Tamim and others will face tougher challenges compared to what they faced in the past and it will be a different ball game. But it's important they are allowed to express themselves and yes there is not enough time for them. But at times, it's good not to have enough time and follow the instincts," he added.

Najibullah returns for Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Middle-order batter Najibullah Zadran returned to Afghanistan's 17-man squad on Sunday ahead of the Asia Cup after recovering from a knee injury.

The 30-year-old left-hander had to miss the three-match series against Pakistan which Afghanistan lost 3-0 in Colombo on Saturday.

Afghanistan will face Bangladesh in Lahore on September 3 before rounding off the group stage of the Asia Cup with a game against Sri Lanka at the same venue two days later.

Allrounder Azmatullah Omarzai has been ruled out of the competition due to a side strain while Gulbadin Naib and Karim Janat have been added to the team.

Squad: Hashmatullah Shahidi (captain), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ikram Alikhil, Ibrahim Zadran, Riaz Hassan, Rahmat Shah, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Nabi, Karim Janat, Gulbadin Naib, Rashid Khan, Abdul Rahman, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Mohammad Saleem Safi, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Sharafuddin Ashraf (travelling reserve).



Usyk retains world heavyweight titles

AFP, Wroclaw

Oleksandr Usyk of Ukraine retained his world heavyweight titles with a ninth-round knockout of Britain's Daniel Dubois in Wroclaw, Poland on Saturday.

Victory meant Usyk kept hold of the World Boxing Association, World Boxing Organisation and International Boxing Federation belts.

It also extended his perfect professional record to 21 wins from 21 bouts.

Dubois, however, claimed he had been "cheated" out of victory after referee Luis Pabon ruled he had struck Usyk with a low blow in the fifth round, which led to a lengthy delay.

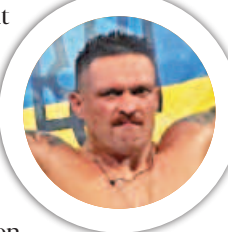
But former World Boxing Council super-middleweight champion Richie Woodhall, commentating at ringside, described his fellow Briton's punch as a "borderline shot".

Usyk recovered to drop Dubois down on one knee in the eighth round after landing with several punches to the head.

Dubois just beat the count before the bell sounded for the end of the round.

But the fight was all over in the next, with Usyk sending Dubois onto the canvas.

This time the challenger was unable to get back to his feet before the referee counted to 10. "I'm grateful for my country and the Ukrainian army. Thank you so much," said Usyk.



Djokovic, Alcaraz poised for US Open collision

AFP, NEW YORK

Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz are on a US Open collision course as the final Grand Slam tournament of season gets under way on Monday with American teenager Coco Gauff chasing a breakthrough first major title.

A little more than six weeks after world number one Alcaraz defeated Djokovic in an enthralling finale to the Wimbledon championships, the two men could meet again at Flushing Meadows if the seedings go to play over the next fortnight.

Djokovic and Alcaraz whetted the world's appetite for another blockbuster showdown at the Cincinnati Open last week, with 23-time Grand Slam singles winner Djokovic downing the 20-year-old Spaniard in a four-hour classic.

Djokovic, 36, is making a long-awaited return to the US Open this year after his refusal to be vaccinated against Covid-19 meant he was unable to gain entry to the United States.

In Djokovic's absence at last year's tournament, Alcaraz announced his arrival on the world stage with a brilliant run to his first US Open crown.

Second seed Djokovic, who opens

his campaign on the Arthur Ashe main arena against France's Alexandre Muller on Monday, says Alcaraz's relentless, swashbuckling style is reminiscent of Rafael Nadal, the 22-time Grand Slam singles champion who misses this year's US Open due to injury.

"Each point is a hustle. Each point is a battle. You feel like you're not going to get maybe in total five free points in the entire match," Djokovic said of Alcaraz.

"You've got to basically earn every single point, every single shot, regardless of the conditions."

Alcaraz, who faces Germany's Dominik Koepfer in the first round on Tuesday, said he is flattered by the Nadal comparison.

"It's great that he knows that every time he's going to play against me, it reminds him playing against Rafa or against the best ones because that means we are in a good path," he said.

Djokovic will reclaim the world number one ranking with a victory over Muller on Monday, regardless of how Alcaraz performs in the tournament.

