



Australia's Lleyton Hewitt makes a double-fisted backhand return against Gaston Gaudio of Argentina during their French Open second round match at Roland Garros on Thursday.

Hewitt, Nadal on collision course

AFP, Paris



Never-say-die Lleyton Hewitt staged a dramatic French Open fightback on Thursday to edge closer to a Roland Garros showdown against defending champion Rafael Nadal.

Australian Hewitt pulled off his fourth career comeback from two sets down to defeat 2004 champion Gaston Gaudio in a marathon second round clash.

In complete contrast, Nadal brushed aside Italian world number 227 Flavio Cipolla 6-2, 6-1, 6-4.

"Gaston's one of the toughest second round draws you can get here," said 14th seed Hewitt after his 4-6, 3-6, 6-2, 6-4, 6-2 victory set up a third round clash with Jarkko Nieminen.

"At the end of the second set, I was just trying to focus on the third. I wasn't even thinking about the fourth or fifth sets."

The 28-year-old Gaudio admitted that defeat was becoming depressingly familiar after winning just six times all year.

"I'm getting used to such a frustrating experience," he said.

"I served well in the first two sets. But he broke my serve in the third game of the third set and after that I couldn't play anymore."

Nadal, the double defending champion and who has a 16-0 career record at Roland Garros, will face either Latvian teenager Ernests Gulbis or compatriot Albert Montanes for a last 16 place.

Sharapova was joined in the third round by 2002 champion Serena Williams, the eighth seed, who enjoyed a 6-0, 7-6 (7/3) win over Venezuela's Milagros Sequera.

Australian Open champion Williams will face Michaella Krajicek with the Dutchwoman having admitted that the American is her idol.

In the women's singles, second

seed Maria Sharapova, looking to win a first French Open, where she has never got beyond the quarterfinals, eased past American veteran Jill Craybas 6-2, 6-1.

Sharapova admitted that she still needs to work on her movement around the court if she is to get anywhere nearer a Roland Garros title.

"I feel terrible. I feel like a cow on ice, especially on clay," said the Russian who faces compatriot and qualifier Alla Kudryavtseva for a place in the last 16.

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Australian Open champion Williams will face Michaella Krajicek with the Dutchwoman having admitted that the American is her idol.

That's really sweet but when I

played her in Rome she played like she wasn't impressed," recalled Williams of her victory on the Italian clay two weeks ago.

Serbian seventh seed Ana Ivanovic was also an easy winner, defeating India's Sania Mirza 6-1, 6-4 and now meets Romanian qualifier Ioana Raluca Olaru.

Serbian sixth seed Novak Djokovic, tipped as an outsider for the men's title, needed four sets to get past French world number 306 Laurent Recouder.

Former Australian Open runner-up Marcos Baghdatis, the 16th seeded Cypriot, also made the third round with a straight sets triumph over Denmark's Kristian Pless.

Seventh seed Ivan Ljubicic, 12th seed David Ferrer and 23rd seed Carlos Moya, the 1998 champion, were also third round winners on Thursday.

Blatter to serve another term

AFP, Zurich

FIFA president Sepp Blatter is set to be voted in for a third term as the boss of football's world governing body here this week with social responsibility the main thrust of the coming years.

Blatter, who became president in 1998, also said his new tenure, set to begin at the 57th annual congress which starts on Thursday as he is the only candidate, would herald the end of a troubled period in the body's history.

"For the last 30 years we have made great efforts in the development of football, the game," Blatter said. "Now our sport has developed fully and is played all over the world and another task awaits us: social responsibility."

"This is the main message which will come out of the congress."

"We must make sure to always respect solidarity, fair-play," and

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Azzurri duo miss out

INTERNET, undated

Gianluca Zambrotta and Massimo Ambrosini will miss Italy's Euro 2008 qualifier with the Faroe Islands on Saturday.

The Azzurri, currently fourth in Group B behind Ukraine, Scotland and France, will face the minnows in Torshavn, before travelling to Kaunas where they will play Lithuania on June 6.

Zambrotta and Ambrosini are struggling with a calf and thigh injuries respectively and will not travel to the Faroe Islands with the rest of the squad this evening.

Azzurri doctor Professor Ferretti confirmed that the two players will in fact stay at Milanello, where they will play in the rest of the squad.

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Diplomacy lesson for Norwegian booters

AFP, Oslo

Norway's national squad are to be given lessons from the country's diplomatic chief, just two days before their next Euro 2008 qualifier against Malta.

Norway play Malta here on Saturday but Jonas Gahr Stoere was Thursday due to talk to the squad about "questions on international news, Norway's international image and sport as a medium of union amongst nations," the Foreign Affairs Ministry said in a statement.

The meeting, which is closed to the press, was the idea of the Norwegian football federation.

