



Guillermo Canas (R) pats Roger Federer on the back after defeating the world number one at the ATP Masters Series event Sony Ericsson Open in Miami on Wednesday.

SERENA ROUTS SHARAPOVA

Canas shocks Federer again

Tennis

AFP, Miami

Guillermo Canas stunned world number one Roger Federer for the second time in three weeks, earning a 7-6 (7/2), 2-6, 7-6 (7/5) win in the fourth round of the ATP/WTN Miami Masters Series event.

"I am really surprised because I beat the number one in the world two times," Canas, of Argentina, said. "I played great tennis. It is like a dream."

Canas's win Tuesday validated a convincing straight-sets upset on March 11 at the Indian Wells Masters Series tournament that snapped Federer's 41-match winning streak.

Canas improved to 3-1 all-time against the tournament's top seed.

"I messed it up," Federer said. "I played so much better than a couple of weeks ago. I was really expecting to win tonight. It is one of those matches I should have never lost."

Just hours earlier, Serena Williams humiliated the top-seeded Maria Sharapova for the second time this year with a convincing 6-1, 6-1 fourth round win at the 6.9 million dollar tournament.

Williams' dismantling of Sharapova looked remarkably similar to her 6-1, 6-2 demolition in the Australian Open final and further confirmed her renewed commitment to tennis after over a year of injuries and distractions.

"I know if I'm playing well, then anything can happen," said Williams, a two-time champion of this event.

Williams deployed her power game to neutralise the length and court coverage of the 6-1 Sharapova, whose grunts and groans intensify with the importance of the points and could easily be heard above the crowd.

As she was in Melbourne eight weeks ago, the 13th-seeded Williams was relentless, winning the last five games of the first set and the last six of the second set. She never faced a break point and converted five of her own.

"I never think about, 'I'm winning. It's easy.' Because every point, Maria is a fighter. She doesn't give up," Williams said.

Williams is looking less like the overweight, under-motivated player she was last year and more like the eight-time Grand Slam winner.

"I don't know anyone who's won

eight Grand Slams and had so many doubters in her life," Williams said. Tuesday's romp came a day after she was heckled during her third-round win over Czech Lucie Safarova.

Told by the heckler to "Hit the net like any Negro would," Williams was rattled at the time. "It was over once the match was over," Williams said.

Meanwhile, Sharapova failed to reach the quarterfinals as the top seed for the second straight event, raising questions about her game.

"You obviously go out on the practice court and work on it," she said. "It'll take time, but I'm sure I'll get there."

Canas also has had a long road back. In September, he returned from a 15-month suspension for using a banned substance and has been playing his way back into form.

Canas immediately put the pressure on the two-time defending champion by winning the first set.

Federer found his form in the second set but continually struggled with his return game that saw him convert just four of 16 break points.

"I could have won but I didn't do it, so it is disappointing," Federer said. "He scrambles back so many balls and doesn't miss much. I have a

feeling sometimes players play better against me than they would against other players because they have nothing to lose."

The match was played in an electric atmosphere because of the high number of South American fans.

"As long as they don't boo my Swiss flag," Federer said. "South America doesn't have a Masters Series so they consider this one as theirs."

Federer's second straight early departure again opens the door for second seed Rafael Nadal of Spain, who beat Juan Martin Del Potro of Argentina. Nadal won the Pacific Life Open, his first tourney victory since the 2006 French Open.

Third-seeded Andy Roddick continued his strong play this season with a 7-5, 6-3 victory over 13th-seeded David Ferrer of Spain.

Up next for Roddick is 12th seed Andy Murray of Britain, who stormed back from the brink of elimination for a 2-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory over Paul-Henri Mathieu of France.

"There was somebody in the crowd who at 5-3, match point down, shouted at me, 'Murray, you've got nothing,' Murray said. "And I was like, 'Well, I do.'"

C'Ron in doubt for Serbia tie

AFP, Lisbon

Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo is in doubt for Wednesday's Euro 2008 qualifier against Serbia in Belgrade after suffering a sprain in training Tuesday.

