

Sports

Shiffrin wins World Cup slalom despite skiing over broken gate



Decision time for World Cup format



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THUNDER BEAT NUGGETS, BULLS DOWN RAPTORS IN OT

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LONDON: Chelsea's John Terry, top, heads the ball under pressure from Peterborough United's Michael Bostwick, center, during the English FA Cup third round soccer match between Chelsea and Peterborough United at Stamford Bridge stadium in London, yesterday. —AP

TERRY OFF AS CHELSEA CRUISE IN FA CUP

LONDON: John Terry's dismissal took the gloss off Chelsea's comfortable 4-1 victory over third-tier Peterborough United yesterday, which took the Premier League leaders into the FA Cup fourth round. Two goals from Pedro Rodriguez and strikes from Michy Batshuayi and Willian ensured Antonio Conte's side avoided any chance of an embarrassing slip. But Terry's 67th-minute dismissal for fouling Lee Angol was a big blow for the 36-year-old, who was making his first appearance in two months after an injury lay-off and whose contract expires at the season's end.

Chelsea were leading 3-0 at the time and while Peterborough's Tom Nichols quickly reduced the deficit, Pedro's 75th-minute strike meant the hosts saw out the game comfortably.

Conte made nine changes to the line-up that started the 2-0 mid-week defeat by Tottenham Hotspur, the game that marked the end of the Blues' 13-game winning run.

The Italian took the opportunity to restore Terry to the side, while Kurt Zouma made his return after 11 months on the sidelines following a serious knee injury. Youngsters Ruben Loftus-Cheek and Nathaniel Chalobah were also handed rare starts, but it was one of the more familiar names on the team-sheet that calmed any early home nerves.

Pedro took his 18th-minute opportunity superbly, but before then Conte's side had survived an early scare. Peterborough started the game promisingly and while they had cause to be grateful that Gary Cahill's sixth-minute flick deflected off

the post to safety, they should have taken the lead two minutes later. A deep cross from Marcus Maddison was allowed to find its way to striker Angol, who was unmarked when he connected with a close-range volley that he directed wastefully at goalkeeper Asmir Begovic.

Peterborough manager Grant McCann had insisted his side had nothing to lose coming into the game and challenged his players to create a moment of history for the club.

PEDRO HITS BAR

Had they made more of that opportunity, or the one that presented itself when Ryan Tafazolli headed wide from a corner a few minutes later, Conte's side might have endured a more testing afternoon.

As it was, Chelsea made sure there would be no repeat of those early scares, taking control when Pedro pounced on the ball after Chalobah's shot had been pushed out by Luke McGee.

The Spain international cut inside one challenge and gave McGee no chance with a curled finish.

From that moment, there was little chance of an upset and Conte's side should have had the tie wrapped up before half-time.

McCann's side were fortunate to escape a strong penalty appeal when Tafazolli appeared to bring Batshuayi down inside the box and had an even greater let-off when Pedro struck the bar from six yards. Batshuayi drew a frustrated response from his manager when he failed to play in Willian, who had a clear run on goal, instead trying to fash-

ion his own shooting opportunity. But the Belgium striker made amends two minutes before half-time when he was set up by Loftus-Cheek's lay-off, striking home his side's second goal with a low, right-foot shot. The interval brought respite for the visitors, but when Loftus-Cheek fired wide moments after the restart, it was clear there would be no shift in the balance of the game. A third goal quickly came when Pedro collected Cesc Fabregas's pass wide on the left and picked out Willian's forward run. The Brazilian moved the ball onto his right foot and placed his shot beyond McGee from 20 yards out. Terry's clumsy last-man challenge on Angol was followed by Nichols' close-range effort, but Pedro wrapped things up with another well-executed finish. —AFP

DIMITROV STUNS NISHIKORI TO WIN BRISBANE FINAL

BRISBANE: Bulgaria's Grigor Dimitrov won his first title in over two years when he upset world number five Kei Nishikori in three sets to win the Brisbane International yesterday.

In an enthralling final between two evenly matched opponents, Dimitrov claimed the Roy Emerson Trophy 6-2, 2-6, 6-3, his fourth singles title on the ATP Tour. Dimitrov was ranked as high as eighth in the world in 2014 and was nicknamed "Baby Fed" because of his similar playing style to Swiss great Roger Federer.

Injury problems and poor form saw him slump during 2015 and the first half of 2016, when he plummeted to 40th in the world. But he recovered towards the end of last year and entered the season-opening tournament ranked 17.

The Brisbane win will see him climb to 15 when the rankings are released today. Dimitrov insisted he had not felt under pressure because of his rankings slide and said he knew he would eventually get the rewards for the hard work he was doing off court.

