



DARING FLAIR FACES GRINDING RESILIENCE

Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz will renew their generational rivalry in a much-anticipated US Open semifinal tonight, a bridge-between-eras clash where the duo will meet for the first time at Flushing Meadows. The winner faces defending champion Jannik Sinner or Felix Auger-Aliassime.

DJOKOVIC VS ALCARAZ

Age: 38 | 22

Stakes: Record 25th Grand Slam | Sixth Slam and World No. 1 chase

Head-to-head: Djokovic leads 5-3

Recent meetings: Australian Open 2025 QF, Olympic 2024 final (Djokovic won both)

"Everybody is probably expecting and anticipating the finals between the two of them (Alcaraz and Sinner). I'm going to try to mess up the plans of most of the people."

Novak Djokovic

"Sometimes I play a shot I shouldn't, but it's the way I love playing tennis. I'm here to entertain the people, myself and the team."

Carlos Alcaraz



FEAR confronted is fear conquered

KHALID HOSSAIN

Athletes are often cast as entertainers, their victories measured in numbers and trophies. Yet, time and again, they reveal themselves as something more profound: reluctant mentors in resilience, teachers of the unseen battles that play out long before the scoreboard blinks.

Amanda Anisimova of the United States has just given us such a lesson at the Arthur Ashe Stadium court.

Around seven weeks ago, she endured one of the crudest humiliations a player could face – a Grand Slam final on Centre Court reduced to a footnote, a double bagel (6-0, 6-0) at the hands of Iga Swiatek. She was “frozen by nerves,” her body stiffened under the weight of history, she admitted later.

Few would have blamed her for burying that memory, shelving the replay, and moving on. That is, after all, the common prescription of our age: “forget, distract, move past.”

But Anisimova did the improbable,

if not unthinkable. On the eve of her US Open quarterfinal match, she sat herself down and pressed play, reliving the horror, watching her getting annihilated. She rewound the shame that many would rather erase, and in doing so, disarmed it.

Then she stepped onto Arthur Ashe Stadium and dismantled six-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek 6-4, 6-3 on Thursday (Bangladesh time), setting up Friday’s semifinal encounter with two-time US Open champion Naomi Osaka – another player who is on course to conquer her own depression-related demons.

Call it revenge, redemption, or reclamation, but in those two hours, Anisimova demonstrated that healing does not always come from escape. Sometimes, it is born of staring into the very abyss we most want to avoid.

“Last night – nobody told me to – but I watched (it) back, as painful as it was,



just to see, like, what I can avoid or what went wrong. Then I had to watch some good highlights to remove that from my brain,” the 24-year-old revealed post-match.

It is why athletes often end up as spiritual mentors without intending to be. Their struggles mirror our own, only magnified under brighter lights. “Today [yesterday] I came out with not an ounce of fear,” she added.

Anisimova may still be piecing herself together after years of personal setbacks – the sudden loss of her father and coach, bouts of grief and burnout, a tumble down the rankings, and a break from the sport to tend to her mental health – but in showing that fear confronted can be fear conquered, she revived a template for anyone stuck in their own loops of shame.

Not every wound closes quickly. Not every setback is simply “moved on” from. However, with courage to revisit the painful chapters, as the eighth seeded player proved in New York, those very scars can become the source of strength.

And that, more than rankings or titles, is what endures in memory.

PHOTOS: AFP/REUTERS

HOCKEY ASIA CUP Bangladesh seek ‘big achievement’

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh confirmed at least a sixth place finish in the AHF Hockey Asia Cup after beating Kazakhstan 5-1 in the 5th-8th place deciding match in Raigir, Bihar, India, yesterday.

They will next play the 5th-6th place deciding match on Sunday against Japan, who beat Chinese Taipei 2-0 on Wednesday.

Bangladesh, who also finished sixth in the previous edition of the Asian Cup in 2022, now have the chance to qualify directly for the FIH World Cup Qualifiers if they overcome Japan, which, according to head coach Moshir Rahman Biplob, would be a “big achievement” for the men in red and green.

“We are happy to confirm at least sixth in the Hockey Asia Cup as per our quality,” Biplob told The Daily Star yesterday.

