

DJOKOVIC

not yet ready to pass the torch

MILESTONES ACHIEVED

Ties Margaret Court for the most Grand Slams ever.

The only Open Era player to have won 24 Grand Slam singles titles.

Becomes the US Open's oldest men's singles champion in the Open Era.

The first player to win three Grand Slam titles in a single year four times.

REUTERS, New York

Novak Djokovic has no intention of passing the torch to the next generation just yet, the 36-year-old Serb proving age is just a number by becoming the oldest man in the Open Era to hoist the US Open trophy on Sunday.

With Roger Federer retired and the oft-injured Rafa Nadal ready to call it quits after next season, the days of the 'Big Three' are long gone but Djokovic - the final member of that triumvirate - reminded fans in New York that he is far from finished.

His 6-3, 7-6(5), 6-3 victory over Russian Daniil Medvedev brought him not only a fourth Flushing Meadows title but a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam crown, and Djokovic wants more.

"Knowing that I play at such a high level still, ... I don't want to leave this sport if I'm still at the top," said Djokovic.

Djokovic swatted side some

DJOKOVIC'S CAREER HONOURS

Total ATP titles: 96

Grand Slams: 24

Australian Open (10) -- 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2023

French Open (3) -- 2016, 2021, 2023

Wimbledon (7) -- 2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022

US Open (4) -- 2011, 2015, 2018, 2023

ATP Tour Finals (6) -- 2008, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2022

Davis Cup (1) -- 2010

of the United States' brightest young stars en route to the final. In Medvedev, however, he faced an older foe, and one who gave him the chance to exorcise his demons - two years earlier the Russian had ended his bid for a calendar Grand Slam on the very same court.

Djokovic did not squander that opportunity, smothering the 27-year-old in a series of exhausting rallies.

As he basked in the glory of his win, Djokovic had no words of comfort for those hoping to replace him.

"It's not my interest and neither business to really review what everyone talks about or thinks, whether there is a passing of the torch or new gen, next gen, future gen, whatever you want to call it, happening or not happening in the sport," he said.

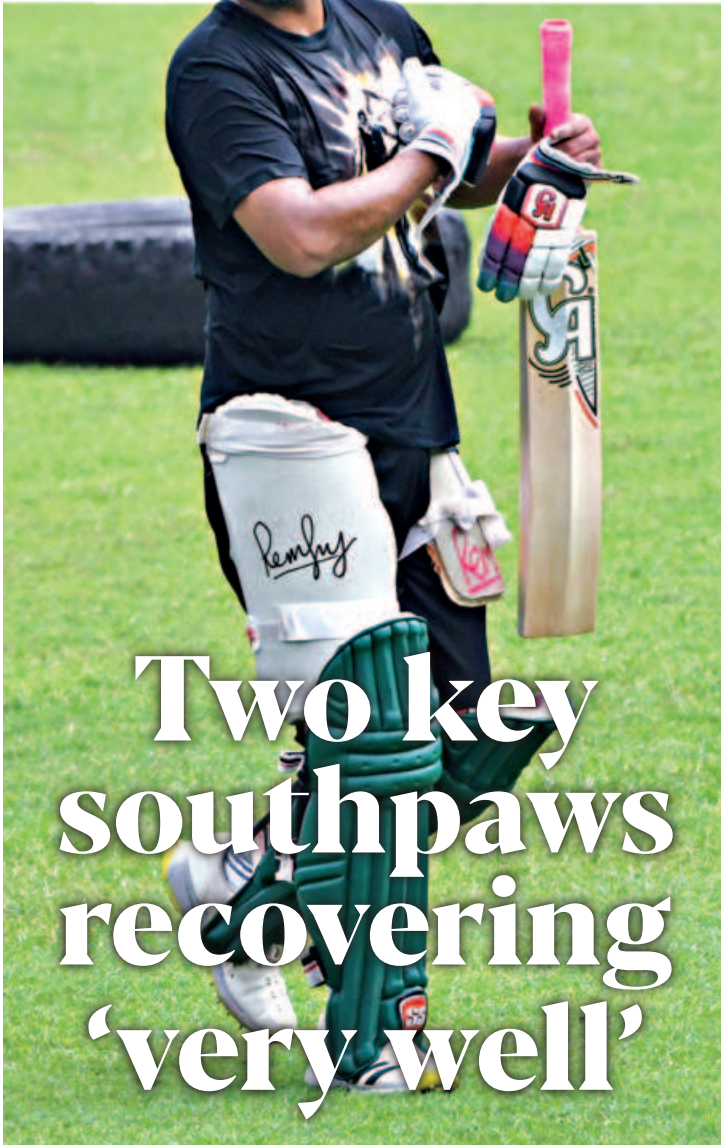


"When you tell him he can't do something, it's even worse. Then he's going to show you that he can do it. No excuses. He always tries to find a way to win, to fight, even when he's not feeling well, injured, not injured."