A Portuguese Football Federation spokesman said the Manchester United striker picked up the injury in the final minutes of training at the Red Star Belgrade stadium.

Ronaldo scored twice to help Portugal to a 4-0 win in Saturday's European qualifier against Belgium in Lisbon.

Portugal are third in Group A three points behind leaders Poland with the top two teams qualifying for the Euro 2008 finals.

McClaren gets FA backing

AFP, Barcelona

The Football Association's (FA) International Committee on Tuesday moved to dismiss reports they have summoned under-fire England boss Steve McClaren to explain the team's poor recent performances.

Speculation has arisen that figures on the influential 11-man committee want to get rid of McClaren after results which have left England struggling to qualify for Euro 2008.

But in a statement issued ahead of Wednesday's European qualifier against Andorra here, FA International Committee chairman Noel White and vice-chairman Sir David Richards expressed their backing for McClaren.

"It is very disappointing to see reports that we have, or will, 'summon' Steve McClaren to explain himself to the International Committee when we return to England," the pair said in a statement.

"At a time when we are giving our full support to Steve and the England team ahead of the game with Andorra, these stories are very unhelpful."

McClaren will, however, be required to attend a routine briefing when the International Committee meets next month.

"As the senior members of the committee, we can confirm that Steve, as normal, will attend the next international committee meeting as he and every England manager always has," the statement said.

"There is nothing out of the ordinary with this. It is routine."

"We have been with the squad throughout the past week and it is obvious to us just how hard Steve and his coaching staff are working to get results."

"We would once again like to offer our full support to Steve and all the team."

Arsenal, Chelsea fined

AFP, London

Arsenal and Chelsea have been slapped with a 100,000-pound fine each by the Football Association for the behaviour of players and backroom staff near the end of the League Cup final a month ago.

The melee at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium on February 25 was sparked following a confrontation between Chelsea's Jon Obi Mikel and Arsenal captain Kolo Toure, with players and coaches from both sides becoming involved.

Both players were dismissed, alongside Arsenal's Togo international striker Emmanuel Adebayor, who confronted referee Howard Webb and refused to immediately leave the pitch.

The FA's disciplinary commission on Tuesday stated that they viewed the incident as "serious, unacceptable and damaging to the image of the game."

However, they took into consideration the guilty pleas and the mitigation put forward by both Premiership clubs, following Chelsea's 2-1 success.

The commission found that Arsenal players had been "marginally more involved in the incident, but that Chelsea had past proven cases in recent years regarding the general behaviour of their players where warnings had been issued."

FA Cup final at Wembley

AFP, London

The new Wembley Stadium will host this year's FA Cup final on May 19, the Football Association (FA) confirmed on Tuesday.

The 90,000-seater national stadium, rebuilt at a cost of 800-million pounds (1.45 billion dollars), has been awarded its general safety certificate from Brent Council.

FA chief executive Brian Barwick said the announcement was "great news for football fans in this country and indeed the world over."

He added: "The Cup final and Wembley Stadium go hand in hand and everybody at the FA is looking forward to a great day."

The final will be between the winners of next month's semi-finals between Chelsea and Blackburn; and Manchester United and

Loew admits using psychologist

AFP, Berlin

Germany coach Joachim Loew revealed on Wednesday some of the pressure faced by national football coaches when he admitted he sees a psychologist to help him cope with the job.

The 47-year-old was Juergen Klinsmann's assistant during the 2006 World Cup held in Germany and, although the unfancied team finished a commendable third, he admitted needing professional help to come to terms with the experience.

Loew, who succeeded Klinsmann as national coach last July, is not alone in needing a psy-

chologist to help him with the job -- England coach Sven-Goran Eriksson also used a therapist during his five years in charge.

"The World Cup took a lot out of me," Loew told the German weekly newspaper Die Zeit.

Loew says he still feels the pressure to get results and never appreciated the good work that was done to reach third spot.

"We could hardly be delighted just to beat Poland in the pool stages and we constantly felt under pressure to perform, right from the early games," he said.

In the changing room (after the 3-1 third place victory over Portugal), the team was delighted with the win, but we came straight down to earth again and asked how we could do better.

