



HENIN-IVANOVIC FINAL Serb surge sweeps Sharapova away

AP, Paris



Maria Sharapova lost her French Open semifinal to Ana Ivanovic, a Serbian teenager who soared to a 6-2, 6-1 victory Thursday to reach her first Grand Slam final.

Justine Henin beat Jelena Jankovic 6-2, 6-2 in the other semifinal. The Belgian will become the first woman to win three consecutive titles at Roland Garros since Monica Seles in 1990-92 if she defeats Ivanovic on Saturday.

In their only previous meeting two years ago, Henin beat Ivanovic in straight sets on clay in Warsaw, Poland.

Ivanovic, seeded seventh, neutralised Sharapova's power and kept her on the run. Sharapova was looking to advance to her third consecutive final in a major after winning last year's U.S. Open.

"I was thinking the game would be much closer," Ivanovic said.

She is an aggressive player and likes to dominate. I knew she was not a great mover on the clay."

Sharapova's defeat was reminiscent of her 6-1, 6-2 loss to Serena Williams in the Australian Open final in January. Playing in her first French Open semifinal, Sharapova struggled to chase down Ivanovic's pinpoint strokes.

Her performance was riddled with unforced errors and five double-faults, and she lasted little more than an hour on centre-court.

Sharapova trailed 5-0 in the second set, before holding for 5-1. Ivanovic closed the win with her fifth ace. Sharapova had 25 unforced errors to 11 for Ivanovic and hit only four baseline winners.

Ivanovic started quickly, holding her opening serve and then broke Sharapova immediately with a strong forehand flick down the line. Sharapova double-faulted to go 5-1 down, broke back for 5-2, but lost the first set in 32 minutes when she double-faulted for the fourth time.

Ivanovic broke Sharapova in the second game of the second set. In the next game, Ivanovic

was briefly in trouble at 0-30 down before rallying to win the next four points to move 3-0 up. That was as close as Ivanovic got to being under pressure.

"I think I played a pretty good match," Ivanovic said. "I knew I had to be aggressive from the beginning, I didn't make many unforced errors. My serve worked well."

Henin improved to 6-0 against Jankovic head-to-head, including a win in the semifinals of last year's U.S. Open. But it was the first time the Serb had lost in straight sets to Henin, who also won in Paris in 2003.

Jankovic rallied midway through the second set, and Henin had to save a break point before moving ahead 5-2. Jankovic double-faulted to go 15-40 down on her serve and give Henin two match points.

She won at the first attempt when Jankovic's forehand sailed long. Henin clenched her fist and blew a kiss to the crowd.

PHOTO: AFP

Ana Ivanovic of Serbia hits a backhand shot against Russia's Maria Sharapova during their French Open semifinal match at Roland Garros on Thursday. Ivanovic won 6-2, 6-1.

Klose buries hatchet with Frings

AFP, Berlin

German striker Miroslav Klose buried the hatchet with national and Werder Bremen teammate Torsten Frings on Wednesday over comments in the German press that Klose should quit the Bundesliga club.

The 28-year-old Klose - top-scorer at last year's World Cup - has been under pressure since failing to score in Germany's 6-0 rout over minnows San Marino on Saturday and has been linked with a multi-million euro transfer to Bayern Munich.

But Frings, 30, stirred things up by saying he believes Klose wants to leave Bremen and his priorities lie elsewhere, which drew his teammate's wrath on the eve of Germany's Euro 2008 clash with Slovakia.

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Parker joins West Ham

AFP, London

Scott Parker has signed a five-year, seven-million pound (10.3-million euro) contract for West Ham, the London club said on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old Parker, the first summer signing for the East London club, left Newcastle to link up with Alan Curbishley, his former manager at Charlton.

Curbishley said: "I'm delighted Scott has agreed to sign for us. Our relationship goes back some time to when he first joined Charlton as a schoolboy."

"He's coming to the club knowing full well that we're trying to

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Happy hunting for top guns

AFP, Paris



David Beckham and David Villa produced outstanding individual performances to put England and Spain respectively firmly back in the hunt for places at Euro 2008 on Wednesday.

Beckham created two of England's goals as they beat pointless Estonia 3-0, easing the pressure on coach Steve McClaren and taking them to within three points of the top two in the group jointly led by Croatia - held 0-0 by Russia and Israel, who beat Andorra 2-0 away.

Villa scored a brace as a less than convincing Spain edged Liechtenstein 2-0 in Vaduz but with their fourth victory in as many matches Luis Aragones' side are now in the second qualifying spot albeit having played one more game than third placed Northern Ireland.

Last year's World Cup final duo Italy and France look set for a battle to the end in their group, though, if France play as sloppily as they did in their 1-0 win over Georgia.

That would give third placed Scotland a chance to pull off a surprise.

The Scots got a monkey off their backs with a 2-0 win away in the Faroe Islands - an opponent they had drawn with on the last two occasions at their Toftr stadium.

Beckham created goals for Peter Crouch and Michael Owen - his first goal for England since last June though he has spent most of that time out injured - and pro-

fessed that he was looking for a longer run in the side.

"Was I on trial? I'm not sure about that," Beckham told Sky Sports.

"I would love to be in the next squad and Steve (McClaren the England boss) has made it clear that I would retain my place if my form is good."

The 32-year-old - dropped unceremoniously to 3-0, easing the pressure on coach Steve McClaren and taking them to within three points of the top two in the group jointly led by Croatia - held 0-0 by Russia and Israel, who beat Andorra 2-0 away.