The Spaniard, meanwhile, must navigate a tricky route to the final that could include 2021 US Open champion Daniil Medvedev and Italy's Jannik Sinner.



In the women's tournament meanwhile, all eyes will be on the in-form 19-year-old Gauff, who is chasing a first Grand Slam title that would make her only the fifth Black woman in the open era to win the US Open. After struggling in the early part of the season, Gauff felt she had hit rock bottom after exiting in the first round at Wimbledon. But the addition of veteran guru Brad Gilbert to her coaching team has sparked a transformation in her form and fortunes. She won the Washington Open in early August, reached the quarter-finals of the Canadian Open in Montreal and then scored a superb victory in the Cincinnati Open - her first WTA 1000 title. The win in Cincinnati included a morale-boosting first ever victory over world number one Iga Swiatek, the defending US Open champion. Gauff, who could face Swiatek in the quarter-finals in New York, says her late season resurgence is the result of a shift in mindset.

Lamichhane heads to Asia Cup

AFP, Kathmandu

The rape trial of Nepal's cricket star Sandeep Lamichhane was postponed Sunday, allowing him to join teammates in Pakistan for the upcoming Asia Cup, his lawyer Saroj Ghimire said.

Spin bowler Lamichhane, 23, once the poster boy for the rise of cricket in Nepal, is accused of raping a 17-year-old girl in a Kathmandu hotel room in August last year. Lamichhane denies all charges.

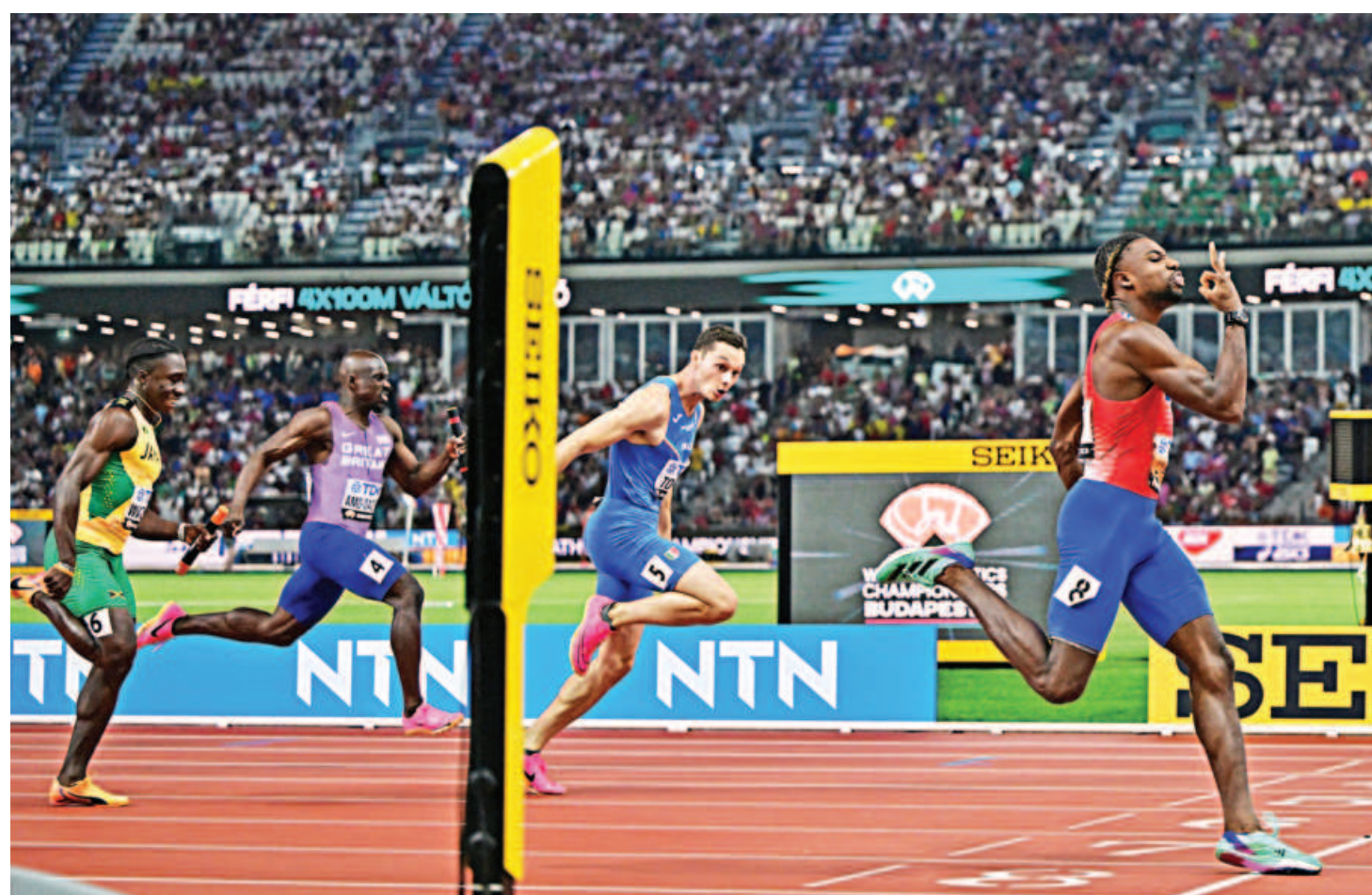
The latest hearing on Sunday was deferred until September 7. "Sandeep will now fly to Pakistan to play," Ghimire told AFP.

