



US star Andy Roddick (L) consoles his Russian opponent Marat Safin after prevailing in a fiery third round battle at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Friday.

Marat spitting fire

Australian Open
The Grand Slam of Asia/Pacific

AFP, Melbourne

Granting Marat Safin had repeated run-ins with the umpire in his third round Australian Open loss to Andy Roddick Friday as the big Russian ended his Melbourne challenge on a sour note.

The 2005 champion, who has a reputation for being moody, was spitting fire after going two sets to one down when a brief shower delayed play.

The retractable roof of the Rod Laver Arena slowly closed as ball boys frantically used towels to mop

up centre court.

French chair umpire Pascal Maria and tournament referee Wayne McKewen gave the all clear to resume but Safin was having none of it.

While Roddick was happy to play on, Safin began working himself up, pointing to the court and saying it wasn't dry and safe, waving his racket around and going red in the face.

He copped a fine for an audible obscenity and reluctantly resumed, but continued arguing between points, disputing line calls and calling for the Hawkeye technology to be used.

"Why are you overruling. Why did you call it out. You have all the power and we have none," he was

heard shouting at umpire Maria.

His bad-tempered outbursts continued as Roddick ground out a fighting 7-6 (7/2), 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) victory to book a slot against Croatia's ninth seed Mario Ancic in the next round.

"I was so disappointed with the officials. I can't describe how I feel," he said afterwards.

"They have been so pathetic on this subject. It was a joke.

"And I really am just so disappointed that really, the people, they are so blind, they don't want to see anything, and I'm just going to say it in front of everybody because it's a nonsense for me.

"The guy comes and says to me it's not wet. The guy never played the aura that intimidated opponents.

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SERENA STRIKES BACK Roddick dumps Safin

Australian Open
The Grand Slam of Asia/Pacific

AFP, Melbourne

Marat Safin was bounced out of the Australian Open in the third round by Andy Roddick in a bad-tempered dogfight Friday as Serena Williams announced she is back with a vengeance.

World number one Roger Federer also made the fourth round, as did women's champion Amelie Mauresmo and Russian third seed Svetlana Kuznetsova.

Roddick won 7-6 (7/2), 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/2), overcoming the 2005 champion who had repeated runs with the chair umpire over line calls and the state of the court, which got wet before the retractable roof was shut when rain began falling.

"This wasn't routine. Last time he was here he was lifting the trophy," said the American sixth seed, who will now play Croatia's ninth seed Mario Ancic.

"I knew I had to play well and I definitely lifted my game in the last two sets. I had to or I would be going home. It is nice to get through a tough one like this."

In his last four trips Down Under Safin had been champion and runner-up twice, missing his title defence last year with a knee injury.

Williams, unseeded here after an injury-hit 2006, ousted fifth seed Nadia Petrova, proving her fitness by coming from behind to win 1-6, 7-5, 6-3 in a gruelling 2hrs 5mins in the biggest women's upset so far.

The 2003 and 2005 champion showed the fighting qualities that won her seven Grand Slams to set up a fourth round match with Serbia's 11th seed Jelena Jankovic, who overcame Victoria Azarenka of Belarus.

"I'm excited, I'm having fun out here," she said, revelling in beating a player who before the match said Williams no longer possessed the aura that intimidated opponents.

"I felt like I was doing everything

right in the first set and then she was killing me and I was like 'what to do?' so I'm glad I was able to change it up," added Williams, ranked 81 in the world.

Defending champion Federer is now on a run of 32 straight wins after having no trouble dispatching Russia's Mikhail Youzhny, who has never beaten the Swiss in eight attempts.

In all those matches, the 24th seed has only taken two sets off the undisputed top player in the world, and failed miserably again Friday in a 6-3, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) defeat.

The victory pits Federer against exciting Serbian teen Novak Djokovic, who ended the hopes of Thai star Danai Udomchoke in four sets.

