

Grass meets its gilded era

KHALID HOSSAIN

There was a time, not long ago, when men's tennis kept one foot in the future but the other firmly in the past. Change was always on the horizon; but, like a sun that never quite set, the old gods lingered.

For nearly two decades, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic redefined the sport. However, as Centre Court prepares to witness Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner face off in the Wimbledon final, there is no longer an iota of confusion that the new era is deep rooted.

The 2025 final at the All England Club is the verification: in Alcaraz and Sinner, tennis has found its new centre of gravity. Their names now orbit the Grand Slam calendar the way the terrific trio once did; and today's meeting will mark the seventh consecutive major claimed by the deadly duo.

Just five weeks ago in Paris, they produced one of the greatest matches in Grand Slam history. That French Open final was, in Alcaraz's own words, "the best match I have ever played so far", while Sinner said, "I don't know if it'll get better than Paris [2025], because I don't think it's possible."

A five-hour and 29-minute epic at the clay colosseum had everything: athleticism, emotion, nerves and resilience. Sinner had three match points; Alcaraz, however, as he so often does, found another level from the brink of despair.

But if Paris was where Sinner slipped, London might be where he lands. The Italian has parked the pain of that defeat

SINNER (WORLD NO. 1) VS ALCARAZ (2)

Head-to-head

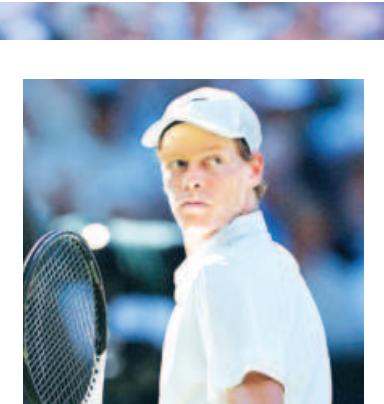
Alcaraz leads 8-4 (won last 5)

Grand Slam finals record

Alcaraz 5-0, Sinner 3-1

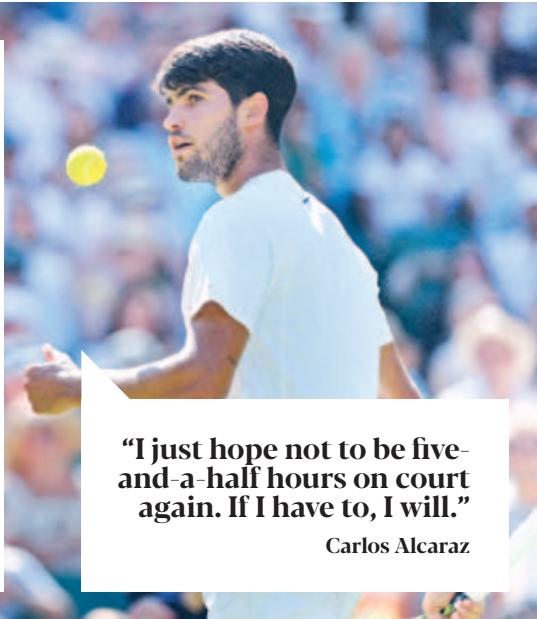
Streaks

Alcaraz 24-match winning streak; Sinner 4th straight Slam final



"Hopefully it's going to be a good match, like the last one."

Jannik Sinner



"I just hope not to be five-and-a-half hours on court again. If I have to, I will."

Carlos Alcaraz

and stormed into his first Wimbledon final by dismantling a hobbled Djokovic in straight sets. In doing so, he beat the man who had featured in six consecutive Wimbledon finals prior to this edition; symbolically closing the curtain on an era.

"It's just age... the wear and tear of the body," Djokovic admitted, as his wait for an unprecedented 25th Grand Slam continues.

Alcaraz, already a two-time defending champion at Wimbledon, will arrive on the back of a career-best 24-match winning streak. The 22-year-old Spaniard has never lost a Grand Slam final.

And therein lies the narrative: this is

"The things we are doing right now are great for tennis," he said. Few would disagree.

Sinner, for his part, knows the odds: "He [Alcaraz] is the favourite. He's again in the final. It's very tough to beat him on grass. But I like these challenges," said the 23-year-old Italian.

If Sinner's icy baseline precision and recent hard court dominance make him a methodical counterweight to Alcaraz's dynamism and willpower, their rivalry could mirror the balance once provided by the Big Three.

In Alcaraz and Sinner, tennis may have found its next great axis.

In this Wimbledon that began with speculation and sentiment about a fading champion, it now ends with clarity.

History suggests the grand finale on the hallowed lawns will be tight. Expect fire, finesse, and perhaps another five-set epic.

Litton in focus as Tigers vie to level series

SPORTS REPORTER

As Bangladesh take on hosts Sri Lanka in the second T20I in Dambulla today in a bid to level the three-match series, all eyes will be on skipper Litton Das, who has so far failed to inspire an underperforming side since assuming captaincy full-time in May.

Since being named captain of the T20I side till the next year's ICC T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, Litton has led Bangladesh to back-to-back series defeats against the UAE (2-1) and Pakistan (3-0) and a defeat today would hand him a third straight series defeat as captain.

