

Serena reveals baby to world in touching home movie

Krunic rolls on in Japan after Date tear-jerker

TOKYO, Sept 13, (AFP): Serbia's Aleksandra Krunic powered on at the Japan Women's Open on Wednesday by eliminating seventh seed Alison Riske, a day after ushering local favourite Kimiko Date into retirement.

It was a day of upsets at the Tokyo hardcourt tournament, with top seed Kristina Mladenovic the biggest scalp as the Frenchwoman was bundled out 6-4, 6-3 by Croatian qualifier Jana Fett in the first round.

World number 67 Krunic, who whitewashed the 46-year-old Date on Tuesday, stormed to a 6-3, 6-4 win over American Riske in sweltering conditions to reach the quarter-finals. Third seed Elise Mertens also booked her place in the last eight, the

Belgian overpowering Poland's Magda Linette 6-1, 7-5. But there was another surprise later on Wednesday when Japan's Miyu Kato toppled fourth seed Kristyna Pliskova — twin sister of world number one Karolina — 7-5, 6-3 to set up a meeting with Krunic.

In first-round matches, Kurumi Nara upset sixth seed Naomi Osaka 6-3, 6-0 as the next generation of Japanese tennis players took centre stage after Date's tearful exit.

Osaka, who reached the third round of the US Open earlier this month after stunning defending champion Angelique Kerber, left her game in the locker room as she came out inexplicably flat. Australia's former US Open winner Samantha Stosur was bundled out by Spain's

Sara Sorribes, who came from a set down to beat the fifth seed 3-6, 7-5, 6-1.

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Two weeks after becoming a first-time mother, tennis legend **Serena Williams** revealed her baby daughter to the world Wednesday in an online montage that featured moments from early sonograms to just after the birth.

In the touching compilation posted on Williams' Instagram account, the 23-time Grand Slam singles champion also said that there had been "complications" in the delivery of **Alexis Olympia Ohanian**.

"It's been a long time, but we had a lot of complications, but look who we got — we got a baby girl!" said

Williams in one segment of the home movie as she left the hospital with fiancé and Reddit co-founder **Alex Ohanian**.

She said the couple had spent almost a week at the hospital after the Sept 1 delivery, but did not say what the complications had been. Media reports said the birth had been induced by doctors.

The clips show the pregnant tennis star — who turns 36 at the end of this month — showing off her belly bump, dancing and practicing her game, as well as shots of the expectant couple assembling their daughter's nursery.

The film appeared to be meant as much for her daughter's future viewing as for Williams' millions of ecstatic fans, with the pregnant tennis

mom telling the camera as she filmed her belly, "You move at 10:15 or 10:30 every night."

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Maria Sharapova muses on her long, lopsided rivalry with **Serena**

TENNIS

Williams in a new autobiography released on Tuesday and how she believes a locker room moment fueled the American's drive to dominate her.

The Russian-born Sharapova was 17 when she defeated Williams in the

2004 Wimbledon final. Rather than proving the start of a long, close-run rivalry, it was one of just two victories Sharapova can claim against the US great, who has beaten her 19 times.

In her new book, "Unstoppable: My Life So Far," Sharapova says it was not only her victory, but the fact that she overheard Williams weeping afterwards in the locker room that ensured the American would always find a way to elevate her game in their future contests.

"It went on and on. I got out as quickly as I could, but she knew I was there. People often wonder why I have had so much trouble beating Serena; she's owned me in the past ten years.

'Right to Dream'

African academy aims to curb players exploitation

LONDON, Sept 13, (RTRS): Floodlit stadiums, adoring fans and huge salaries — following in the footsteps of transfer-record breaking football superstars such as Neymar and Kylian Mbappé and playing for one of Europe's leading clubs is the dream of every young player worldwide.

But beneath the big money headlines is an underbelly of exploitation of youngsters from developing nations, experts say.

Countless boys in West Africa enrol in football academies, giving up on an education and splashing the family savings in their quest to establish a career at one of Europe's top teams.

Yet many of them are duped, taken abroad and dumped by unscrupulous men posing as agents, according to activists.



Neymar

Tom Vernon, founder of Right to Dream (RTD) football academy in Ghana and owner of Danish Superliga club FC Nordsjælland, is striving to end such exploitation by offering a safe route for young African footballers with dreams of making it in Europe.

