

## SPORTS

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18

DAYS  
TO BAHRAIN  
GRAND PRIX  
2020

## Nadal strolls into Acapulco final

● Rafael Nadal defeats Grigor Dimitrov in semi final

● Spaniard to face Fritz for title

AFP | Los Angeles



Spain's Rafael Nadal returns the ball to Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov

Rafael Nadal used a steady stream of blistering forehand winners and a heavy dose of precision serves to book his spot in the ATP Mexico Open final with a convincing 6-3, 6-2 win over Grigor Dimitrov.

The two-time tournament champion will be the favourite to claim his third Acapulco title when he faces unseeded Taylor Fritz in the final.

It has been 15 years since world No. 2 Nadal won for the first time here. He also won in 2013 and improved to 18-2 at this event overall.

"I'm very happy. A great victory against one of the best players in the world and a good friend," Nadal said after his one-sided victory on Friday night. "I think I've increased my level during the match, so it's positive for me."

The top seed clinched the victory on his first match point. He fell behind 0-30 in the final game but rallied to win the next four points.

On match point, seventh seed Dimitrov hit a backhand that clipped the top of the net

and bounced in. But it hung in the air just long enough for Nadal to race forward and blast a cross-court forehand that the Bulgarian had no chance on.

Nadal continued his dominance of Dimitrov, improving to 13-1 lifetime. Nadal has only lost 20 games in his first four matches this week and is yet to lose a set.

The unseeded Fritz defeated fellow American John Isner in the other semi-final 2-6, 7-5, 6-3.

"He's playing well. He has a great serve, fantastic shots from the baseline. It's going to be a tough one," Nadal said of Fritz. "I know I'm going to have to be at my best and I hope to be ready for it."

This will be the first meeting between Nadal and 22-year-old Fritz.

The second set progressed nearly identically to the first set, with Dimitrov breaking early for a 2-0 lead before Nadal stormed back.

## Al Hala, Bahrain Club advance to Cup quarters

TDT | Manama

Al Hala and Bahrain Club both powered into the quarter-finals of this year's Khalifa bin Salman Cup last night.

Al Hala completely dominated Sitra in a 96-67 win while Bahrain Club defeated Al Ettihad 106-94 to go through.

Both games were played at Khalifa Sports City arena in Isa Town.

Hala and Bahrain Club are now set to face off in the round of eight.

Al Hala raced out to a 31-7 lead at the end of the first quarter and never looked back in their game. They took advantage of their superior size as six-foot, 10-inch Senegalese big man Mansour Kasse had no opposing professional to compete with on Sitra.

Hala enjoyed a nearly insurmountable 61-20 lead at the half and took the foot off the gas the rest of the way, allowing Sitra to reduce the final losing margin. Hala led by as many as 47 points in the contest.

Kasse finished with 25 points and 14 rebounds to pace Hala, while Hasan Gerashi had 12 and Ahmed Khalifa 11.

Abdulla Ali scored 18 to pace Sitra in defeat while Ali Eid had 15.

In Bahrain Club's win, they were in control from the very start as they took a 32-22 lead at the end of the first period. They stayed ahead 58-50 at the half, before stretching their advantage to 88-73 after three. In the final canto, they went ahead by as many as 19 points following a three-pointer by Nooh Ali, en route to securing the result.

Serbian-Bosnian professional Dragan Tubak led all scorers with 36 points for Bahrain Club. The towering seven-foot, one-inch centre was an efficient 16-of-19 from the field and also had 17 rebounds. Khalid Ali came off the bench to contribute 16 while Jalal Akbar had 14. Nooh Ali and Fadhel Abbas both finished with 11 for their team.

For Ettihad, who were playing without a professional, Fadhel Abdulalah had a valiant 32-point effort as a substitute. Ali Ghadeer added 15 to go with nine rebounds and seven assists while Nasser Adel scored 14 in the loss.

Cup action continues this evening with another two games on schedule, with Al Ahli battling Samaheej and Al Najma going against Nuwaidrat.

On March 5, two quarter-final games will be held with Muharrag facing Isa Town and Riffa going head to head with Mana-



A player in action during the match

ma. All four teams were given direct berths in the last eight.

Another quarter-final will then be between the winners of Ahli-Samaheej and Najma-Nuwaidrat, with the victor of that

moving on to meet the winner of the Muharrag-Isa Town affair in the semi-finals.

The semi-finals are set from March 18 to 26, to be followed by the final on May 2.

## India, Pakistan to clash at neutral Asia Cup venue

AFP | Mumbai

The next Asia Cup will be held in Dubai so that arch-rivals India and Pakistan can both take part, Indian cricket chief Sourav Ganguly said.

The tournament had been scheduled for Pakistan in September but India had refused to take part unless it was held on neutral territory because of tensions between the two countries.

"The Asia Cup will be held

in Dubai and both India and Pakistan will play," Ganguly said late Friday before leaving for an Asian Cricket Council meeting in Dubai.

India and Pakistan have not played a bilateral series since 2012-13 when Pakistan crossed the border for a series of one-day internationals. With their decades-old dispute over Kashmir at a new peak, India has stopped all sports teams going to Pakistan and they have only clashed in cricket at major international events.



ICICI Invincibles team members with their trophies after winning BCICAI Premier Cricket League 2020. BCICAI organized the tournament for members and families at the Gulf Air Club Salmabad. 12 men's team and 2 women's team comprising a total of over 130 participants had a fantastic outing playing against each other. ICICI Invincibles sponsored by ICICI Bank lifted the Mens Champions trophy, while MacRoh Maidens sponsored by MacRoh Bakes won the Women's final. The other participating teams were sponsored by KPMG, BDO, GRANT THORNTON, Assure Audit, AM Consulting, ASP Auditing, Yateem Centre, P. Haridas Sons, Abbas Dadabai Group, Bahrain Financing Company, Lost Paradise of Dilmun and Hasnia

## Djokovic saves three match points to set up Dubai final with Tsitsipas

Reuters | Dubai

World number one Novak Djokovic saved three match points to beat France's Gael Monfils 2-6 7-6(8) 6-1 on Friday as he set up a final showdown at the Dubai Open with Greek second seed Stefanos Tsitsipas.

Djokovic is yet to lose this year and the Australian Open champion extended his unbeaten run in 2020 to 17 matches with what was also his 17th win over Monfils.

"It was truly an escape, he was clearly the better player for two sets," Djokovic said.

"I was fortunate to work my way back in the second set. Gael is playing as well as he has played ever, I've played him many times. I know I have a good defense but what he did today for two sets was unbelievable."

A double break in the opening set gave Monfils an early advantage as Djokovic dropped his first set of the tournament, failing to find answers when faced with Monfils' long reach and



Novak Djokovic of Serbia hits a return to Gael Monfils of France

well-angled returns.

Djokovic's drop shots that held him in good stead in the tournament also proved to be ineffective against the athletic Monfils, who was up to the task of lengthening rallies to prevent the Serb from controlling points.

Djokovic finished with 17 unforced errors in the first set and his frustrations only mounted when he was broken at 1-1 in the second, with the 32-year-old screaming in the direction of his team while the crowd roared its approval for Monfils.

But Djokovic had his share of fans in the crowd too and they egged him on to restore parity as he converted his first break point to make it 3-3. However, a visibly tiring Monfils still held on to save five set points to take it to a tiebreak. Monfils was doubled over between every point at this stage but the Frenchman then got a second wind in the tiebreak to go 6-3 up, before squandering three match points. Djokovic then benefited from a double fault to convert his eighth set point.