The six-nation ODI Asia Cup opens Wednesday in Multan, Pakistan, where the hosts will clash with debutants Nepal.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Manchester City striker Erling Haaland finally got off the mark with a well-taken close-range header following a cross from Jack Grealish during a dramatic 2-1 victory over Sheffield United yesterday. And as he ran off to celebrate, a fan jumped from the stands onto the pitch. It was, however, Rodri who scored a late winner to secure City's third win of the season.



Noah Lyles gestures with three fingers as he races to the finish line ahead of the others to anchor USA to a 4x100m relay gold, thereby securing three gold medals in the World Athletics Championship just as he had predicted, at the National Athletics Centre in Budapest on Saturday night. Olympic champions Italy, with Tokyo 100m gold medalist Marcell Jacobs on the second leg, claimed silver while Jamaica took bronze.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'We want Messi!'

AGENCIES

More than what was happening out there on the field at the Red Bull Arena on Sunday, fans were concerned about just one thing - at least till the 60th minute of the game between Inter Miami and hosts New York Red Bulls.

Chants of "We want Messi!" swept across the ground in the fifth, seventh, and 10th minutes with rising intensity, then several more times in the first half. Even after Diego Gomez's well-taken goal in the 36th minute, which might have tempted Inter Miami coach Tata Martino to sit on the lead and give his star the rest his 36-year-old body most likely needs, the calls for the World Cup hero persisted.

Messi, who started for Inter Miami in eight games at a stretch and scored 10 times to guide the MLS side to the final of the US Open Cup and also clinch the Leagues Cup, was deservedly given some rest.

Coach Martino defended his decision to start his 36-year-old compatriot on the bench despite the hopes of the crowd. "I understand the desire of the people who want him to play, this will happen everywhere we go," he said.

"But as the coach, I cannot be guided by those fans' desires. My job is to make sure Leo takes care of himself," he said.

Despite Messi being in the US for over

a couple of months, even his Inter Miami teammates anticipated the fan craze that comes with the Argentine. "When we found out that he wouldn't be starting, I expected there was going to be a couple angry fans," Miami right-back DeAndre Yedlin said after Saturday's game against the New York Red Bulls. "But if I was a kid or a fan and I came,

I would want to see the greatest to ever play the game, as well, so I can't blame them."

When Messi rose from his seat on the Miami bench two minutes into the second half, the crowd went into a frenzy as he made his way to the corner to begin warming up. The roars only intensified when he entered the match in the 60th minute along with his longtime Barcelona teammate Sergio Busquets.

Messi had limited involvement but made his mark on his regular season debut with an 89th-minute goal.

Jordi Alba acrobatically hooked the ball into the box to Messi who twisted and turned then slipped a sublime pass

with the outside of his foot to Benjamin Cremaschi whose low first-time cross was tapped in by the seven-times Ballon d'Or winner.

Messi has now scored 11 goals in nine appearances in all competitions since joining Inter Miami.