"As a group, we never really gave ourselves a break and it was incredible how hard we were on ourselves."

Loew, undefeated in eight games since taking charge, says he still sees a psychologist "occasionally, but it is more to see how I am doing."

In July 2006, Klinsmann turned down the chance to stay on as German head coach saying he was burned out after two years in the role and wanted to spend more time with his family in the United States.

After Germany beat the Czech Republic 2-1 in Prague last Saturday, Loew's side top their qualifying group for next summer's European Championships and face Denmark in a friendly at home on Wednesday.

Domenech demands ban on racists

AFP, Marcoussis

France football coach Raymond Domenech said he hoped whoever was responsible for the racist banner in Lithuania on Saturday would pay but not the country's football federation.

Football has been fighting for years at all levels of the game to eradicate racism however a huge banner was unveiled in Vilnius by Lithuanian fans with the African continent painted in French colours with the slogan: "Welcome to Europe."

Lithuanian legal authorities have opened an inquiry into the

matter following the Euro 2008 qualifier won 1-0 by France thanks to a Nicola Anelka goal in the second half.

Domenech said at their Marcoussis training base on Tuesday: "We are fighting against idiots, people who are tarnishing the image of sport. But we had a good welcome in Lithuania, things went well in the stadium and there was no whistling during our national anthem."

"I hope the people who are really guilty, those who unveiled the banner, are punished, but not the Lithuanian football federation."

"This type of banner is completely scandalous and shameful. It's good that an inquiry is being

held as we can't continue (in football) with this idiocy."

France defender Lilian Thuram said he was shocked by the banner but then said similar things had been happening in France and pointed out how a member of the Socialist Party had been excluded for commenting on the amount of coloured players in the French team.

"Unfortunately the times we are going through at this moment in our history are a little sad and grim," Thuram added. "This situation does not eat me up but we must revert to a fairer and calmer situation otherwise we'll end up with a catastrophe. (...) We must learn to live and respect each other."

Raikkonen favours night racing

AFP, Sepang

Finland's Kimi Raikkonen has backed a controversial plan to stage Formula One grand prix races at night.

Formula One supremo Bernie Ecclestone has spoken of including night races on the F1 schedule as early as next season.

"For me it is okay as long as there is enough lighting," Raikkonen told reporters during testing here ahead of the April 8 Malaysian Grand Prix.

But some top drivers have opposed the plan. Citing safety reasons, world champion Fernando Alonso has come out against night races.

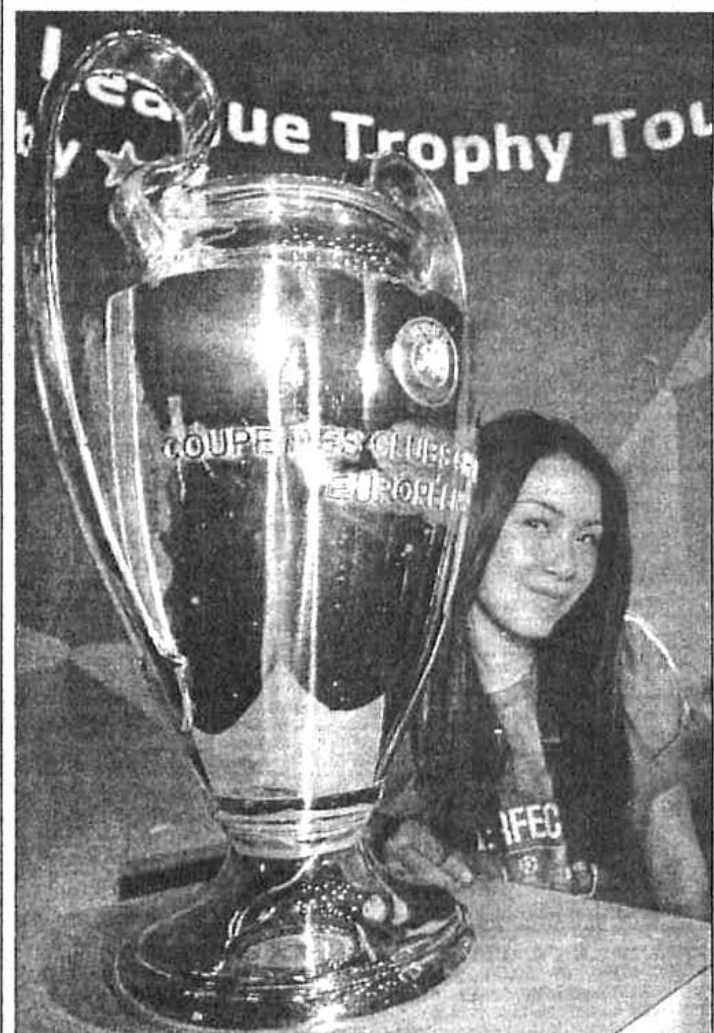
The Spaniard had recently said in Australia that he had some experience of racing at night at the McLaren team's 2007 season launch.

