



Second seed Rafael Nadal Spain of plays a forehand return against Russia's Mikhail Youzhny during an enthralling 4th-round encounter at the Wimbledon on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP

United close to Tevez deal

AFP, London

Manchester United are on the verge of signing Argentina striker Carlos Tevez from West Ham, according to reports in England.

United are believed to have reached an agreement with Tevez and his owner, businessman Kia Joorabchian, to sign the West Ham forward on July 14, when he has finished playing for his country at the Copa America.

Tevez impressed Sir Alex Ferguson with his superb form in the final weeks of the season, which included scoring the winner against United to keep West Ham in the Premiership on the final day of the season.

Ferguson has already spent 50 million pounds bringing Owen Hargreaves, Anderson and Nani to Old Trafford in the close season and the United manager has sanctioned a 20 million pounds move for Tevez.

The 23-year-old, who was a guest of fellow Argentine Gabriel Heinze at United's end of season party, is under contract to West Ham for another three years, but it is uncertain if the London club will actually receive a fee if Tevez leaves.

It is thought that the terms of his controversial move from Corinthians last season included a clause that gives the majority of any transfer fee to Joorabchian rather than the club.

The Hammers are embroiled in a legal dispute with Joorabchian, who runs the company Media Sports Investment (MSI), after the club apparently terminated that agreement.

If Tevez does sign on, it is likely to signal the end of Alan Smith's spell at Old Trafford, with Everton, Aston Villa and Middlesbrough keen on the England striker.

Robinho leads Brazil into last eight Mexico, Chile thru' too

INTERNET, Puerto de La Cruz



Mexico and Chile booked their places in the Copa America quarterfinals after the two sides played out a tepid goalless draw Wednesday night.

The result saw the Mexicans top Group B on seven points after victories over Brazil and Ecuador, while Chile's four-point haul was good enough for them to also make the last eight.

In the evening's second game, Brazil edged Ecuador, 1-0, to earn a matchup with Chile in the quarterfinals.

Robinho scored Brazil's only goal from the spot after 55 minutes as Dunga's side eventually overcame their winless opponents in an entertaining game in Puerto La Cruz.

"Robinho is a great player with fantastic individual skill but he also created a lot of chances for his teammates. That's important," Dunga said. "The team showed plenty of determination and I am satisfied with that."

"Qualification was difficult but we managed it."

Brazil had the better of the first half but it was Ecuador which threatened first. Felix Borja headed

Walter Ayovi's cross over the bar

after 14 minutes before a weak header by Brazil striker Julio Baptista was held by keeper Marcelo Elizaga.

The Ecuador keeper then did really well to deny Wagner Love after the Brazilian got on the end of Gilberto Silva's ball.

Robinho produced an unsuccessful attempt after combining well with Alex before Brazil keeper Doni was called into action to deal with a long-range strike from Cristian Benitez with 30 minutes gone.

Four minutes later, Elizaga denied Robinho and Wagner Love in quick succession before Doni almost gifted Ecuador the opener as he came charging out of his box and Borja took the ball around the keeper before firing wide.

Ten minutes after the break, however, Robinho opened the scoring when he was brought down in the box before dusting himself off to convert the resulting penalty.

That seemed to deflate the Ecuadorians and they were unable to threaten the Brazilians for the rest of the encounter.

Robinho was inches away from noddling in a second for Brazil from Wagner Love's cross, as Ecuador were eliminated having conceded six goals in three games.

Mexico and Chile were booed off the pitch at the final whistle by the 35,000 fans packed into the Luis

Ramos stadium after a game of few chances.

With qualification already assured, Mexico boss Hugo Sanchez took the opportunity to include fringe players Gonzalo Pineda, Jose Antonio Castro and Jaime Lozano.

Chile, on the other hand, was decimated by injury and boss Nelson Acosta was forced to leave out Miguel Riffo, Rodrigo Melendez, Jorge Valdivia, Reinaldo Navia and Matias Fernandez, while Jorge Vargas was suspended after picking up bookings in the previous two games.

"I do not know if they really wanted to win the game as a draw was enough for them," Sanchez said. "We tried to attack and create chances but it was difficult against a defensive side like Chile."

Chile had the only two opportunities of the first half and Colo Colo striker Humberto Suazo could not find a way past keeper Guillermo Ochoa after seven minutes before the Mexico stopper produced a good save to keep out Rodrigo Tello's free-kick after quarter of an hour.

Mexico threatened in the second period and Guadalaajara's Jhonny Magallon missed a great chance when heading wide from close range on the hour mark before Jaime Lozano's long-range

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No way out for Terry, Lampard

AFP, London

Chelsea stars John Terry and Frank Lampard will not be allowed to leave Stamford Bridge despite their stalled contract negotiations, according to chief executive Peter Kenyon.