A defeat to Japan, however, would mean Bangladesh must play a three-match playoff series against Pakistan -- who withdrew from the ongoing Asia Cup due to security concerns over traveling to India -- to secure



are ahead of Bangladesh in terms of technique, tactics, and physicality,” he said.

The coach also praised his players for giving their best despite fitness concerns, as the team had only 14 days of training before the tournament.

Bangladesh, who had already beaten Kazakhstan twice -- 3-0 and 5-1 -- in the AHF Cup in Indonesia last April, went ahead in the 10th minute yesterday when penalty-corner specialist Ashraf Islam converted a set piece. He doubled the lead in the 23rd minute with another penalty corner.

Roman Sarkar made it 3-0 from open play just before halftime. He struck again three minutes after the restart, extending the margin to 4-0 with a penalty corner, before Tayeb Ali netted from open play in the 34th minute to make it 5-0.

Kazakhstan's Altynbek Aitkaliyev scored in the 38th minute, but his side, who earned their Asia Cup spot after AHF Cup champions Oman opted out, could not avoid a third defeat in six months against Bangladesh.

their place in the qualifiers.

The champions of the ongoing Asia Cup will directly qualify for the FIH World Cup, while the next top five finishers will earn places in the qualifiers.

Biplob is hoping to take advantage of Japan's mental state following their recent setback.

“It seems to me that the Japanese are mentally down after failing to qualify for the Super Four, but they are still a team to beat. We will definitely try to cash in on their mental condition, though Japan

Mbappe's chance to overtake Henry

France, runners-up of the 2022 World Cup, are set to open their qualifying campaign for the 2026 World Cup when they take on Ukraine in Poland on Saturday night, before hosting Iceland on Tuesday. For skipper Kylian Mbappe, the upcoming fixtures present a chance to go level or even overtake French legend Thierry Henry. Mbappe, who has now scored 50 goals in 90 matches, is just one shy of equalling Henry's record and sharing the second spot in France's all-time top scorers list. World Cup winner Olivier Giroud leads the list with 57 goals.

PHOTO: REUTERS



New CWAB president Mithun vows to fight for players

SPORTS REPORTER

National team cricketer and the newly elected president of the Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) Mohammad Mithun said he is prepared to lock horns with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials for the players.

Mithun received 154 votes to beat lone competitor match referee Salim Shahed (34 votes) for the presidency post in the CWAB election held at the BCB Academy building on Thursday.

“We will try to solve everything through negotiation. If that's not possible, as I have come here to protect the rights of the cricketers, I have to speak for them. If that makes some in the board unhappy, there is nothing I can do about it,” Mithun said after getting elected.

Meanwhile, the remaining 10 posts were decided without contest. Shahed had told the media earlier that he competed in the polls to prevent what he termed an “auto pass” election.

Those elected unopposed are -- Shahriar Hossain Bidut (senior vice-president), Nurul Hasan Sohan (vice-president), Najmul Hossain Shanto, Shamsur Rahman, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Rumana Ahmed, Khaled Mashud Pilot, Imrul Kayes, Irfan Sukkur, and Akbar Ali (executive members).

Mithun takes over from former Bangladesh captain Naimur Rahman Durjoy, who had held the post from 2014 till March of 2025.



UAE name Asia Cup squad

ICC

UAE on Thursday named a 17-member outfit for the upcoming Asia Cup.

Led by their star batter Muhammad Waseem, UAE are placed in Group A along with India, Pakistan, and Oman. They will take on India in their opening game of the Asia Cup in Dubai on September 10.

Their squad is the same as the one featuring in the ongoing tri series against Afghanistan and Pakistan, with the addition of pacer Matiullah Khan and left-arm tweaker Simranjeet Singh.

UAE previously participated in the Asia Cup in 2016, when the tournament was hosted in Bangladesh.

The latest edition of the continental tournament has eight sides divided into two groups of four. The top-two teams from each group will then feature in the Super Four stage, before the best two sides fight it out for the title in the Final.

The tournament will see Asia's finest sides in action ahead of next year's ICC Men's T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.