"I beat Djokovic twice last year in the Davis Cup and at Monaco. He's definitely improved since," said Federer.

"He's come through his rounds fairly comfortably. Seems like he is playing pretty good. It's a dangerous match for me, that's for sure."

Second seed Mauresmo showed her killer touch in trouncing Eva Birnerova of the Czech Republic 6-3, 6-1 to set up a fourth round tie with another Czech Lucie Safarova.

"Yes, it can get better," said the Frenchwoman.

"There's still a long way to go and I'm really just trying to focus on each day and to improve and get the feeling on court. So far it has gone well but obviously it will get tougher and tougher."

Kuznetsova displayed similar instinct in her all-Russian clash with Maria Kirilenko, humbling the 26th seed 6-1, 6-4 to remain on course for a quarter-final against Williams.

In other matches, Russian seventh seed Elena Dementieva beat Italy's Maria Elena Camerin while tenth seed Czech starlet Nicole Vaidisova downed Slovakia's Katarina Srebotnik.

Among the men, Spanish seventh seed Tommy Robredo beat Sam Querry of the United States while ninth Ancic ended the run of Slovakia's Dominik Hrbaty.



Rising Czech Republic star Nicole Vaidisova applauds the crowd after her victory over Katarina Srebotnik of Slovakia during the third round of the Australian Open at Melbourne on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP

KING'S CUP

Madrid crash out

Football

INTERNET, undated

Real Madrid's participation in the Copa del Rey came an end on Thursday night after they were knocked out by Primera Liga strugglers Real Betis in a fiery encounter at the Bernabeu.

A youthful Madrid, with almost an entire team's worth of absences either through injury or technical reasons, were made to pay for a number of wasted chances as Betis progressed through to the quarterfinals on the away goals rule.

Hosts Madrid, who had earned a goalless draw from the away leg, were handed a flying start when

Robinho made the most of some slack Betis defending to put the home side ahead after just five minutes.

The Brazilian was left with acres of space inside the Betis area to collect a Jose Antonio Reyes corner before lashing home a left-footed shot.

Visiting custodian Antonio Doblas might have felt he could have done better with that effort, but he denied Madrid a second goal with some brave goalkeeping 10 minutes later when Gonzalo Higuain broke free on goal.

An impressive Madrid could have, and perhaps should have, had the game wrapped up inside the opening half-hour with Robinho having a decent penalty appeal turned down before then

blazing over when well-placed.

Ruud van Nistelrooy also almost got on the scoresheet when an attempted clearance from Betis defender Victoriano Nano rebounded off the Dutchman before sliding just wide of the post.

Madrid were punished for their profligacy though when Betis fashioned an equaliser in the 37th minute.

The visitors had been little threat up until that point, testing Diego Lopez only twice, but they got back on level terms when a deep cross into the box was headed back by Maldonado and Dani had the easy task of nodding it into an open goal.

Madrid looked for an immediate reply, and they looked to have got one minutes later when Higuain

slotted home from a tight angle.

But the goal was chalked off for an apparent offside, although it took the celebrating Real players a while to notice the referee's decision.

Although they started the match well, Madrid were unable to repeat that at the beginning of the second half and it was not until Robinho's effort on the hour-mark that they really threatened the visitors' goal.

A flying Sergio Ramos then headed just wide as Madrid started to up the tempo, before the same player brought a brilliant one-handed save out of Doblas from another header.

Robinho saw another effort saved by the visiting custodian,

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Mutiny at Real

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid president Ramon Calderon had an acutely uncomfortable meeting with his players here Thursday in talks designed to clear the air after his controversial remarks about some of their number earlier in the week.

The Real squad pulled no punches in venting their anger at Calderon with a flavour of what the Real boss was told in the 90-minute session reported in the domestic press.

"Are you with us or against us?" one player was quoted as saying.

"You'd have been better off saying what you said to our faces," was another while a teammate fumed: "We're fed up hearing the rubbish coming from his mouth."