The visitors are trailing the series 1-0 after losing the series opener in Pallekele by seven wickets on Thursday, which was also their sixth straight defeat in the format.

The woeful defeats have been an outcome of the team's collective failure, and Litton's sporadic form has aggravated Bangladesh's problems.



The batter has made 147 runs in seven innings since gaining captaincy with a highest score of 48 off 30 against Pakistan, and has not scored a half-century in the format in his last 13 innings.

All seven of those matches were played in placid batting surfaces, and while fellow top-order batters Parvez Hossain Emon (216) and Tenzin Hasam Tamim (231) scored at a rapid rate of 175.60 and 159.31 respectively, Litton, with his strike rate of 124.58, squandered the early momentum.

In the first T20I against Sri Lanka, Emon and Tenzin once again gave Bangladesh a good start, making 46 runs in just five overs before Litton's 11-ball six to dampened their efforts.

Apart from Litton's own form, his captaincy has also been below par so far. In just seven matches as captain, he has tried out 20 different players in the playing XI, and from the looks of it, he and the team management have not been able to lock down their best XI yet.

In the series opener, Bangladesh opting for four genuine openers in the starting XI, omitting Jaker Ali and not picking pacer Mustafizur Rahman were decisions that raised many eyebrows.

Bangladesh are surrounded with similar selection issues ahead of the crucial game in Dambulla today, where they have never played a T20I and have only featured in five ODIs, having last played there in 2017.

For both Bangladesh and Litton, the challenge will be to address the issues swiftly, otherwise, they will sink deeper into the mire of their own making.

BAN-PAK T20I SERIES

Big relief for BCB as media rights sold

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) heaved a sigh of relief after managing to sell its worldwide media rights for the national team's upcoming three-match home T20I series against Pakistan.

Although the media rights were expected to be sold through an open bidding, scheduled for Thursday (July 10), the board had to sell it in a different way after companies who showed interest for the series did failed to meet the floor price.

It has been learnt that the board had offered a floor price of Tk 4cr for the media rights of the series but none of the interested companies offered even half of the figure.

"The offer prices were just nonsense. Then we talked to a few of the interested companies separately and eventually got an amount which almost fulfilled our target," a BCB director, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star.

The director, however, didn't disclose the name of the company or the amount the board received from the sale.

"We can't reveal the figure right now as the company which bought the media rights need to sell it to the broadcasters. But we will reveal it after the series," he added.

However, it has been learnt that T-Sports, a local private television channel, will broadcast the series, scheduled between July 20 and 24.

Earlier in April, the BCB had failed to sell media rights for the two-Test home series against Zimbabwe as neither broadcasters nor marketing agencies showed any interest. The BCB had to telecast the series on state-owned BTV free of cost.

All three matches will be played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka.

Earlier, Bangladesh had toured Pakistan for a three-match T20I series in May-June and lost the series 3-0.



KL Rahul etched his name in history with a gritty 100 on Day 3 of the third Test against England at Lord's -- his 10th Test ton and second of the series -- becoming only the second Indian after Dilip Vengsarkar to feature twice on the iconic Honours Board. He was dismissed the very next ball after reaching the milestone yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

- This will be the first major international final in men's football between clubs from England and France.
- The last time these two teams met was in the last 16 of the 2015-16 UEFA Champions League, which saw PSG advance 4-2 on aggregate.

- PSG have scored ten first-half goals in the competition, while Chelsea are yet to concede before the break in any match.

- Chelsea have attempted 100 shots on goal in the competition, more than any other club.
- Dating back to the Coupe de France final, PSG have won their last five knockout matches in all competitions by a combined score of 18-0.
- PSG's Gianluigi Donnarumma has kept five clean sheets at this tournament -- the most and two more than any goalkeeper in the tournament.



PSG's relentless run faces Chelsea's fearless fight

AGENCIES

The stage is set for a blockbuster finale as PSG take on Chelsea in the final of the FIFA Club World Cup 2025 at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on Sunday.

With global bragging rights and over \$100 million in prize money on the line, both clubs will aim to close out marathon campaigns with the ultimate reward.

PSG arrive as overwhelming favourites. Fresh off a stunning 5-0 Champions League final win over Inter Milan, Luis Enrique's men have steamrolled through the Club World Cup -- putting four past both Inter Miami and Atletico Madrid, before dispatching Bayern Munich and thrashing Real Madrid 4-0 in the semis.

"We have had this objective from the beginning," Enrique said. "It's very difficult to achieve these things -- very few teams can do what we are trying to do."

Chelsea's road to the final has been less flashy but equally resilient. Enzo Maresca's side saw off Benfica, Palmeiras, and Fluminense, building on a season that has already delivered a UEFA Conference League



The match, starting at 1:00am (Monday, Bangladesh time) will not be telecast, but live-streamed for free on DAZN.

PSG's incredible run.

As the curtain falls on FIFA's expanded Club World Cup, the final promises a fitting climax: the world's form team against a revitalised giant eager to shock the world -- all under the New York skyline.