

Keys: From teenage prodigy to Grand Slam champion



Madison Keys arrived in Australia under the radar and with the modest goal of seeing how well she could perform with her 30th birthday looming next month. The resilient American now has the answer after defeating two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka in three sets in Saturday's Australian Open final to clinch her first major title. Now ranked 14, Keys will return to the top 10 for the first time since 2019 next week. She made her first semi-final at Melbourne Park in 2015 as a prodigious 19-year-old to showcase her potential.

Keys was born in Rock Island, Illinois and started playing tennis at the age of four.

Having made her professional debut in 2009 aged 14, Keys won her first title on the ITF circuit in 2010 and added two more in 2012.

In 2013, she broke into the top 100 before finishing the year ranked as world number 39.

Her first WTA title came at 2014 Eastbourne International.

The following year she reached the quarter-finals at Wimbledon as well as the semis of the Australian Open, where she lost to eventual champion Serena Williams.

She missed out on a bronze medal at the Rio Olympics, losing to Czech Petra Kvitová in three sets.

She reached her first Grand Slam final at the 2017 U.S. Open, falling to compatriot Sloane Stephens in straight sets.

The biggest title of her career came at the 2019 Cincinnati Open after she defeated twice major winner Svetlana Kuznetsova in the final.

She started the 2025 season on a high by clinching her ninth WTA Tour singles title at the Adelaide International, which she also won in 2022.

After reaching the Australian Open semis in 2015 and 2022, Keys reached the 2025 final with a victory over five-times Grand Slam champion Swiatek.

29-year-old Keys became the second-oldest woman to claim her first Australian Open singles title in the Open era after China's Li Na, who was 31 when she triumphed at Melbourne Park in 2014.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN MEN'S FINAL

Sinner wary of 'physical beast' Zverev

AFP, MELBOURNE

Jannik Sinner is wary of "physical beast" Alexander Zverev as the Italian bids to join an elite group with back-to-back Australian Open titles in a final that pits the world's top two players.

The ice-cool runaway world number one goes into Sunday's Melbourne Park decider on a 20-match win streak, dropping just two sets in his six matches

"No," he replied when asked if he had become unbeatable after his run in Melbourne, on the back of winning eight titles last year, including the US Open and season-ending ATP Finals.

"I know that I put a lot of work in. I know I just try to stay calm, never taking things for granted. Just well-prepared, to be honest.

"Every day is a big challenge. Every day you have a different opponent," he



The ice-cool runaway world number one goes into Sunday's Melbourne Park decider on a 20-match win streak, dropping just two sets in his six matches so far.

Sinner is favourite to secure a third Grand Slam crown and second at the Australian Open after his maiden triumph over Daniil Medvedev last year. Only three other men have managed the feat on Rod Laver Arena since the turn of the century – Andre Agassi, Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic.

But the 23-year-old, who suffered from cramp in his semi-final with Ben Shelton, offered Germany's Zverev a glimmer of hope ahead of their showdown.



added. "Sometimes you have some issues and then trying to understand that whatever works best for that day and trying to go for it. Everyone makes mistakes. Nobody's perfect."

Sinner's coach Darren Cahill said it was no surprise for him to see his young charge back in the final, but they were wary of the threat posed by Zverev's overarching desire to finally win a Slam. "He's a physical beast," Cahill said. "He's put those years of work into his body. He is a great athlete and has a

great five-set record. "They're both physically prepared. They're both incredible athletes," he added.

"It's the number one and two in the world so it's the perfect final as far as the rankings are concerned."

That will prick the ears of world number two Zverev, long seen as the sport's most unfulfilled talent, without a Grand Slam title after a decade of trying. The German has bulked up in recent months and is also on a red-hot streak, winning 16 of his past 17 matches dating back to his title run at November's Paris Masters.

He holds a 4-2 record over the Italian, but the 27-year-old knows all too well that's he's fallen short when it mattered most on tennis's biggest stages.