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Del Piero goes for 500

AFP, Rome

Alessandro Del Piero will make his 500th appearance for Juventus when the Serie B leaders host Bari this weekend.

The 32-year-old striker, a World Cup winner with Italy last year, is in his 14th season with the Turin club and was one of the few stars to stick by them when they were relegated from Serie A last summer for match-fixing.

Former Italy coach Marcello Lippi, who stood down after the Azzurri triumphed in Germany, heaped praise on Del Piero for his contribution to Italian football.

"Del Piero is exceptional," Lippi said.

"Few players have reached 500

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Saviola's hattrick rewarded

AFP, Barcelona

Argentina forward Javier Saviola is to be rewarded for his midweek hattrick by being offered a new Barcelona contract, Sport newspaper said Thursday.

Saviola struck three times as Barca knocked Alaves out of the Spanish Cup with a 3-2 victory (5-2 on aggregate) at the Nou Camp on Tuesday.

Saviola has scored eight goals in just 11 games this season despite starting only three times, with five of his goals coming in his two cup starts.

And now he looks set to be offered a new deal, although with

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Sheva seeks redemption

AFP, London

build-up to Saturday's match.

While Mourinho has been insisting he would be happy to see out a contract at Chelsea that runs until 2010, Shevchenko has been attempting to prove that he has not demanded special treatment.

"If the manager decides I am not capable, I just have to work harder," the former AC Milan forward said. "It doesn't matter what I think. I remain positive."

"The situation is I came as a new player, the fee was high and the expectation was high and I've been attacked from all sides."

"I am disappointed in some of my performances so far. It's a period where I have not been doing very well. I'm working on it and I want to give 100 per cent."

"Anywhere you go you need time to understand things and you need luck and I haven't had that in recent

FIXTURES

(1500 GMT kick-off unless stated)

Saturday
Aston Villa v Watford, Fulham v Tottenham, Liverpool v Chelsea (245), Manchester City v Blackburn (1715), Middlesbrough v Bolton, Newcastle v West Ham, Portsmouth v Charlton, Reading v Sheffield United

Sunday
Arsenal v Manchester Utd (1600), Wigan v Everton (1330)

times, I want to show people the real me – I'm really moved by the support I get from the fans. When I play I can see that the fans in the stadium are really behind me and give me a lot of support."

As well as deciding what to do with Shevchenko, Mourinho must also judge whether goalkeeper Petr Cech is ready to play his first match since fracturing his skull in a collision with Reading's Stephen Hunt in October.

Medical experts have issued an all-clear for the Czech international to play with a protective helmet but Mourinho may be reluctant to risk one of his "untouchables" returning in such a high-pressure environment.

Liverpool-Chelsea encounters have been among the most bitterly contested fixtures on the English football calendar in recent years and the home side will be desperate to make a point on Saturday with everyone connected with the club still smarting at the memory of back-to-back home defeats by Arsenal in the FA and League Cups.

Arsenal's chances of completing a league double over United this season have been hit by the loss of influential Brazilian midfields Gilber Silveira through suspension.

French youngster Mathieu

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Viola hold no fears

AFP, Rome

unbeaten.

"They seem invincible, but anything can happen in football. We certainly don't feel it's a lost cause."

"It's difficult to find a weakness in this Inter side but one definitely exists, and we'll be looking for it."

"We believe in our own strengths and go to the San Siro knowing we cannot afford to make a mistake. At the same time we have nothing to lose, and this can only help us get an important result."

Fiorentina, who have climbed up into the safety of midtable after



FIXTURES

(all 1400GMT kick-off unless stated):

Saturday
Ascoli v Atalanta (1700), Reggina v Palermo (1930)

Sunday
Catania v Cagliari, Empoli v Sampdoria, Inter Milan v Fiorentina, Livorno v Roma, Parma v Torino, Siena v Chievo, Udinese v Messina, Lazio v AC Milan (1930)

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