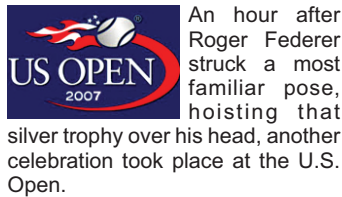


# No stopping Federer

## Wins 4th straight Open

AP, New York



An hour after Roger Federer struck a most familiar pose, hoisting that silver trophy over his head, another celebration took place at the U.S. Open.

Novak Djokovic's family and friends threw him a little party Sunday night, as if he'd won. Made sense, too. Because these days, everyone in tennis is basically playing for second place behind Roger the Great.

"No. 2, No. 3 -- it doesn't matter much," Federer said. "It's No. 1 that matters. That's how it goes."

In a match that tilted as much on mental strength as shot-making ability, Federer beat back seven set points Sunday in a 7-6 (4), 7-6 (2), 6-4 win over Djokovic for a fourth straight U.S. Open championship and a 12th Grand Slam title.

"He had his chances today, many of them," Federer said. "You could sing a song about it."

Or write a novel.

"My next book is going to be called, 'Seven Set Points,'" Djokovic said, his smile intact.

Federer became the first man since Bill Tilden in the 1920s to win the American Grand Slam four years in a row. Add in his five straight Wimbledon titles, plus his three overall at the Australian Open and he's two away from Pete Sampras' record of 14 Slams.

And at 26, he's in the prime of his

career.

"I think about it a lot now," Federer said of Sampras' mark. "To come so close at my age is fantastic, and I hope to break it."

At 20, Djokovic made a strong impression on and off the court, reaching his first Slam final and doing dead-on imitations of Maria Sharapova and Rafael Nadal.

Sharapova sat in Djokovic's box -- "It's just a friendship," he insisted -- and apparently approves of his rendition.

"She said she's going to kill me," the personable Serb said. "Of course, she found it funny. Not offended."

Djokovic also does one of Federer that's posted on YouTube. But Federer didn't exactly smile when asked about Djokovic's joking.

"I know some guys weren't happy. I know some guys might think it's funny," he said. "He's walking a tightrope, for sure."

About an hour after the match, Djokovic walked outside Arthur Ashe Stadium, where a dozen people were waiting for him. They chanted his name, posed for pictures and gave him a bottle of champagne.

Then, they all gathered around for Djokovic to pop the cork. He tried and tried. Somehow, he couldn't quite finish the job -- he needed his dad's help to twist the top.

It fit, considering how Djokovic's day went.

"This is the moment we've been waiting for our whole life," said his mom, Dijana. "If he won the first set I

don't know what would happen, but maybe something different.

"Tennis needs a new face. Tennis needs young boys who like to play tennis," she said. "I don't have anything against Nadal and Federer, but when it is always these two guys in the final it is boring."

Djokovic was the last player to beat Federer, winning two tiebreakers at a tournament in Montreal a month ago.

But on center court in front of an overflow crowd of 25,000, it was different. Right before this match, Federer said: "It'll be interesting to see how he handles the final."

He was right.

Ahead 6-5, the third-seeded Djokovic took a 40-love lead and served for the first set. He wound up dropping five set points and double-faulted to make it 6-all.

Midway through the tiebreaker, Djokovic put a backhand into the net. He slammed his racket and a little piece broke off -- it was quarter-sized string dampener, used to reduce vibration, that was decorated with a yellow smiley face.

"He knows what it feels like to be in that kind of situation. He knows how to cope with the pressure," Djokovic said. "For me, this is something new."

Sitting in his chair during the break, Djokovic squashed a water bottle. A couple of ballboys needed to mop up the spill.

Djokovic led 6-5 in the second set and had two chances to win it on Federer's serve.

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PHOTO: AFP

FOUR IN A ROW: Swiss top seed Roger Federer falls to the ground in delight after winning his fourth straight US Open final by beating Serb Novak Djokovic at Flushing Meadows on Sunday.



PHOTO: AFP

Tennis star Maria Sharapova (top row L) and Hollywood actor Robert De Niro (bottom row R) cheer on Novak Djokovic from his family box during the US Open final at Flushing Meadows on Sunday.

# Romance rumours

AFP, New York



Russian tennis heart-throb Maria Sharapova and actor Robert De Niro added celebrity status and romantic gossip to the supporters' section for Serbia's Novak Djokovic in Sunday's US Open final.

But don't start making love-40 links just yet between the Russian beauty and 20-year-old Djokovic, who lost his first Grand Slam final appearance to Swiss world number one Roger Federer 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/2), 6-4.

"Let's not go too much with Maria," Djokovic said. "It's just a friendship we have."

Djokovic, known for his joking impersonations of Sharapova and other tennis players, bumped into Sharapova during a Fashion Week event ongoing in New York at the same time as the year's last Grand

Slam tennis tournament.

Djokovic, who has a girl friend, struck up a friendship with Sharapova this week and invited her to join his parents in their seating section.

"It was nice for her to come and support me. As well Robert," Djokovic said. "It's an amazing feeling to see such successful people in my box supporting me, playing with me I can say, living every emotional moment. It's great."

Asked what Sharapova thought of his impersonation, complete with exaggerated moves like smooching hair, Djokovic joked, "She said she's going to kill me."