Zverev blew a two-set advantage against Dominic Thiem in the 2020 US Open final and gave up a 2-1 lead in the French Open title match against Carlos Alcaraz last year.

Barishal's Nabi eyeing top-two finish

SPORTS REPORTER

Fortune Barishal's Afghan star Mohammad Nabi is upbeat about their remaining four games, aiming to finish in the top two to boost their chances of reaching the finals of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

The league phase of the BPL has arrived at the business end, with the tournament back in Dhaka following the Sylhet and Chattogram phases.

"Yeah, still have four games left here to focus on and put our team in the top two. All four matches here and also playoffs are in Dhaka, and we are already used to this condition as well," Nabi said yesterday, on the eve of his side's game against Sylhet Strikers.

"Everyone is trying to put his team in the top two to get that extra chance. If they lose, they have an extra chance to play one more game to put their team in the final," he added.

Barishal's only two losses in this BPL have come against table-toppers Rangpur Riders. With 12 points and the fewest matches played, they aim to refine their combinations in the run-



PHOTO: STAR

up to the playoffs. In their last outing against Khulna Tigers, Jahandad Khan and Rishad Hossain turned up with performances.

"Yeah, every team have a different combination. Some players are going, some players are coming, and we have to find the right combination for those four games left in the league stage and put a good combination for the playoffs," Nabi said when asked if the team were catching momentum at the right time.

He also praised the improved quality of pitches this season.

"I think this time there is more rest for the pitches. They make proper pitches for every single game, and that's why they put three venues in this BPL. Most of the time they have three venues, but this time they're more focused on the pitches, and they put better pitches this year... That's why most of the games are high-scoring games, and chases have been well," he added.

Meanwhile, Rangpur Riders, who suffered their only defeat against Durbar Rajshahi during the Chattogram phase, will face the same opponents in Sunday's evening fixture.

BCB suspends activities of constitution reform committee

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) arrived at a decision regarding the much-talked-about constitution reform committee, suspending its activities following the 17th meeting of the BCB board of directors yesterday.

A five-member committee, led by director Najmul Abedeen Fahim, was set to present proposed reforms to the board. However, before they could present their suggestions, Dhaka clubs decided to boycott the first division league, influencing the decision.

Following the meeting, BCB directors Iftekhar Ahmed Mithu and Mahub Anam addressed the media in a press briefing, during which the standing committees of the board were also announced.

"They [reform committee] did not present anything to the board or the NSC [National Sports Council]. The board of directors felt that the process [of the committee] should be a bit more transparent because the constitution is something where there can't be any secrecy," Mahub told reporters yesterday.



"It's public information that will be public. We felt their activities need to be suspended and the discussions that are coming should be stopped. In the same way, the changes in the committees and their expansion are necessary because it's important for the stakeholders to be involved, which the board felt. In light of those, these decisions have been taken. We will announce the committee's scope of work before any changes and expansion decisions are executed," he added.

The BPL's payment issue was also a major topic at the meeting. News circulated that players from Durbar Rajshahi and Chittagong Kings were still facing payment-related complications. As a result, BCB has decided to meet with its governing council and franchise owners in the next 48 hours to resolve the players' payment issue.

"The things that have to be maintained under franchise contracts, BCB will do everything to ensure that the franchise owners abide by them. In the next 48 hours, those activities will continue," Mahub informed further.

The board had also been functioning without standing committees. Twenty-one standing committee chairmen were announced after the board meeting. The BCB discussed the two remaining vacant committee positions and will decide how to fulfill those positions.

Windies lead after Noman hattrick in Multan

AGENCIES

The West Indies gained a slender nine-run lead over Pakistan Saturday as spinners dominated the opening day of the second Test in Multan, with Noman Ali achieving a hat trick for the home side. Jomel Warrican took 4-43 and

Gudakesh Motie 3-49 as Pakistan were bowled out for 154 at the close, replying to the West Indian first innings total of 163. Left-arm Noman picked up a hattrick during his 6-41 as the visitors were bowled out at the stroke of lunch in 41.1 overs, having won the toss and batted.