"I think that was kind of an emotional win for me, but at the same time, it wasn't unexpected," he said. "I think I have put in the work. I think I have learnt a lot. I have set myself quite high goals for the first six months, and one of them was actually to win a tournament," he added.

"And it happened during the first week of the year." The 25-year-old revealed later he had relaxed ahead of his matches with late-night visits to a Brisbane video game arcade. "Since I have been here, every night I've been going to the arcades for an hour and a half," he

laughed. "It's given me tremendous joy. You know, it's something so childish (but) every time I was going to bed, I was, like, 'Wow, that feels so good.' It's just something so small."

Despite Dimitrov's win over top seed Milos Raonic in the semi-finals, the 27-year-old Nishikori had not lost to the Bulgarian in three previous meetings and went into the final as firm favourite.

The Japanese star started well and had Dimitrov struggling to hold his opening service game. But from then on the Bulgarian dominated the first set, breaking Nishikori twice to take the opener in 36 minutes.

Dimitrov took that momentum into the second set and was comfortable on serve. But at 2-2 he faltered and was broken, with Nishikori seizing the initiative and winning four games in succession to level the match.

Nishikori took an injury break at the end of the second set to get treatment for a sore hip. This seemed to swing the momentum back to the Bulgarian, who immediately had the third seed under pressure.

But Nishikori held on and both men were untroubled on serve, until at 3-4 the Japanese player stumbled and gave Dimitrov a vital break. The Bulgarian stepped up and showed no nerves as he served out the match, claiming victory in one hour, 48 minutes when Nishikori sent a backhand long.

Nishikori said he was not sure how bad his injury was but it would not affect his Australian Open chances. "I felt it in the second set-it was still hurting during the second set," he said. —AFP



BRISBANE: Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria holds the trophy after winning the final match against Kei Nishikori of Japan at the Brisbane International tennis tournament in Brisbane, Australia, yesterday. — AP

PLYMOUTH HOLD LIVERPOOL YOUNGSTERS

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool face the prospect of a tricky FA Cup third-round replay against Plymouth Argyle after they were held to a 0-0 draw at Anfield yesterday.

The sides met for the first time in any competition since April 1962 and although the Premier League team dominated possession and had the majority of the chances, they were unable to find the net. Plymouth, who are second in fourth-tier League Two, will now host the seven-time winners at Home Park in south-west England later this month. It will add to a congested January for Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp, whose team also have a two-legged League Cup semi-final against Southampton to contend with.

After a hectic festive period, Klopp decided to rest many of his first-choice players as he made 10 changes from the 2-2 draw at Sunderland in the Premier League. He ended up naming the youngest team in Liverpool's history, with an average age of 21 years and 296 days, which included a first start for teenage striker Ben Woodburn.

The 17-year-old became Liverpool's youngest ever goalscorer in a League Cup victory over Leeds United in November.

He drew the first save out of Plymouth goalkeeper Luke McCormick with a low toe-poke from close range after clever play by Emre Can. Divock Origi had the ball in the net for the Reds moments later after he brought down a high ball, but the Belgium international was deemed to have fouled Plymouth defender Gary Miller. Liverpool controlled the play against a side 68 places below them in the English football pyramid, but the visitors

were organised and reached the break on level terms.

STURRIDGE SUMMONED

Plymouth, backed by 8,500 vocal fans who had made a near 600-mile (965-kilometre) round trip to Merseyside, finally managed a shot on target 10 minutes into the second half.

But Graham Carey's speculative free-kick was comfortably saved by Loris Karius. Liverpool midfielder Lucas Leiva, handed the armband by Klopp, brought a save from McCormick with an equally audacious effort from outside the box moments later. Anfield started to grow restless and Klopp responded shortly after the hour mark with the introduction of Daniel Sturridge for Can. The striker's first act was to whistle a low shot just the wrong side of the post following a Liverpool counter-attack. Shortly after he lifted a dangerous ball into the area, with Sheyi Ojo not quite able to apply the decisive touch. Klopp brought on Roberto Firmino and Adam Lallana with 15 minutes remaining in an attempt to inject some life into his side. Despite the fresh legs and six minutes of added time, the hosts failed to find a way past a stubborn Argyle defence.

Right at the death, Trent Alexander-Arnold's free-kick was flicked on by Origi and substitute Connor Smith almost nudged the ball into his own net, only for McCormick to gather. When referee Paul Tierney blew the final whistle, the Plymouth players went to applaud the away contingent, who celebrated as if they had secured victory, while Liverpool's players trudged off. —AFP