French hopes fade away

AFP, Paris



French hopes of a first men's singles title at Roland Garros since Yannick Noah nearly a quarter of a century ago lay in tatters Wednesday after the defeat of their top players in the opening two rounds.

Veterans Sebastien Grosjean (28), Arnaud Clement (29) and Fabrice Santoro (34) all failed to make it past the first round to the dismay of the partisan Parisian crowds.

And matters got distinctly worse on Wednesday when French No.1 Richard Gasquet had a nightmare game on the centre court against Belgium's Kristof Vliegen losing 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 6-1.

Much had been expected of the 11th seed who has long been regarded as one of the most precocious talents in the game but who has struggled with injuries and mental lapses.

The 20-year-old from the southern town of Beziers was complaining of a bad blister on his racquet hand going in to the tournament, but he looked comfortable.

The former top junior was also

able in his straight sets first round win over compatriot Nicolas Mahut.

Instead it was the mental side that let him down against Vliegen, a 24-year-old ranked world No.74.

"I'm shocked. It wasn't great to say the least," he said after trudging off court to scattered jeers from the home fans.

"I sort of liquefied little by little after I lost the first set. The court was too big and the people were expecting too much of me."

"And I wanted to do things well and put too much pressure on myself and didn't succeed. It was rubbish."

That pressure may have started as soon as he rose from bed on Wednesday morning to find his picture plastered over the front page of L'Equipe under the headline "The youngsters are taking over."

The highly-respected and read

sports daily said that the times were changing, a new generation was taking over in French tennis and Gasquet was the pick of the new boys on the block.

The former top junior was also

responsible on the front cover of the official French Open

programme and he was given pride of place as second match up on the

Philippe Chatrier centre court.

It all, it seems, proved too much for him to cope with especially after the crowd started to jeer some of his efforts.

"When people feel you're not playing your best tennis, they're not happy. It's quite natural," he said.

"But then what you feel on the court is very difficult. You feel really lonely. You feel really on your own."

"I never felt more alone on a court than today. It was horrible."

Gasquet's collapse evoked memories of the many Paris failures endured by top woman player Amelie Mauresmo who despite winning at Wimbledon and Australia has never gone beyond the quarterfinals here in 12 attempts.

Mauresmo, who won her opening match minutes later, had words of consolation for her countryman.

"People say you learn a lot from defeat and it's true," she said.

"It happened to me in the past. And the only thing I wish for him is to learn for this match he lost."

Fading French hopes, however, were given a slight boost late in the day with wins for youngster Gael Monfils and doubles expert Michael Llodra, but neither were seeded or expected to make it much beyond the first week.

ENGLAND V BRAZIL

McClaren plays his last hand

Football

AFP, London

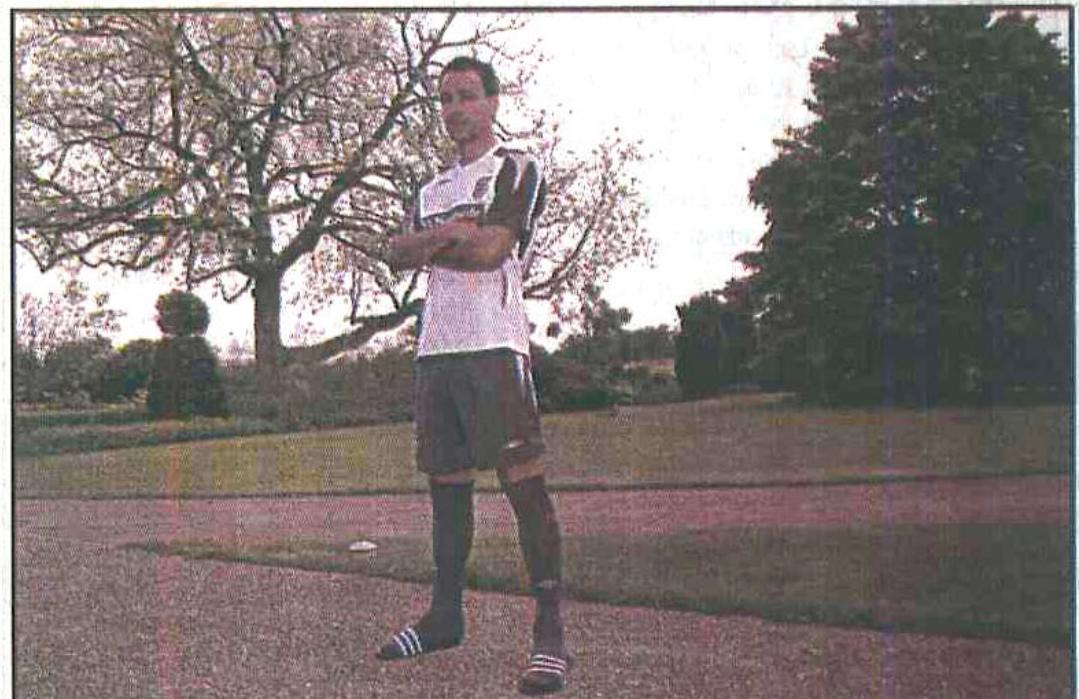
While McClaren ponders those potential problems he will be relieved the spotlight is temporarily off him as England and Beckham make an emotional return to the game's spiritual home.

