

Champion Sinner 'LIKE PRIME NOVAK'

Alexander Zverev said that Jannik Sinner is as good as Novak Djokovic at his peak and on "a different universe" after the German was well beaten in Sunday's Australian Open final. Top-ranked Italian Sinner retained his Melbourne crown with a ruthless 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 victory over the second-seeded Zverev. "He's very, very similar to Novak when he was at his best. They barely miss, they make you think like you have to overhit all the time to have a chance in a rally against them. It's very, very difficult to win a point from the back of the court against them, against Novak and him," Zverev said, drawing favourable comparisons between Sinner and 24-time major champion Djokovic.

Jannik Sinner became just the eighth player in the Open era (since 1968) to win the first three Grand Slam men's singles finals he has contested.

Sinner is the first Italian male or female player to win three singles Grand Slam titles in tennis history, surpassing Nicola Pietrangeli (two).

Sinner is also the fourth player in the last 35 years not to face a single break point in a Grand Slam final. Only Pete

Sampras (Wimbledon 1995), Federer (Wimbledon 2003) and Rafael Nadal (US Open 2017) have managed that since 1990.

The Italian also became the first player to claim 10 consecutive straight-set wins over ATP top-10 opponents since they were first published in 1973.

Sinner has equalled Bjorn Borg and Jimmy Connors for the most wins in their first 50 matches as world No 1 in the ATP Rankings (47).



BPL hits new nadir

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

BCB to take legal action against Durbar Rajshahi

We have to take legal action by any means now. This money has to be paid. Otherwise, the reputation of the BPL will be gone. The violation of the contractual obligation in matters such as cheque dishonour and other issues will be addressed through cases. There will be criminal cases as per the merit of these breaches. The board has given them enough chances. But they have crossed all the limits.

Iftekhar Rahman Mithu,
BCB's media committee chairman

The controversy-ridden ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) reached a new low yesterday after Durbar Rajshahi failed to field any foreign players – an unforeseen occurrence in the tournament history – for their match against Rangpur Riders in Mirpur.

The Rajshahi team arrived at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday at around 05:00 pm, about 90 minutes before the start of the match, without any of their foreign players.

Their absence casted serious doubts on whether the match would go ahead as according to the tournament bylaws, a franchise must include a minimum of two overseas players in its playing XI.

During the toss, Rajshahi skipper Taskin Ahmed revealed that they are fielding a team of only local players due to the non-availability of their foreign recruits.

Later, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) through a press release confirmed that the BPL Technical Committee upon a request from Rajshahi has granted a special permission to the franchise to field 11 local players against Rangpur.

After a review of the request [from Durbar Rajshahi] and in accordance with the provisions outlined in Clause 1.2.8 of the Match Playing Conditions of BPL 2024-25, the Technical Committee has granted approval for Durbar Rajshahi to field a team consisting of only Bangladeshi players for this match," the press release said.

The provisions outlined in clause 1.2.8 gives the Technical Committee the authority to take the final decision if a team is unable to field at least two foreign players for any 'valid reason'.

In that case, the integrity of the technical



committee can be put into question as the reason Rajshahi could not comply with the rule is because their foreign players, in protest of their non-payment, chose not to come to the field.

The Daily Star reached out to one of Rajshahi's foreign cricketers, who was part of the boycott, and he said that till yesterday the foreign players have received only 25 percent of their payment and one of them is yet to receive a single penny.

Earlier in the morning, it was also reported that the same franchise had to change their team hotel in Dhaka due to payment related issues and rumours began floating around that the entire team might boycott the match because of the non-payment issue.

Just a few hours before the match, Rajshahi batter Anamul Haque Bijoy posted a photo with fellow local players of the franchise,

all holding envelopes, suggesting they have agreed to play the contest.

However, the overseas cricketers were absent in that picture and later refused to travel to the ground as well.

Meanwhile, the hotel management later issued a press release where they stated that the shift was made to one of their other properties at the special request of the team owner Md. Shafiq Rahman.

Yesterday's episode is another addition to the non-payment debacle of the ongoing BPL that has tainted the image of the tournament and Rajshahi, one of the two new franchises in this edition, has repeatedly found itself at the centre of the issue. However, whether Rajshahi reappears in the next editions or disappears from BPL like many others, it has already preserved a place in BPL history, even though in an ignominious manner.

Can MSC keep lead intact?