GORAN IVANISEVIC
former Wimbledon champion and Djokovic's coach since 2019.

"Well done again Novak, I'm sure 24 feels as great as one, especially when you have fought so hard to get where you are and to stay there against a growing tide of challengers... Take another bow, champ!"

ROD LAVER
11-time Grand Slam champion



Altitude and Messi concerns for Argentina

AGENCIES

Argentina will have the chance to start their World Cup qualifying campaign with back-to-back victories when they travel to La Paz for Tuesday's clash with Bolivia but the World champions will have to deal with the challenging altitude and the prospect of playing the game without their captain Lionel Messi.

The Albiceleste take on Bolivia at the Hernando Siles Stadium, a football ground that will pose a different kind of challenge for the Argentinian squad with its altitude sitting at a whopping 11,932 feet above sea level.

With players needing to be at their utmost fitness to deal with the altitude challenge in Bolivia, Argentina's challenge will be compounded if Lionel Scaloni decides to rest star forward Messi, whose late freekick saw the three-time World Champions eke out a 1-0 victory against Ecuador in their first qualifying game on Friday.

The 36-year-old Messi travelled with the squad but is not a certain starter at the game because

of fatigue. Messi had asked to be substituted in their last game.

Scaloni said that even though Messi is fit for the game against Bolivia, a decision about him starting or even playing the game will be taken today.

"Leo trained separately, but he is fit. There are two days left, and we will make a decision on whether or not he will play the day before or on Tuesday. Messi and Cuti Romero are fit, and we'll see if he [Messi] plays from the start or from the bench or even if he doesn't play," Scaloni said in his pre-match press conference in Argentina before leaving for Bolivia.

While the world champions are hoping to follow up Thursday's victory over Ecuador, the hosts will have to pick themselves up from a heavy defeat to Brazil.

Bolivia's qualifying campaign began with a forgettable outing against five-time World Cup winners Brazil, who cruised to a 5-1 victory in Bellem.

Having lost their last five qualifiers, Bolivia coach La Verde will go into the daunting fixture against the world champions as massive underdogs.



SPORTS REPORTER

The reality exposed in the ongoing Asia Cup for Bangladesh has certainly compelled Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the team management to only hope that their best players will be available for the upcoming World Cup in October.

On the batting front, the return of seasoned opener Tamim Iqbal and in-form Najmul Hossain Shanto will give the Tigers' misfiring batting lineup a much-needed balance for the showpiece event in India.

BCB chief physician Debashis Chowdhury, however, provided encouraging fitness updates of the two aforementioned players yesterday.

Tamim mentioned three days ago that he was hopeful of featuring in the three-match ODI home series against New Zealand, starting from September 21.

"Tamim is doing very well right at this moment. He has no complaints regarding back pain. He is facing all sorts of bowling at the nets, apart from performing fielding and running drills. He will now start batting in central wickets without nets," informed Debashis.

The ongoing Asia Cup saw the 'Tigers' top-order, devoid of Tamim and Shanto, lack back-up plans.

Thus, nothing would fare better for Bangladesh than to see Tamim rediscover his mojo in the New Zealand series. For the greater interest of the team, it is also important for the former Bangladesh ODI captain to be comfortable in the dressing room when he reunites with his teammates since withdrawing his retirement.

In Shanto's case, the team management needs to be cautious about his return to the New Zealand series since a hamstring injury forced the batter's exit from the Asia Cup. Shanto scored 193 runs in two matches and his absence was badly felt during Bangladesh's two Super Four matches.

Debashis also expressed his satisfaction over Shanto's rehabilitation progress.

"Shanto's is now running with 60 percent intensity. It's very difficult to give any time frame about his return, but he will be okay very soon."

According to sources within the team management, Shanto could be allowed to skip the entire New Zealand series to keep him fresh for the World Cup, or he might play one match to get back into rhythm.