England will be making their first appearance at Wembley since October 2000 when they lost 1-0 to Germany in the last match at the old stadium before it was demolished to make way for the impressive 800 million pounds arena that finally opened earlier this year.

The rebuilt Wembley is a fitting venue for the first meeting between these countries since the 2002 World Cup quarterfinal in Shizuoka, an encounter that won't hold many fond memories for Beckham.

Brazil were trailing 1-0 when Beckham jumped out of a tackle and the South Americans broke away to equalise before winning the tie with a freak goal from Ronaldinho.

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Nani poised for United

Football

AFP, Manchester

Sporting Lisbon striker Nani is set to sign for Manchester United announced the English Premier League champions on Wednesday.

United assistant coach Carlos Queiroz and executive director David Gill, met the 21-year-old Cap Verde born-star's agent Jorge Mendes in Lisbon early on Wednesday.

While Sporting Lisbon and Nani refused to comment United later released a statement on its website saying they had agreed terms with both him and FC Porto's 19-year-old Brazilian Anderson.

"Terms are agreed with both players and an announcement will take place once a medical and other procedures are done," said a statement on the club's website.

Nani -- who has scored once in five international appearances for Portugal -- is likely to cost 20 million euros due to a buy out clause in

his contract.

Anderson -- who joined Porto from Gremio in 2005 -- is in Brazil's Copa America squad, though, not in the one selected for Friday's friendly with England.

Sporting had made it clear that they would prefer Nani -- who has been with them since 2005 -- stay.

"Sporting will not confirm the meeting took place," said club spokesman Salema Garcia.

"All we will say is that we would like Nani to stay. Of course if a club is interested, it will have to pay the sum of the buy out clause."

United have already enjoyed tremendous success with a former Sporting Lisbon player, Cristiano Ronaldo, who won both senior and young player of the year awards last term after sparkling performances and other procedures are done," said a statement on the club's website.

Should both signings go through without a hitch United are likely to quickly add England international midfielder Owen Hargreaves for 17million pounds from German giants Bayern Munich.

Venus sets new mark

AFP, Paris

Venus Williams warmed up a chilly French Open by sending down the fastest serve ever recorded in a women's main draw match here on Wednesday.

Williams clocked 206 kmh (128mph) during her second round 6-1, 7-6 (10/8) win over compatriot Ashley Harkleroad on Court Suzanne Lenglen.

"I loved it," said Williams whose record coincided with her allowing Harkleroad back into the match from 2-5 down, and holding match points to having to fend off four set points when she should have safely backed in the locker room.

"That's where I lost my focus a little bit because I saw the 206. I was so excited. When I was younger I was always trying to serve harder and harder."

"Now that I'm not trying to serve hard, it comes hard. It was unexpected," added Williams who registered the new mark in the fifth game of the second set when she was leading 4-1.

Williams set the old mark of 204kmh (127mph) in 1998 in a quarter-final win against Mary

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The little Mourinho

INTERNET, undated

Giancarlo Corradini will sit on the Juventus bench for the final games of the season after Didier Deschamps' resignation. "I feel like a little Jose Mourinho."

The 46-year-old has spent this term as assistant manager to Deschamps and took charge of his first Bianconeri training session this afternoon.

"I feel like a little Mourinho," he told 'Juventus Channel,' referring to the 'Champions' boss' start as assistant manager at Chelsea.

"He also learned by working beside winning coaches. I hope all of this will help when I start my career proper."

Corradini will take charge of Juve for the last two Serie B matches against Bari and Spezia, as promotion and the title is already secure despite their nine-point Calciopoli penalty.

"The first step in my work will be on Sunday. It has been a difficult season and we had a lot of problems, especially at the midway point."

"But we held on and came out of it in great shape, above all thanks to the strength of this squad and everyone's willingness to help out."

With the results essentially meaningless and several stars away on international duty, Corradini may be tempted to make changes.

"I will continue the work we have done here throughout the year. My responsibilities may grow, but the squad is united," he added.

"I want to salute Didier, who I spent a wonderful season with. Thanks to him and all the staff we have achieved a great objective despite the obstacles in our path."

There was also an emergency

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Sir David Beckham?

Football

APP, London

Blair's resignation honours list or the queen's birthday honours list.

As well as his footballing success, his claims for the top award are bolstered by his charity work and role in helping to secure the