"I guess we should have scored more goals but that can happen in football, the chances simply do not go in," sighed the veteran Spanish handler.

"However we have two wins from the last two matches and I cannot but be happy with that and what it means for our chances of qualifying."

The game with Brazil (a 1-1 draw in a friendly last Friday) set us up for this," said the soon to be promoted LA Galaxy mid-fielder.

"We did the job tonight (Wednesday) and scored some goals."

"The confidence is coming back into the squad which it should do as not only do we have some of the best players in the British Isles but also in the world."

"This is how we should play and we are now in a better position."

McClaren refused to be drawn on whether he had made a mistake in dropping Beckham so quickly after the World Cup but was full of praise for what he termed his immense contribution to the match.

"David Beckham is a very, very good player, and he deserves to be in team, as he's shown in last two games," said McClaren.

Villa gave the Spanish the perfect start with two goals in the first 15 minutes - the second a splendid overhead kick - and could well have had a hat-trick and his 13th international goal had not a late penalty not struck the bar.

However victory, their second in the past week following the win over Latvia, left Aragones happy about the state of their qualifying chances.

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Real request security

AFP, Madrid

Spanish giants Real Madrid have requested extra security for their away match on Saturday to Zaragoza after the armed Basque separatist group ETA put an end to a 15-month-old ceasefire.

The club has asked police and the government to reinforce the number of anti-terrorism agents put at the airport where the players will arrive as well as at their hotel and at the Romareda stadium where the match will be held, sports daily Marca reported.

No one at Real Madrid was immediately available to confirm the report.

ETA, whose four-decade campaign to achieve independence for the northeastern Basque region of Spain has claimed more than 800

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Ribery joins Bayern

AFP, Munich

France international midfielder Franck Ribery has joined Bayern Munich in a four-year deal, the German club said on Thursday.

Less than 24 hours after helping France to a 1-0 win in their Euro 2008 qualifier against Georgia in Paris, Ribery was in Munich to meet his potential new employers.

"Everything went well," he told waiting reporters in Munich. "I am happy I could help Munich."

The 24-year-old spent 30 minutes with Bayern's doctor Hans-Wilhelm Mueller-Wohlfahrt, was all smiles when he left the Munich clinic following his transfer from French club Marseille.

Bayern were also expected to

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on whether he regretted leaving

Beckham out for 11 months, or what will happen when Beckham leaves Real Madrid for LA Galaxy in the summer.

Beckham was bullish about his future.

"I will definitely be at the Euros," he said.

"I believe I can carry on playing for a long time. The Galaxy will do everything possible to keep me playing for my country. Things can change, but I'm proud of playing for my country. I just love playing football."

Estonia coach Jelle Goes also highlighted Beckham as the difference between the sides.

"It was clear from the first half that England were trying to find Beckham, who was putting in great crosses," he said.

"That's why Beckham's back in the team - two great deliveries and

the game is closed.

"Beckham at Real Madrid has started to play marvellously, and he has returned to the national team; then you see what happens. The team makes good use of Beckham waiting there on the line."

Beckham was unmoved as he crossed for the second and third goals - the first a Peter Crouch header, the second a sidefoot from Michael Owen - but Goes was critical only about the defending for the first, as Joe Cole was allowed to spin onto a Crouch flick.

"But then," he reflected, "how do you defend against an Eiffel Tower like Crouch?"

McClaren was delighted with the professionalism of his side's display.

"We won that game in the first 20 minutes," he said.

"We started on the front foot. We

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Italy's new star

INTERNET, undated



Fabio Quagliarella admits he could not have asked for a better end to the season than bagging his first Italy brace.

Although this was his third cap, the Sampdoria hitman had previously only played a handful of minutes at international level, but snatched both sensational goals in a 2-0 win in Lithuania on his first start.

"I tried to repay the faith that the Coach and my teammates put in me. I tried to give my best and it went well. With two good goals I could not have asked for a better way to end the season," said Quagliarella.

Famous for some stunning strikes in Serie A, he also impressed in wide midfield, as a second striker or even a centre-forward.

"I have always played as a support striker, so that means cutting in and shooting. Walter Novellino tried me out in a wider role and I still scored a lot of goals from there."

"Unfortunately, towards the end of the campaign we were missing a lot of players so I had to be the

centre-forward with my back to goal and that made it tricky for me. I try to adapt and do my best in any role where I am placed."

"Roberto Donadoni asked me to start wide and cut in to the centre for a shot on goal, but it is within my characteristics as well."

Already hot property on the transfer market after 13 Serie A goals, Manchester United target Quagliarella's price-tag has just skyrocketed after this performance.

"I am on holiday from tomorrow and cannot wait to rest. There is time for the transfer market. I am on a co-ownership deal between Sampdoria and Udinese so that may be renewed. The important thing now is for me to play consistently."

Quagliarella's explosion has given Donadoni more options upfront, even if Totti does not decide to return for the 'important games' against France and Ukraine in September.

"Italy has always provided great talents and will not cease to do that. We try to raise our young players in the best way possible and then take it from there," expressed a delighted Donadoni.



PHOTO: AFP

(L) French youngster Samir Nasri tries to zip through a host of Georgian players, as England winger Joe Cole (C) shoots for goal between two Estonian defenders, while new Italian sensation Fabio Quagliarella celebrates one of his double against Lithuania, during their respective Euro 2008 qualifying matches on Wednesday night.