"We launched the car in Valencia at night and it was extremely difficult to see the road," Alonso said.

"For me, it's very hard to believe that they will have strong enough lights to see okay to have a grand prix."

But support for Ecclestone's plans seems growing after Mokhzani Mahathir, chairman of the Sepang International Circuit (SIC), backed night races.

"For me it makes commercial sense to host a night race. It is cooler to race here and we think we can get more people to come and watch at Sepang," he said.



A lady poses with the UEFA Champions League Trophy during a press conference in Bangkok on Wednesday. The trophy is on an Asia tour and will be displayed for two weeks in Bangkok and Pattaya.

WORLD SWIMMING CHAMPIONSHIP

Phelps fires as Hackett fizzles

Swimming

AFP, Melbourne

Michael Phelps, Laure Manaudou and Leila Vaziri obliterated world records here Wednesday on another sensational night of swimming but Grant Hackett's reign as king of the 800m freestyle ended.

Phelps, 21, carved a huge 1:51.41 seconds off his own 200m butterfly world record to set a new mark of one minute 52.09 seconds and leave China's top swimmer Wu Peng (1:55.13) and Russia's Nikolay Skvortsov (1:55.22) in his wake.

But there was disappointment for the once invincible Hackett who faded badly to finish seventh behind Tunisian winner Oussama Mellouli (7:46.95) in an event he was defending and in which he holds the world record.

Hackett was sluggish and never in the race with only the 1500m, where he is unbeaten in a decade, now left to salvage his meet.

"If I had more fuel in the tank I would have stepped it up a few places," said the Australian, who is the most decorated swimmer in world championship history.

"It's extremely disappointing when you've swum almost 20 seconds faster than that."

Poland's Przemyslaw Stanczyk took the 800m silver while Australia's Craig Stevens grabbed the bronze.

Phelps' phenomenal success made him the only swimmer to win a 200m butterfly world title three times and keeps him on track for eight gold medals here as he gears up to challenge Mark Spitz's seven Olympic titles in Beijing next year.

"I surprised myself. I went so fast," said the American. "I wanted to go 1:52.00 but I didn't expect to swim 1:52.00."

"I'm showing I'm in solid shape now. I had a really good swim earlier in the season where I broke the world record."

"I wanted to take it out tonight, so I'm pretty happy."

He has now set two world records at the meet after his stunning win over Pieter van den Hoogenband in Tuesday's 200m freestyle final and returned later Wednesday to qualify fastest in the 200m individual medley semifinals.

Manaudou, 20, was equally impressive, leading from the gun to win her second gold medal of the championships in a new world record time of 1:55.52.

Annika Lurz of Germany fought her to the wall to take silver in 1:55.68 while Italy's Federica Pellegrini, who set a new world mark in the semifinals on Tuesday, grabbed the bronze in 1:56.97.

Manaudou dropped out of the 50m backstroke semifinals Wednesday to focus on the 200m and it paid rich dividends.

"I didn't expect to set another world record but Pellegrini is a great swimmer and she will get it again next time," Manaudou said.

"The 400m freestyle is my race. There is stress for me to perform and I put pressure on myself. I just performed exceptionally well."

