



Tennis world bids adieu to 'CHAMP' NADAL

Rafael Nadal retired as a player on Tuesday as Spain were eliminated in the Davis Cup finals, ending a career that yielded 22 Grand Slam titles. Unsurprisingly, the exit of the superstar drew a host of messages from Tennis greats across the globe, a snippet of which are as follows:

“Congratulations on a career that most won't dare to dream of. Your legacy will never die. Wow to see your career from the beginning to today was an honour champ! Long live Rafa!”
-- Serena Williams, American tennis great

“Thanks to you I have become a professional tennis player. It has been a blessing to be able to live your career as a child for whom you were an idol and then as a teammate! The best possible ambassador who leaves an eternal legacy.”
-- Nadal's Davis Cup teammate Carlos Alcaraz

“Your legacy will endure as one of the greatest to ever grace the game. Thank you for the countless unforgettable moments and for setting a standard of excellence that will inspire generations to come.”
-- Australian tennis great Rod Laver

“What an absolute icon of sport, period! There will never be another one like Rafa! Role model for so many kids all around the world!”
-- German Boris Becker, a six-time Grand Slam champion

India not ruling out Gill playing first Aus Test

REUTERS

India will give Shubman Gill every chance to prove his fitness to start the opening Test against Australia at Perth Stadium with the batter showing improvement after fracturing his left thumb, bowling coach Morne Morkel said on Wednesday.

Gill, 25, sustained the injury while fielding at slip last week as India were gearing up for the match, which starts on Friday, with squad sessions instead of a tour game against a local side.

“Shubman is improving every day. Obviously he picked up a nasty blow in that intra-squad warm-up game. I think with him it's going to be a day-to-day process,” Morkel told reporters.

“Fingers crossed for that improvement. We'll wait to take a call on him up until the morning of the Test match.”

With skipper Rohit Sharma set to miss the match following the birth of his second child, Gill's absence could heap more pressure on India's less experienced batters on fiery Australian pitches but Morkel backed them to rise to the occasion.

“It's going to be great learning for these young guys, who can front up against a quality Test bowling attack,” Morkel said ahead of the five-match series. “But in saying that there's good leadership within the group that can help and settle the nerves with that. As a group, we're all excited for the challenge.”

Liton's opportunity to recapture form

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Liton Das goes into the West Indies tour, which gets underway in earnest with the first Test match beginning on November 22 in Antigua, as one of only two senior batters in the squad alongside Mominul Haque.

Injuries to Mushfiqur Rahim and regular skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and the absence of Shakib Al Hasan have put the Bangladesh team in a difficult spot, especially in a country where batters have struggled the most on recent tours.

Without such senior batters, Bangladesh drafted in Shahadat Hossain Dipu and Mahidul Islam Ankon, and the responsibility falls on Mominul and Liton, alongside a young batting line-up, to negotiate West Indies' pace attack.

However, Liton's form vaporised since his half-century and a century against Pakistan in Rawalpindi in August. In the last six innings since the ton, Liton managed double figures only twice, scoring 45 runs. His record in West Indies also stands against him, averaging just over 21 in eight innings with one fifty.

Suffering from a fever, Liton was absent during the Afghanistan ODIs but he will be a key all-format player this series. His 32-ball 61 in Lauderhill in 2018 seized the T20I series in Bangladesh's favour and he will like to recapture his batting form with the Tests since it was his prolific scoring during 2021-2022 season, averaging over 46 in Tests during that period, which saw him become an integral part of the batting unit in all formats.



More importantly, spending time at the crease helped him get his technique tuned. Before the series, Liton's Comilla Victorians coach Mohammad Salahuddin joined the Tigers' coaching staff. Liton was seen keenly discussing things with the seasoned coach.

Rishabh Pant's coach Devender Sharma had talked about the key facets of a coach while talking to The Daily Star during the India series earlier this year.

Liton has blown hot and cold recently, his inconsistency a burning issue in Bangladesh's national team context. Devender said that at Sonnet Cricket Club -- where Pant began his trade -- they make assessment of which player would serve the national team through technique at first but then work begins on mentality, a

key aspect Liton may need to focus on. “Cricket is just about planning. We work on mental strength of the children. You have to motivate them that they are the best and you will win the match for the team,” Devender had told The Daily Star.

“Players can become mentally down after one bad performance, so you have to talk about their game with them. You have to encourage them to learn about the challenges they face. It's key in modern cricket. I put my effort to make sure Rishabh Pant plays for the country and the results are in front of you. Liton is a very interesting player and I think he will fix those issues,” the coach had added.

With Salahuddin now in the fold, looking at batting side of things, Liton's challenge is also an opportunity to find his groove.

Archrivals in same Fed Cup group

SPORTS REPORTER

Country's footballing rivals Abahani and Mohammedan were pitted in the same group of the 36th Federation Cup, which also unveiled a format styled after the Indian Premier League, at a draw ceremony at the BFF House in Motijheel yesterday.

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings will play against promoted Dhaka Wanderers in the opening match at Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla on December 23 while the final match will take place on May 2, 2025. Bashundhara Kings Arena in Dhaka and Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh are the two other venues of the 10-team event.