Debashis, however, cautioned that a successive hamstring injury can prove to be fatal for Shanto since "it will take more time for him to get back to full fitness".

"Look, he might have played the [Asia Cup] tournament with this injury, but he had to return to avoid the risk. But he is now doing very well."

Voeller focuses on getting Germany 'back on track'

AFP, Berlin



Nine months before Euro 2024 kicks off in Germany, the hosts have turned to Rudi Voeller to get the team back on track before Tuesday's friendly against France after coach Hansi Flick was sacked.

Flick became the first Germany coach in history to be relieved of his duties after his side slumped to a 4-1 loss to Japan in Wolfsburg on Saturday, the latest in a run of poor results which included a group-stage exit at the World Cup in Qatar last year.

The German Football Association (DFB) have turned to 1990 World Cup winner Voeller to take over on an interim basis for the friendly against 2022 World Cup finalists France in Dortmund.

"The most urgent task is to hire a national coach who will quickly get the team back on track and prepare us for the big European Championships next year," Voeller said.

Diniz's upbeat Brazil face Peru

AGENCIES

An upbeat Brazil will look to follow up Friday's dominant victory over Bolivia when they travel to Lima for Wednesday's clash with Peru in World Cup qualifying.

Bruno Guimaraes, who bossed the midfield and assisted one in Brazil's whopping 5-1 victory against Bolivia in Bellem, hailed the impact of new Brazil manager Fernando Diniz.

"He [Diniz] has instilled a lot of belief in us," Guimaraes told reporters on Sunday. "He sees football differently and is a great motivator. I think there's still a lot to do because we've only had four training sessions with him but the game against Bolivia showed that we are on the right track."

Brazil's star forward Neymar will

look to add more to his tally, after surpassing legend Pele to become the country's all-time top-scorer with 79 goals. Having missed a penalty in the first half against Bolivia, Neymar scored a brace to overtake Pele, who has 77 goals for Brazil.

Meanwhile, Peru, the hosts, will be hoping to pull off a surprise win after they shared the spoils with Paraguay in their opening game.

While they may have won just one of their last five internationals, Peru will be pleased with the fact they have now kept three clean sheets in their last four matches.

Another point on Tuesday would certainly be regarded as a success, but the hosts will be dreaming of claiming their first competitive win over Brazil since June 2016.



'Fresh' Sri Lanka take on India

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will come in "fresh" for an Asia Cup Super Four clash against an Indian team, who will be playing for a third consecutive day.

India's match against arch-rivals Pakistan spilt over into a reserve day on Monday after only 24.1 overs, with the 50-over contest acting as a prelude to their big battle in the upcoming ODI World Cup.

Dasun Shanaka's Sri Lanka, who won the last edition of the Asia Cup -- played in the T20 format -- began their Super Four with a win over Bangladesh on Saturday. Another victory would improve their chances of making the final on September 17.

"With a team like India, you never know, but obviously they are playing three days in a row," Sri Lanka assistant coach Naveed Nawaz told reporters. "We have got a bit of a break since the last game, so the boys are fresh for tomorrow. That can be good for us."

Sri Lanka remain unbeaten in the tournament after winning both their group matches.

"If we plan to play good cricket, if we execute our plans and go into the best version of ourselves in the middle against India -- obviously the result will be favourable for us," Nawaz said.

Only India have won more Asia Cup titles than Sri Lanka, who have often spoiled the India-Pakistan party in the final.

In the last edition, they beat Pakistan to lift the title in Dubai.

"Our boys are very resilient when it comes to handling pressure," said Nawaz, pointing out that Sri Lanka have been without some of their first-choice players in the past two editions of the tournament.

Families announce NZ WC squad

AGENCIES

New Zealand announced their World Cup squad in the most refreshing manner yesterday.

In a social media video posted by New Zealand Cricket (NZC), respective family members of the chosen 15 players called out the names.

The video featured the wife and kids of Kane Williamson, followed by the sons of Trent Boult, wives of Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Glenn Phillips, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, daughters of Daryl Mitchell and Tim Southee, Lockie Ferguson's fiancé, Jimmy Neesham's grandmother, Will Young's mother and Rachin Ravindra's parents.

Head coach Gary Stead said it is unclear whether Williamson, still suffering from injury, will be ready in time for World Cup opener.

Tom Latham was named deputy while Trent Boult -- who returned to the Black Caps recently -- leads a seasoned pace battery, comprising Tim Southee, Lockie Ferguson, and Matt Henry.