



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. PHOTO: AFP

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. Nadal and Hewitt are seeded to meet in the fourth round where they clashed in 2006 with the Spaniard winning in four sets. In the women's singles, second

seed Maria Sharapova, looking to win a first French Open, where she has never got beyond the quarter-finals, 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. 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 Michaela Krajcek 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 Recouderc. 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 Milan, where the

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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 Støre 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 Sebastian 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 rugby town of Beziers was complaining of a bad blister on his racket hand going in to the tournament, but he looked comfort-

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 dejected 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 in 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 resplendent 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 defeats and it's true," she said. "It happened to me in the past. And the only thing I wish for him is to learn from 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

As England's fortunes have gone from bad to worse during Steve McClaren's troubled reign, the beleaguered coach has increasingly resembled a gambler desperately trying to claw back his losses with one big bet. McClaren has already rolled the dice and lost several times during a Euro 2008 qualifying campaign marred by bizarre formations and a rocky relationship with England's fans and the media. But nothing compares with the risk involved in his decision to bring David Beckham back from international exile. A defeat to Brazil in Friday's glamour friendly at Wembley would be forgivable given the quality of the opposition. It is the

manner of the team's performance in their Euro 2008 tie against Estonia next Wednesday that will determine whether McClaren makes it to the close season without further criticism. If Beckham and company fail to deliver a convincing win against the Group E whipping boys in Tallinn, the knives will be out for McClaren. That isn't the only problem for the coach. From August Beckham will be playing in America and a lack of serious opposition will inevitably dilute the competitive instincts needed at the highest level. Beckham runs the risk of being exposed by Croatia and Russia in next season's crucial qualifiers and if he is McClaren's gamble will have failed. And, with assistant coach Terry Venables and several senior players reportedly unhappy at Beckham's recall, it is reasonable to question what affect it will have on the team's morale.

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 too 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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England captain John Terry poses for photograph at the Grove Hotel in Hertfordshire in north London on Thursday as England prepare to challenge Brazil at Wembley in a friendly tonight. PHOTO: AFP

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 Mourinho," he said. 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 Chelsea boss' start as assistant manager at Barcelona. "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?

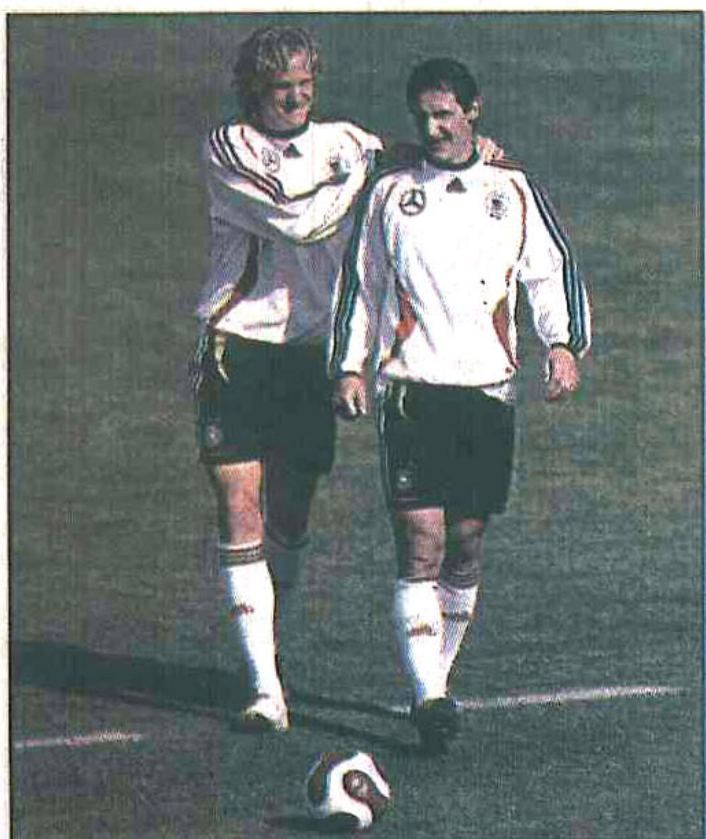
Football

AFP, London

Officials in Britain are wrangling over whether former England football captain David Beckham should be given a knighthood, London's Evening Standard reported Thursday. Civil servants have been asked to consider whether he is suitable for the top honour, awarded by Queen Elizabeth II, but some have argued that he should not be made Sir David because he is moving to play in the United States. "His name has been put forward but there is a view among some officials that it should not be approved while there is a conflict between his future as an England player and his contract with an American club," an unnamed source told the paper. "Some officials feel that there is nothing wrong with honouring a player who is based in Europe and free to represent his country if required, but feel there is a big difference if the same player is earning his main income and paying tax in the United States and unable to play for England." Beckham, 32, has just earned a recall to the England squad and is due to move from Real Madrid to LA Galaxy in Los Angeles in August. His new club is reportedly concerned that his resurrected England career could clash with his commitments to them, hinting that he may not be released for non-competitive games. He was awarded the lower OBE (Order of the British Empire) award in 2003 and could see that upgraded to a knighthood within a few months, either in premier Tony

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 2012 Olympics for London. His wife, former Spice Girl Victoria Beckham, who would

become Lady Victoria if her husband was honoured, told the BBC last year: "It's just so camp, it's wonderful isn't it? Lady Victoria...that would be quite amazing." Downing Street has refused to comment on the story, while royal officials never comment on likely recipients of gongs in advance.



Germany international Miroslav Klose (R) is patted by teammate defender Marcell Jansen during a training session on Wednesday in Herzogenaurach, southern Germany, prior to their Euro 2008 qualifier against San Marino on June 2. PHOTO: AFP

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 back 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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