Despite seeing her record snatched away Pellegrini was content.

"I just wanted to improve on yesterday which was a perfect race and you can't improve on a perfect race," Pellegrini said. "There's still time for me to do it again."

Mellouli, who won Tunisia's first ever championship gold, said it was all the better for being achieved in Australia, but he had sympathy for Hackett.

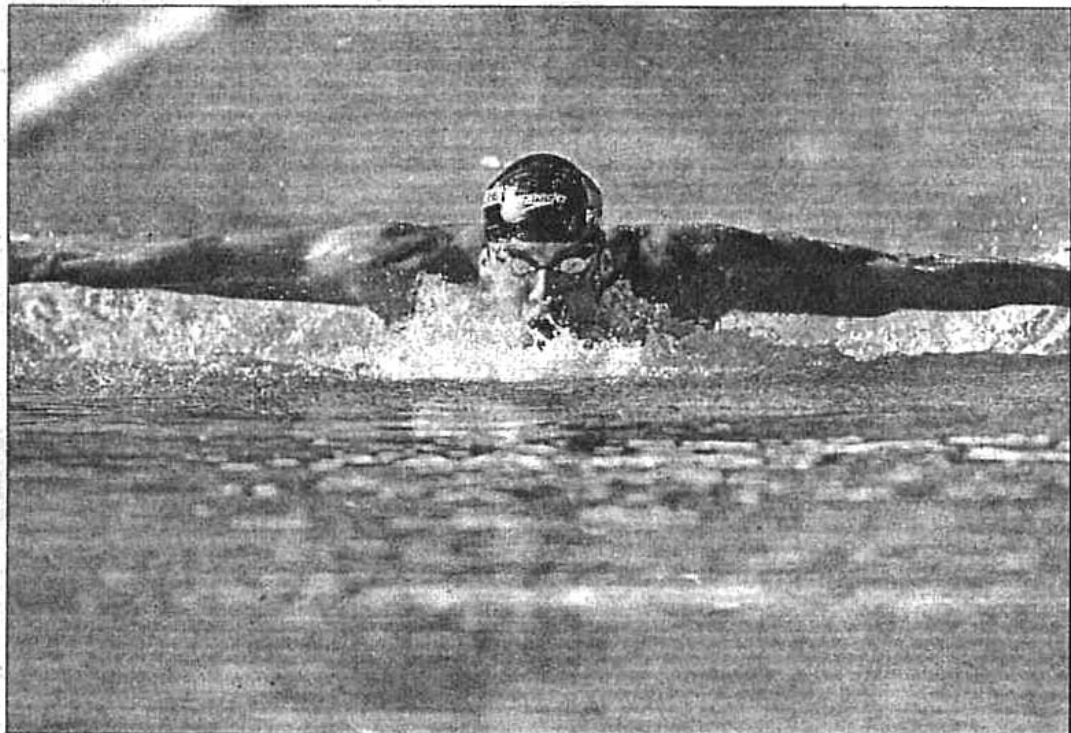
"It's that much better making it happen here in Australia, because

the country is so in love with swimming," he said.

"I don't think it was Grant's day, but he is a tremendous athlete. Hopefully he'll make a comeback next year."

Vaziri unexpectedly set a new world record in the women's 50m backstroke, touching in 28.16 during a lightning semifinal swim to qualify for the final fastest, shaving 0.03 off the time set by Germany's Janine Pietsch in 2005.

In the night's other final, Ukraine's Oleg Lisogor won the men's 50m breaststroke gold medal ahead of US star Brendan Hansen and South Africa's Cameron van der Burgh, but his 27.66 seconds was outside world record time.



American swimming prodigy Michael Phelps is at full stretch during men's 200m butterfly final at the 12th FINA World Swimming Championships in Melbourne on Wednesday. Phelps won in a world record time of 1:52.09.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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Yesterday's Cryptoquip: CHILDREN'S SONG
CONCERNING AN ARTIST'S STAND THAT
EXPLODES: "POP GOES THE EASEL"
Today's Cryptoquip Clue: X equals P