



'I'll keep striving to win more Slams'

Novak Djokovic's injury retirement from his Australian Open semifinal against Alexander Zverev after a gruelling first set on Friday, and his subsequent comments, have left question marks about how the last chapter of his great career might unfold. "It's not like I'm worrying approaching every Grand Slam now whether I'm going to get injured or not, but statistics are against me in a way in the last couple of years. So it is true that, you know, getting injured quite a bit last few years. But I'll keep going. I'll keep striving to win more Slams. And as long as I feel that I want to put up with all of this, I'll be around," Djokovic said after the semifinal.



Sinner, Zverev book title clash IN MELBOURNE

Top-ranked Jannik Sinner overcame cramp in the third set of the semifinal to blow past Ben Shelton 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-2 in Melbourne on Friday to set up a meeting with second seed Alexander Zverev in Sunday's final. Meanwhile, Zverev made it through to the final after Novak Djokovic retired injured from the other semifinal against the German following a 7-6 (7/5) loss in the very first set.

- ⌚ Jannik Sinner is on the cusp of a first successful Grand Slam title defence after winning his maiden major crown in Melbourne last year.
- ⌚ Sinner's victory made the 23-year-old the youngest man to make multiple finals at the Australian Open since Jim Courier in 1992-93 and kept alive his dream of becoming the first Italian to lift three Grand Slam singles trophies.
- ⌚ Meanwhile, Sunday's final is set to be Alexander Zverev's first Australian Open final.
- ⌚ Zverev has been a Grand Slam runner-up twice before, at last year's French Open and the 2020 US Open, but has never lifted one of the big four majors.

Mohammedan suffer first BPL defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

A high-flying Mohammedan SC were stopped in their tracks as they tasted their first defeat in the Bangladesh Premier League, going down 1-0 against newly-promoted Fakirpool Young Men's Club at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

Sardor Jokhono struck the decisive goal in the 66th minute to end Mohammedan's eight-match winning streak. The defeat, however, did not disturb Mohammedan's position at the top of the table as they still hold a five-point lead over second-placed Abahani, who have played a match less.

Mohammedan SC were expected to dominate their way to an inevitable victory against Fakirpool but they were stunned by the minnows, who climbed to seventh with three wins in nine matches.

Mohammedan, expectedly, dominated proceedings from the outset but they could not expose the backline of Fakirpool and were stunned when they conceded from a counterattack. After a few exchanges on the left flank, Uzbek midfielder Jakhonov played a smart one-two with Akobir Turaev before letting loose a powerful shot past Mohammedan goalkeeper Sujan Hossain.

Mohammedan applied constant pressure in search of an equaliser and created several chances but Fakirpool's substitute goalkeeper Saju Ahmed stood tall to thwart at least four chances to pull off the season's biggest upset.

At the Shaheed Barkat Stadium in Gazipur, five-time champions Bashundhara Kings returned to winning ways with a 5-0 win against promoted side Dhaka Wanderers Club. Jonathan Fernandes Reis, Mohammad Sohel Rana, Tapu Barman, Rakibul Hasan and Miguel Ferreira netted one goal apiece in the one-way contest.

Bangladesh Police FC came from behind to clinch a 2-1 win over Rahmatganj MFS at the Rofique Uddin Bhuian Stadium in Mymensingh, thanks to an Al Amin brace.

A fifth win in nine matches took Kings to third on the standings, with 17 points, while Police leapfrogged to sixth with 10 points. Rahmatganj slipped to fourth with 15 points from nine matches.

Sabalenka, Keys promise thunderous slugfest

AFP, Melbourne

The irresistible force of Aryna Sabalenka meets the unbreakable spirit of Madison Keys in an Australian Open women's singles final on Saturday that promises to be a thunderous slugfest.

Defending champion Sabalenka was hailed by beaten semifinalist Paula Badosa as being so good it was "like she's playing a PlayStation" after dishing out a merciless straight sets budgeon to her good friend.

The never-say-die American Keys, who will turn 30 next month, saved eight break points and a match point in a nerve-shredding final set against Iga Swiatek that went all the way to a 10-point tiebreak.

"Definitely some big-hitting. I think that is going to happen," the powerful 19th seed Keys predicted of the final. "Not a lot of long points."

Keys and Sabalenka have met five times previously, with the Belarusian winning four of them, most recently on the Beijing hard courts last year.

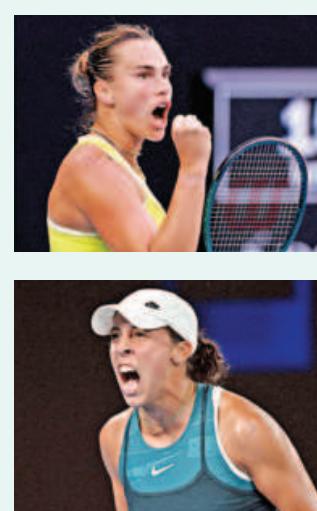
Keys' sole win came on grass in Berlin in 2021.

"She's playing incredible tennis," said Sabalenka.

"She's a very aggressive player, serving well, moving well. She's in a great shape."

"It's going to be a great battle. We had a lot of great battles in the past."

Sabalenka will remain world number one after Swiatek's defeat while Keys is guaranteed to be back



in the top 10 for the first time since 2019 in the new rankings.

Both players are in rampant form and on 11-match win streaks after winning their respective warm-up events.

Sabalenka, the modern day queen of Melbourne Park, has won 20 straight matches on the famous blue hard courts.

If she makes it 21 it will see her complete a treble not witnessed this century.