Noman became the first Pakistan spinner to pick up a hattrick in Tests.

Sixteen wickets fell to spinners -- the most on the opening day of a Test. The previous record was 14 between England and South Africa at Leeds in 1907.

Motie (55), Roach (25) and Warrican (36) -- West Indies' bottom three batters - became the highest scorers in an innings, a feat they had achieved in the first Test against Pakistan in the ongoing series.



Tigresses miss out on direct WC entry

SPORTS REPORTER

With the eight-wicket defeat against West Indies in the third ODI yesterday, Bangladesh women's cricket team missed out on direct qualification for the upcoming ICC Women's ODI World Cup and will now have to compete in a qualifying tournament for the right to compete in the marquee event set to begin in India in August this year.

The defeat in St Kitts cost Bangladesh the three-match series, which the hosts took 2-1, and also kept them from overtaking New Zealand in the ICC Women's Championship table, who finished sixth to secure the sixth and final direct spot for the World Cup.

Both New Zealand and Bangladesh finished with 21 points from 24 matches in the Championship, however, the White Ferns won nine games, one more than the Tigresses, to finish one rung higher.

The other five teams that have qualified are: Australia (39), India (37), England (32), South Africa (25) and Sri Lanka (25).

Nigar Sultana and Co will now have to compete against the three bottom-placed teams from the 10-team Women's Championship – West Indies (18), Pakistan (17), Ireland (eight) – and the next two highest ranked teams – Scotland and Thailand – in a qualifying tournament from which two teams will get to compete in the World Cup. ICC is yet to announce the itinerary for the event.

In yesterday's match, Bangladesh went from 94-3 to 118 all out, courtesy of a four-wicket haul from off-spinner Karishma Ramharack. The hosts then cruised to 122-2 in just 27.3 overs.

The two sides will next face off in a three-match T20I series starting on January 27.

Abahani close gap on Mohammedan

SPORTS REPORTER

Title aspirants Abahani spoiled a good opportunity to close the gap further with leaders Mohammedan SC after playing out a goalless draw against Brothers Union in their last match in the first phase of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at Bir Shrestha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

On Friday, Mohammedan SC lost 1-0 to Fakirerpool Young Men's Club, which ended their eight-match winning streak this season. It also presented Abahani a chance to reduce the gap with the league leaders from five points to two if they could beat Brothers yesterday.

However, the Sky Blue outfits left the field relieved that they did not end up dropping all three points against Brothers, who gave them a run for their money in a neck-on-neck contest.

With their second draw of the season, Abahani, who are playing without any foreign players, are now four points shy of leaders Mohammedan SC's tally of 24.

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings have benefitted from both

Mohammedan and Abahani dropping points in the ninth round, as they are now trailing the league leaders by seven points at the end of the first phase. The second phase of the league will start mid-February.

In Munshiganj, Brothers, a team packed with out of favour national team players, dominated Abahani most of the first half barring the opening 10 minutes.

Abahani, who scored only 11 goals in their previous eight matches, could have taken the lead in the eighth minute had the woodwork not denied Mohammad Ibrahim's header.

Both sides were equally matched in the second half but neither could break the deadlock. Brothers nearly snatched a victory in the stoppage time but Abahani goalkeeper Mitul Marma made a couple of crucial saves in the final few minutes to ensure the draw. At Bashundhara Kings arena, Fortis FC handed a 1-0 defeat to Chittagong Abahani with Ghanaian Essa Jallow netting the all-important goal in the 34th minute.

This was Fortis' second win in nine matches, which helped them leapfrog to sixth position from eighth while Chittagong Abahani sat at the bottom with only one win and eight defeats in nine matches.