Barcelona, Juventus and Inter Milan have been considering moves for Terry and Lampard after talks over improved deals for the England internationals broke down at the end of last season.

Both players have two years left on their present contracts and, although negotiations are yet to resume, Kenyon insists there is no way he would allow the duo to leave, even if they receive big money bids.

"I can confirm we've had no offers and, if we have had offers, we wouldn't accept them," Kenyon told Sky Sports News. "They are a core part of our team."

Chelsea and England captain Terry, 26, reportedly wants a nine-year contract that would include an option to become the club's manager, but the Blues are understood to have only offered a five-year deal.

Lampard, 28, wants his wages to be equal to Andriy Shevchenko and Michael Ballack, who are the club's top earners on 120,000-per-week, but the five-year deal he was offered was below that mark.

Chelsea manager Jose Mourinho has been shopping in the bargain basement as he looks to bolster his squad, but Kenyon is adamant that billionaire owner Roman Abramovich has not shut his cheque book for good.

Mourinho has brought in Claudio Pizarro, Steve Sidwell and Tal Ben Haim on free transfers, but Kenyon said: "It's not because there's no money. It's not because we chose to put a freeze on transfer money."

"It's about saying 'what have we got, what do we need?' We've got three absolutely top players who are going to be joining us and making us stronger next season."

Abramovich wants Chelsea to focus on bringing through their own young talent and has invested in a multi-million pound upgrade of the club's Cobham training headquarters.

Kenyon added: "Developing homegrown players is a vitally important goal for Chelsea. To achieve this, Roman invested in the land, the infrastructure and the latest training, medical and other technology to give us the best chance of meeting those goals."

Parma sign Reginaldo

AFP, Rome

Parma completed the signing of Brazilian striker Reginaldo from Serie A rivals Fiorentina on Thursday.

The 23-year-old forward, whose full name is Ferreira da Silva Reginaldo, has signed a five-year contract.

Reginaldo spent six seasons with Treviso before joining Fiorentina in the summer of last year.

Parma survived relegation on the final day of the season under coach Claudio Ranieri, who left at the end of the campaign to take charge of Turin giants Juventus.

DJOKOVIC TAMES HEWITT

A close shave for Nadal

AGENCIES, London



Rafael Nadal staged a rousing comeback from two sets down to defeat gallant Russian Mikhail Youzhny on Thursday and reach the Wimbledon quarterfinals.

The Spanish second seed, the runner-up to Roger Federer in 2006, triumphed 4-6, 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 in an enthralling three-hour contest and will now face seventh seed Tomas Berdych of the Czech Republic for a place in the semifinals.

In another enthralling encounter, Serbian teenager Novak Djokovic overcame his more illustrious opponent Lleyton Hewitt to set up a semifinal encounter against Marcos Baghdatis of Cyprus.

On Court Two, the so-called graveyard of the champions where Nadal had been relegated for the day, it was the 14th seeded Russian who looked set to play the role as undertaker to the Spaniard's Wimbledon dream.

The 25-year-old Youzhny had defeated the Spaniard in the quarterfinals of the US Open last year and he was virtually untroubled in the first two sets on Thursday wrapping up the opener in just 36 minutes and then grabbing an early break in the second.

He was two sets up after 81 minutes when Nadal went long with a backhand.

The world number two had failed to carve out a single break

point in those two sets, but he was unstoppable in the third breaking in the second and sixth games to reduce the deficit.

Youzhny needed treatment during the changeover for a back injury and his movement became more restricted as Nadal seized his opportunity to level the match at two sets apiece with breaks in the third and seventh games of the fourth set.

The Russian needed another bout of treatment for his injury and tried to calm himself by leaving a packed court for a toilet break.

But it was to no avail as Nadal broke in the third and fifth games of the final set to lead 4-1 against an exhausted opponent.

Nadal served a love game to go to 5-1 before Youzhny saved a match point in the seventh game.

But there was no reprieve in the next game with the Spaniard taking the tie with a vicious crosscourt forehand.

Serbian fourth seed Novak Djokovic overcame a back injury as well as the famed fighting spirit of former champion Lleyton Hewitt to reach the Wimbledon quarterfinals on a four-hour thriller.

The 20-year-old clinched a 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (7/2), 4-6, 7-6 (7/5) win over the 16th seeded Australian and will take on Cypriot 10th seed Marcos Baghdatis for a place in the semifinal.

The defeat was Hewitt's earliest exit from the All England Club since 2003 when he was a shock first round casualty as defending champion.

But on Thursday he played his

part in a memorable feast of big-hitting and marathon rallies against the Serbian player who is being tipped as a future Grand Slam winner.