Education is key — in terms of both studying and learning about the potential pitfalls of going abroad too soon, he said.

"It's a constant battle to stop people exploiting kids," Vernon told the Thomson Reuters Foundation by telephone.

"Without parental support or an educational base, a young player is basically going to get eaten alive, and that still happens on a regular basis," the former football scout added.

Earlier this year, newspaper Corriere della Sera reported that two Italian clubs were under investigation for using faked documents to allow West African minors to enter Italy illegally.

These children are among the some 15,000 young players moved from West Africa each year under false pretences, estimates the charity Foot Solidaire, but a lack of monitoring means the number being trafficked abroad could be far higher, experts say.

Yet exploitation of young players is a worldwide problem.

Reports have emerged in recent years of Liberian boys being trafficked to an academy in Laos and trapped there in debt bondage, and Brazilian teenagers recruited from the Amazon to an academy in Sao Paulo, sleeping four to a mattress in a bedsit.

Vernon, a former scout for Manchester United, based the RTD academy on the American athlete scholarship model in which players continue to study while being trained at an elite level.

The Ghana-based academy spends about \$25,000 a year on each student, which covers education, training, housing, food, travel and equipment, with players gaining scholarships to continue their

education in Britain and North America while playing.

The \$5 million facility — which boasts a school, dormitories including one for girls, and eight grass pitches — is a world apart from the many ramshackle academies across West Africa.

"The vast majority (of players) are coming from \$2-a-day families," Vernon said. "They come into an environment where they are fed four times a day, at an international school with beautiful grass pitches. It is about getting the right balance."

Off the pitch, the players focus on subjects such as science, engineering and maths in the school's robotics lab.

"Our boys and girls are passionate about STEM subjects and can feed that section of Ghanaian society afterwards," Vernon said. "Our ambition is that kids can drop into societies around the world and have other strings to their bow," he added.

Yet most young players in the region are not so fortunate — and more may fall into the hands of crooked agents as Africa's population swells and jobs become more scarce, says James Esson, a migration expert at Loughborough University in England.

Vernon says that many young-

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sters from poorer backgrounds are prey to exploitation and trafficking as agents seek to take advantage of their financial strife, and a lack of awareness.

"In a lot of cases they (agents) pose as a big saviour... (but) aren't trying to represent the best interests of players." For 22-year-old Ghanaian Godsway Donyoh, RTD helped him secure a contract with Manchester City, then a move to FC Nordsjælland in Denmark in pursuit of more playing time.

While Donyoh believes his move to the Premier League club at the age of 18 came too soon in his development — he said his education gave him the conviction that he would succeed abroad.

"My dad sat me down and said before you can play football, you need to go to school," Donyoh said, recalling how a failure to hit his required grades at the academy led to his boots being confiscated for a month, forcing him to focus on his studies.

Ghana's Football Association (GFA) backs the RTD education-first approach and is working with parents and the police to crack down on bogus, unregulated academies — which it says are inspired by soaring transfer fees, wages and agents payments.

Vernon has bigger ambitions for the model. He hopes players will use their experiences to invest in their home communities.

In one such case, US-based RTD graduate David Accam, who plays for Chicago Fire and has represented the Ghanaian national team, funded a community pitch back home in Ghana last year. "It will be interesting to see if the professional game is willing to move towards this model," Vernon said.

SAITAMA, Japan, Sept 13, (AFP): Urawa Reds scored three goals in a 15-minute blitz to floor Japanese rivals Kawasaki Frontale 4-1 in a fiery encounter Wednesday and reach the Asian Champions League semifinals.

Slovenian Zlatan Ljubijankic, Brazilian Rafael Silva and Toshiyuki Takagi all scored late goals against 10-man Kawasaki as the home side overturned a two-goal deficit to win 5-4 on aggregate.

The Reds, who won Asia's premier club competition in 2007, will face China's Shanghai SIPG in the last four after a see-saw struggle.

"We kept our heads after going behind," Reds manager Takafumi Hori told local media.

"Obviously it was a huge factor that they went down to 10 men but we still had to get the job done."