The last person to achieve the three-peat in Melbourne was Martina Hingis in 1999 and only four other women have done it --

⌚ Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka is aiming to become the first woman since Martina Hingis from 1997-99 to win the Australian Open title three times in a row.

⌚ Victory on Saturday would also see Sabalenka become the sixth woman to win three straight Australian Open titles, joining Margaret Court, Evonne Goolagong Cawley, Steffi Graf, Monica Seles, and Hingis.

⌚ Sabalenka won four of the five clashes against Madison Keys.

⌚ This is set to be Sabalenka's fifth Slam final while Keys will be playing in her second.

Margaret Court, Evonne Goolagong, Steffi Graf and Monica Seles.

Three in a row is a rare achievement at any Slam and has only been done this century on three occasions.

At Roland Garros Justine Henin completed the treble in 2007 and Iga Swiatek emulated it last year.

Serena Williams won 23 Grand Slam singles titles but only managed a hattrick once, at the US Open from 2012-14.

Sabalenka will be in her fifth Slam final, Keys in only her second, having lost the 2017 US Open final 6-3, 6-0 to Sloane Stephens.

Kings owner admits Emon's non-payment

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Players' non payment issue in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is refusing to die down on Friday Chittagong Kings admitted that they are yet to pay anything to Bangladesh cricketer Parvez Hossain Emon due to "personal reasons".

Earlier, Chittagong's Sri Lankan pacer Binura Fernando had alleged that he had not been paid the promised amount by the franchise, a claim the team officials denied. But when asked about Emon's issue, franchise owner Sameer Quader Chowdhury admitted not paying Emon a dime without any hesitation.

"I didn't pay Emon because of personal reasons. My money doesn't grow on trees, I need some self-satisfaction. That's it... There are a few personal and franchise issues. I will make my decision after discussing it with the player and the board," Sameer told The Daily Star yesterday.

Sameer, however, did not divulge the exact reason for the non-payment.

"Of course, I will complete the payment, but before that I need to be satisfied," he added.

The Daily Star tried to contact Emon but the player could not be reached.

It was learnt that Emon did not travel with the team from Chattogram to Dhaka yesterday for their remaining matches.

A source who spoke with Emon told The Daily Star that the opener has verbally informed the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) about his non payment and is expected to lodge an official complaint. BPL governing council's member secretary Nazmul Abedeen Fahim was contacted for a comment on the development but also could not be reached.

Till he gets any kind of assurance, Emon plans to practice individually in preparation for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy, scheduled to be held in Pakistan and the UAE from February 19.

Emon has underwhelmed in this BPL so far, making only 103 runs in seven matches. He also lost his place in the XI in the previous two games.

Meanwhile, Sameer claimed that his team has already cleared 25 to 50 percent payment of other local players and at least 50 percent of the overseas players which included Binura.

"By the time Binura had played one match, he had received 50 percent payment... Now, he has received 70 percent payment and he is not even in Bangladesh," he concluded.



Pakistan captain Shan Masood slogsweeps one during the team's practice session at the Multan Cricket Stadium ahead of the second Test against the West Indies, which gets underway today. Having beaten the visitors by 127 runs in the first Test, the hosts will be banking on their spin-heavy attack to make it a clean sweep.

PHOTO: PCB

Top-four battle intensifies as City host Chelsea

AGENCIES

A top-four finish is on the forefront of the agenda as reigning Premier League champions Manchester City host Chelsea on Saturday.

The two teams lock horns for the first time since the opening day of the season in August last year when the Citizens secured a 2-0 win at Stamford Bridge and since then have had a topsy-turvy ride, with both their title aspirations being quashed.

Wednesday's dramatic 4-2 defeat to PSG left City on the brink of an early UEFA Champions League exit, with their worst campaign under Pep Guardiola threatening to reach a new nadir.

In the Premier League, however, City have turned something of a corner lately, taking 10 points from their last four games to boost their hopes of a top-four



finish and have a chance to move into the top-four spots with a win as they are two points off Chelsea (40).

After a run of just one win in nine league games from the start of November (D2 L6), City have now won three of their last four (D1). They have scored 14 goals in this run, more than they had in their previous 11 league games (D3).

Guardiola has moved to strengthen his backline -- a part of his side that is

largely responsible for their plight this season -- with the January acquisitions of Abdulkadir Khusanov and Vitor Reis, both of whom could be involved in the matchday squad on Saturday with fellow defender Ruben Dias a doubt. Also eligible is Omar Marmoush, who arrived from Eintracht Frankfurt for an estimated £63million on Thursday.

Prior to leaving Eintracht, Marmoush recorded 15 goals and nine assists in 17 Bundesliga games in 2024-25, and 20 goals and 13 assists in 26 games in all competitions.

Alongside fellow Egyptian Mohamed Salah, Marmoush is one of just two players from Europe's top five leagues in double figures for goals and assists in all competitions this term.

Enzo Maresca's hopes of overseeing a title charge are surely over after Chelsea went five league games without a victory either side of New Year, though they put a halt to their slump by beating Wolves 3-1 on Monday.

Chelsea have failed to win any of their last 10 meetings with the Citizens across all competitions (D2 L8) since beating Guardiola's side 1-0 in the 2021 Champions League final, three weeks after they claimed their last Premier League win over Man City (2-1) at the Etihad in the same season.

Guardiola has moved to strengthen his backline -- a part of his side that is



Khulna Tigers skipper Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Abu Hider Rony, and Afif Hossain, and Pakistani all-rounder Mohammad Nawaz take a selfie after returning to Dhaka on Friday following the end of the Chattogram phase of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). The final phase of BPL will begin in Mirpur tomorrow, but Khulna will resume their campaign a day later when they take on defending champions Fortune Barishal at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