The first set took an hour to complete with one point in the tiebreak lasting a gruelling 40 strokes. Hewitt had two set points in the breaker but Djokovic saved them both.

The fourth seed then wrapped up the opener on his third set point when Hewitt hit long.

The battling Australian had won the pair's only previous clash at the US Open in 2006 but the young Serb has made great strides in his career since then.

He won his first Masters event in Miami, taking his career total to five, was also a semifinalist at the French Open and went to four in the world.

Djokovic used that new self-confidence to take the second set tiebreak.

But Hewitt, the king of lost causes, reduced the deficit by sweeping up the third set before Djokovic called an injury time-out for treatment on a back injury.

In a tense fourth set, the players exchanged breaks in the third and fourth games before Hewitt edged ahead with another break to lead 5-4.

But serving for the set, he fell apart.

Djokovic hit back to level and then edged ahead to 6-5 before the third tiebreak beckoned.

The Serb took the tie on his third match point when Hewitt dumped a backhand into the net.

Ivanovic sets up Venus clash

AFP, London



Venus Williams moved to within two matches of a fourth Wimbledon singles crown after a straight

sets win over former US Open

winner Svetlana Kuznetsova in her

quarterfinal here on Thursday.

The American, who had blown Maria Sharapova off court in her fourth round tie, was in equally imperious form as she beat the Russian fifth seed 6-3, 6-4 to advance to a semi-final meeting with Serbia's Ana Ivanovic.

In contrast, sixth seed Ivanovic, runner-up at last month's French Open, had to come from a set down and save three match points to squeeze past the Czech Republic's Nicole Pietrangeli, 4-6, 6-2, 7-5.

With her younger sister Serena having been eliminated by Justine Henin in the quarter-finals, the 2000, 2001 and 2005 champion Venus is looking like the only player left in the draw with the game to stop world number one Henin from completing a full set of Grand Slam titles here.

And the depth of the American's confidence was underlined by her response to a question about who she regarded as the favourite among the women left in the draw.

"Now why would I say anyone else?" she asked. "C'mon, I think my self-esteem would be quite low if I would name another person."

Going into the match, Kuznetsova had won three of her five meetings with the American, including their most recent meeting, on clay in Warsaw earlier this year.

But you would not have guessed it from the way in which Williams claimed the opening set in just half an hour.

The Russian proved more resilient in the second, recovering from 0-40 down in the opening



PHOTO: AFP

Ana Ivanovic of Serbia acknowledges the crowd after defeating Nicole Pietrangeli of Czech Republic in the quarterfinal of the Wimbledon yesterday.

I'm no cheat: Serena

AFP, London



Serena Williams has angrily hit back at her critics who accused her of gamesmanship at Wimbledon.

Williams, the champion in 2002 and 2003, came underfire for her dramatic collapse to the Centre Court turf during her fourth round win over Daniela Hantuchova which was followed by demands to take a toilet break in the final set decider.

But many in the crowd were stunned to see her then merrily chase down the ball when the tie turned in her favour despite having both legs heavily strapped.

Former men's champion Michael Stich said Williams, who damaged the calf on her left leg, was being over-dramatic.

"I know the pain I was in. I have

never been overdramatic in my whole career," said Williams whose campaign was ended in the quarterfinals by top seed Justine Henin in straight sets on Wednesday. "I've always been a fighter. My career has been more stellar than Michael Stich's so he can say whatever he likes."

"I've never taken a shot at him. I would never make fun of someone in my position."

Williams, who wore a strapping to protect her left calf on Wednesday as well as a bandage on her left thumb after she sprained it during the win over Hantuchova, said she defied the advice of doctors as well as her father not to play.

She also believes had she been fully fit she would have defeated Henin and gained revenge for her demoralising defeat at the hands of the world number one at the French Open last month.

"Considering my leg and most of all having no backhand and no shot,

I think I did pretty well," said the American seventh seed after her 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 defeat.

"If I had been healthy, I think I would have won, one hundred percent."

Sister Venus came to the defence of Serena claiming her critics were 'ignorant'.

"I am definitely offended," said Venus. "I think Serena has always proved to be the ultimate sports-woman. She gives credit when it's due. She doesn't complain."

"She wins most of the time but when she loses she takes the loss and learns from it. Anyone who would suggests (that the injury was faked) is clearly ignorant."

Venus was speaking after her 6-1, 6-3 victory over Russian second seed Maria Sharapova had put her into the quarterfinals where she will take on another Russian Svetlana Kuznetsova for a place in the last four.

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PHOTO: AFP

Brazil striker Robinho puts the ball into the net from the penalty spot for a valuable 1-0 win against Ecuador in Puerto la Cruz on Thursday, which saw his team qualify for the last eight of the Copa America.