It is the third time in last five seasons that the two popular outfits have been placed in the same group. However, the Sky Blues will be playing without foreign players this season, which will get underway on Friday with the newly-introduced Challenge Cup between Bashundhara Kings and Mohammedan.

Mohammedan manager Intiaz Ahmed Nakib believes Abahani will get out of the five-team group despite not having any foreign player.

“It is always interesting to be in the same group with Abahani, who I think will play well with local players. I hope they will take foreign players in the mid-term window,” Nakib said, adding that they have a strong squad with a couple of foreign players alongside some proven local campaigners who led the team to runners-up position in last edition.

GROUP A: Bashundhara Kings, Bangladesh Police, Fortis FC, Brothers Union, Dhaka Wanderers Club

GROUP B: Mohammedan, Abahani, Chittagong Abahani, Rahmatganj, Fakirerpool YMC

Abahani manager Satyjit Das Rupu also believes that Abahani are capable of performing well in the Federation Cup, a tournament they won 14 times against Mohammedan's 11.

“Abahani always play for titles. This time there will be no exception. We believe we have a team to get out the group stage and play in the final,” said Rupu.

The league committee also brought change to the tournament format -- designing it like the IPL -- with 10 teams split into two groups and playing round robin matches. The top two teams from each group will advance to the qualification round instead of semifinals. The two group champions will square off and the winners will advance to the final while losers will play against the winners between two group runners-up for a place in the final.



Air Marshal Hasan Mahmood Khan, Bangladesh Air Force Chief and Bangladesh Hockey Federation president, yesterday greets players at a jersey unveiling event of Bangladesh teams ahead of the AHF Youth Asia Cup. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Contrasting ends to 2024 for Argentina, Brazil

STAR SPORTS DESK

Archrivals Argentina and Brazil ended this year in contrasting fashion, with the Albiceleste managing a 1-0 win over Peru while the Selecao got held to a 1-1 draw by Uruguay in their respective South American World Cup qualifiers on Tuesday.

Lautaro Martinez was on target for Argentina, scoring 10 minutes after the break in front of the home crowd in Buenos Aires. Martinez, who is now tied with legend Diego Maradona as the country's fifth all-time scorer with 32 goals, fired home a half-volley into the top-right corner after availing a fine cross from skipper Lionel Messi.



joint-top with USA's Landon Donovan for most international assists (58).

The win also helped Argentina finish the year as the top-ranked side in FIFA rankings and lead the CONMEBOL standings with 25 points, five clear of second-placed Uruguay.

Brazil, meanwhile, have dropped a spot down to fifth in the World Cup qualifiers -- with 18 points -- after a Gerson striker helped the five-time world champions draw at home with Uruguay, who got the lead through a Federico Valverde strike.

“We had a good performance in these last two matches, we could have had better luck, one more goal would have given us a chance to finish this year in second place [in qualifiers],” said Brazil coach Dorival Junior after the game.

Tigresses' World Cup path hinges on Ireland series

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh will brace for a difficult journey to secure direct qualification for next year's ICC Women's ODI World Cup, with the upcoming Ireland series marking their first major hurdle.

The Tigresses are currently placed ninth out of 10 teams in the ICC Women's Championship (IWC) 2022-2025 cycle, with 13 points from 18 games.

To secure direct qualification for the eight-team tournament as one of the top six sides in IWC, Bangladesh must win all three home matches against Ireland, starting on November 27 in Mirpur, and defeat West Indies in at least two of their final three fixtures next month in the Caribbean.

According to the qualification scenario, India have already gained direct entry by virtue of being hosts, while Australia, England, and South Africa have already booked their place in the marquee event.

The seventh and eighth spots will be decided through a global qualifier featuring six teams -- the bottom four from the IWC and two additional teams based on rankings.

In 2022, Bangladesh women made their ODI World Cup debut as one of the three qualifying teams, alongside Pakistan



and West Indies, based on rankings when the qualifiers were cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“As a team, we must earn all six points from this Ireland series,” experienced campaigner Jahanara Alam, who recently returned to the ODI fold after 18 months, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Tigresses, however, face a tough task against an in-form Ireland, who recently beat England and Sri Lanka, while the hosts are winless this year and last played a 50-over match in March.

Vice-captain Nahida Akter acknowledged the series would be “challenging”, noting Ireland's strong recent performances. Bangladesh, however, have won three

WODIs against Ireland, losing only once.

“We have the determination and hunger to beat the Irish side in the series. We have a series against the West Indies next, but right now we are focusing on this series and planning how to win it,” Nahida told The Daily Star.

“I think in all the series we've played on home soil, we have done really well. I think we have the confidence to win this series as well. It will be our first series against Ireland in Mirpur. We have a good idea about the Mirpur wicket.”

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Cricket Board's women's wing head, Habibul Bashar, claimed the team had taken decent preparation ahead of the Irish assignment.

“We have been preparing for the series for a long time. Since November 1, our girls have been taking part in a preparation camp. I think they have improved a lot,” Bashar said yesterday, during the title sponsor declaration ceremony of the series in Mirpur.

“There will be some nerves and pressure to perform well; it's quite normal. Everyone wants to do well and play in the World Cup. As we will be playing on home soil [against Ireland], I hope we will do well,” added the former Bangladesh captain.