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan leading the standings, Bashundhara Kings' struggles, local forwards coming through, betting allegations, and poor grounds have been the highlights after the conclusion of the first phase of the Bangladesh Premier League this weekend.

A revitalised Mohammedan top the table after the first phase for only the second time since the inaugural season of the BPL in 2007. They strung up an eight-match winning streak this season on their way to the top but it was snapped by newly-promoted Fakirerpool Young



Men's Club in their last match.

With 24 points from nine matches, three-time league runners-up Mohammedan, however, maintain a four-point advantage over second-placed Abahani and can hope for a maiden title charge, considering the other factors that have coincided with their resurgence led by coach Alfaz Ahmed.

Kings, winners of five consecutive seasons since 2018, have fallen from grace and are looking to strengthen their side with foreign recruits. They are seven points off the top.

In the last five seasons, Kings led the table after the end of the first phase, boasting leads of five points (2023-24 season), nine (2022-23 season), three (2022 seasons), eight (2021 seasons) and four (2020-21 seasons), respectively.

Six-time champions Abahani played the entirety of the first phase without foreign players and are expected to make multiple overseas signings in the mid-term transfer window to challenge the Black and Whites.

Encouraging performances by local players has also been a highlight so far in the tournament, with local forwards often outshining foreign talents. Al Amin (7 goals), Rakib Hossain (5 goals), Nabib Newaz Jibon (5 goals) and Piash Ahmed Nova (4 goals), have all entered the top 10 goal-scoring list, usually dominated by foreigners.

However, the poor grounds in Cumilla, Gazipur and Munshiganj failed to present good contests for the spectators, who regularly turned up to the stadiums outside the capital this time around, and the title contenders also suffered blows due to the poor conditions of the ground.

"Kings could not perform due to a lack of quality foreign players, while Mohammedan SC, despite losing a few players to Abahani, have kept it together because a lot of their players have been together for a few years.

"The league has seen mostly one-sided contests so far because the lower-table teams are focused on surviving and don't have urgency to do more."

Haaland praises 'SPECIAL' MARMOUSH

AFP, Manchester

Erling Haaland believes his new strike partner Omar Marmoush will be a "fantastic" signing for Manchester City after an impressive debut in the English champions' 3-1 win over Chelsea on Saturday.

Haaland was the difference maker as City leapfrogged the Blues into fourth in the Premier League despite a nightmare start for another new signing Abdulkadir Khusanov.

The Uzbek's error gifted Chelsea the lead inside three minutes through Noni Madueke.

Marmoush had a goal ruled out for offside before Josko Gvardiol levelled for the home side before half-time.

The tactic of hitting Haaland's physical presence with long balls from goalkeeper Ederson then turned the game decisively in the favour of Pep Guardiola's men.

Haaland shrugged off Trevoh Chalobah to chip in his 24th goal of the season before teeing up Phil Foden for City's third.

Marmoush scored 20 goals in 26 appearances for Eintracht Frankfurt this season before making the move to Manchester for a £59 million (\$72.6 million) fee this week.

"I think in the first half you could see he



has something special. That is obviously the reason Manchester City bought him," said Haaland.

"It's about giving him confidence. He's going to be a fantastic player for us.

"He had an amazing first half of the season for Eintracht Frankfurt. Hopefully he's going to have the same second half of the season for us."

City face a huge week ahead as they must beat Club Brugge at home on Wednesday to avoid an early exit from

the Champions League before travelling to second-placed Arsenal in the Premier League next weekend.

Haaland is hoping they can kick on after a fourth win in five league games.

"When we had the start like we did it is difficult but we played really well and we kept on going and kept on going," added Haaland.

"We kept pushing and second half was the same. In the end it is what we need to do."

'A PLAYER OF GREAT QUALITY'

Kylian Mbappe continued his rich vein of form with his first hat-trick for Real Madrid on Saturday, helping Los Blancos to a 3-0 win over Valladolid and a four-point lead at the top of LaLiga. The treble saw Mbappe, criticised for his underwhelming form earlier in the season, go second in the league's top scorers' list with 15 goals, just one behind of Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski. Real top the LaLiga standings with 49 points, four ahead second-placed Atletico Madrid who dropped two points at home earlier on Saturday in a 1-1 draw against Villarreal. They are followed by Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao, level on 39 points, both with a game in hand. "Mbappe is bringing a lot to the team, he's been getting into a rhythm for a couple of months. Obviously, that's a plus for our team, he's a player of great quality," Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti told a press conference yesterday.



PHOTO: AFP