Brazilian Elsinho put Kawasaki in front after 19 minutes, flicking the ball home after a comic error from goalkeeper Shusaku Nishikawa to stretch their lead to three goals after winning the first leg 3-1.

But Shinzo Koroki pulled one back for Urawa in the 35th minute before the tie took a dramatic twist moments later when Frontale defender Shintaro Kurumaya was sent off for a high boot that caught Koroki in the face.

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At times it appeared that both teams were more interested in fisticuffs and rolling on the ground in mock agony than playing football, while several shots were more of a threat to low-flying aircraft than the goalkeepers. But when substitute Ljubijankic headed Urawa's second of the night to make it 4-3 on aggregate, Kawasaki began to look frayed and a Rafael Silva bullet levelled the tie on 83 minutes.

As Kawasaki wilted in the humid conditions, Takagi's shin connected with an attempted left-foot volley two minutes later and the ball looped over goalkeeper Jung Sung-Ryong for a dramatic winner.

"To be honest, that goal wasn't 100 percent how I planned to hit it but it went in so I'll take it," said Takagi sheepishly. "We've come this far so we have to make sure we reach the final now."

Kawasaki striker Yu Kobayashi said: "We thought we were in control after scoring first but we just weren't good enough. We have to put this behind us and focus on chasing other titles now."

Urawa, currently eighth in the J-League table, face Andre Villas-Boas's Shanghai side away on Sept 27 in the first leg of their semifinal.

The return fixture will be played on Oct 18.

Japanese sides have struggled in the Asian Champions League since Urawa's victory in 2007 and Gamba Osaka's triumph a year later, and Shanghai SIPG will go into the semifinal as firm favourites.

Urawa score 3 goals in 15-minute blitz



Kawasaki Frontale defender Eduardo (left), kicks the ball next to Urawa Reds defender Ryota Moriwaki (right), during the AFC Champions League quarter-final match between Urawa Reds and Kawasaki Frontale in Saitama on Sept 13. (AFP)

Soccer Roundup

Bundesliga boss wants shorter transfer window

'FIFA still resistant to change'

LONDON, Sept 13, (Agencies): FIFA is struggling to implement reforms and change its operating culture because its leaders are more worried about their own political futures, a former top official said on Wednesday.

The global soccer body has been trying to overhaul its operations in the wake of the worst crisis in its history, sparked in 2015 by the indictment in the United States of several dozen soccer officials on corruption-related charges.

Miguel Maduro, a former head of FIFA's independent governance and review committee, also told a British parliamentary hearing that FIFA's leadership tried to persuade him not to block Russian Deputy Prime Minister Vitaly Mutko from being re-elected to its top committee.

Neither FIFA nor Infantino could immediately be reached for comment.

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The Bundesliga looks set to follow the example of England's Premier League by voting to shorten the transfer window, with German Football League (DFL) chief Rein-

hard Rauball proposing changes.

Germany's 36 professional clubs are set to hold a vote at their general assembly in December and Rauball wants the Bundesliga clubs to agree to close the transfer window before the season starts.

Last week, the English Premier League clubs voted to shut the 2018 close-season window before the start of the 2018-19 campaign in a move that sparked approval across the European game.

Now Rauball is hoping the German clubs will do the same.

Currently, the season in Germany starts in mid-August

and the transfer window closes on the last day of the month, which can unsettle squads with players coming and going with fixtures already underway.

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Handsome paid **Carlos Tevez**

is overweight and will not play again for **Shanghai Shenhua** until he gets fit, the Chinese club's new coach has warned.

The 33-year-old Tevez is one of the best-paid players on the planet on reported weekly wages of about 730,000 euros (US\$870,000) but has scored just twice this season and missed half the games with injury.

The former **Manchester United**, **Manchester City** and **Juventus** star has hinted that he will quit China at the end of the season in November and has been branded "very homesick boy" by angry Shenhua fans and Chinese media.

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Spanish and European champions **Real Madrid** announced a two-year contract extension for Brazilian left back **Marcelo** on Wednesday, hours after the player's appeal against a domestic suspension was rejected.

Now in his 12th season at Real, Marcelo is the second longest serving player after captain **Sergio Ramos**, having joined the Spanish giants from Brazilian side **Fluminense** aged 18 back in January 2007, and is the longest serving foreign player in the club's history.

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