"Of course she accepted it in the right way. Of course she found it funny. Not offended."

Djokovic was among several players invited to De Niro's Japanese restaurant and met the movie star and his tennis-fan wife there.

"He's a great person," Djokovic said. "I'm really happy they showed

up and supported me."

Djokovic became a hit with New York crowds for his personality and his impressions were a YouTube favorite.

"I'm really glad for my success on and off the court," Djokovic said.

"I felt really flattered and emotional when I heard at the (award) ceremony when they told me I stole their hearts. Even when I didn't win the match that was very emotional... they like my character on and off the court."

But Federer sounded an alarm bell regarding the Serbian jokester's routines, denying he had seen Djokovic's "Federer" impersonation making the internet rounds.

"I know some guys weren't happy. I know some guys might think it's funny. He is walking a tightrope, for sure," Federer said. "If fans like it, it's good for tennis. It's good to have a character like him out there, no doubt."

pleting the Grand Slam of tennis that only Rod Laver and Don Budge have previously achieved.

For the last two years, Federer has won three of the four Grand Slam titles, but lost the French Open on both occasions to Nadal.

Still, he says that at 26 he has several years ahead of him and feels driven by the new players coming onto the scene.

"Honestly I've enjoyed the challenge of young guys challenging me," he said.

"This is probably my biggest motivation out there ... seeing them challenge me, beating them in the final. It's really for me the best feeling."

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# Domenech irked by rugby

AFP, Clairefontaine

France coach Raymond Domenech fears that Euro 2008 qualifying rivals Scotland could be given an advantage by playing on a pitch likely to be churned up by a rugby world cup match.

South Africa play against Samoa at the Parc des Princes on Sunday, and Domenech - fresh from a scoreless draw with Italy in Milan, which has left France top of group B - is unhappy at the scheduling for Wednesday's match.

"It would be have been great for us to return to the Parc des Princes ... if there wasn't the rugby match between South Africa and Samoa being played there," said Domenech.

"It's going to ruin the pitch. We need a flat pitch, without the holes."

"We can't be doing with a pitch where the ball bounces because of the holes."

Domenech fears France could be forced into ditching their short passing game for playing the ball high, which could advantage the Scots who like to play long, high balls into their opponents' half.

"With the ground like that we'll have to play lots of high balls - against the Scots. Thanks a lot," added Domenech.

Goalkeeper Mickael Landreau added: "When the pitch isn't good, that favours the defensive teams (like Scotland)."

Meanwhile Domenech said Arsenal defender William Gallas, who missed the Italy match with a groin injury, was training "almost normally".

# Park targets Jan return

AFP, Manchester

Manchester United winger Park Ji-sung hopes to be back in action by January as he recovers from knee surgery.

Park, 26, has been sidelined since March after suffering serious knee damage, but the South Korean had a successful operation in California during the close season and is confident of returning early in 2008.

"Hopefully I'll be playing again early in the New Year. My knee is getting better and it's a case of so far, so good," he told Manchester United's official website.

By the time Park next appears at Old Trafford, Sir Alex Ferguson's side will be halfway through their Premier League campaign and the midfielder is confident United have the strength to hold on to the title.

"We've got a good squad and the manager has brought some good players into the team to improve it even further," Park said.

"The new signings have all impressed me in different ways. Nani is very quick, Owen (Hargreaves) works hard and Carlos (Tevez) has great vision."

"Anderson hasn't played much, but I am looking forward to seeing more of him."

"I'm confident that we can retain the Premier League title this season."

# Ronaldinho masterclass



INTERNET, undated

Brazilian forward Ronaldinho has been called the world's best soccer player.

He showed why Sunday, helping Brazil score their first three goals in a 4-2 victory over the United States in the "Clash of Champions" in front of a Soldier Field crowd of 43,543.

Afterward, he humbled himself as a grateful victor by taking turns with U.S. coach Bob Bradley in commending the losers.

"This really was a very hard, competitive game," Ronaldinho said. "They played us tough, and they played us tight defensively. They don't give much space at all. They were also very aggressive and physical. I had to work hard all match. They are really improving because they played us as tough as anybody."

Bradley didn't like the fact his team lost, but he liked the way it lost.

"Eight months into this cycle, we remain a work in progress," he said. "But we feel good about our progress. As a team, we were pretty solid for 90 minutes. Collectively,

our defense was good.

"But against Brazil, the world's best team, you can be in the right spots and they'll still make you pay."

The United States outshot Brazil 11-9, had a 5-3 edge in corner kicks and scored the same number of goals as the Brazilians. But after Carlos Bocanegra had given the U.S. team a 1-0 lead in the 21st minute by heading in Landon Donovan's curving corner kick, the United States accidentally scored Brazil's first goal in the 33rd minute.

Ronaldinho's pass to Kaka triggered a sequence of events that led to U.S. defender Oguchi Onyewu's own-goal. Goalie Tim Howard batted away Kaka's shot, but the rebound bounced off the chest of an advancing Onyewu into the net.

Brazil took the lead in the second half off a corner kick resulting from Bocanegra's misclearing a loose ball over his goal line. Ronaldinho took the kick and curved it into the penalty box for Lucio to head it past Howard, who dislocated his left ring finger trying to make the save but stayed in the game.

The U.S. team tied the score in the 73rd minute on Clint Dempsey's header off Steve Cherundolo's

corner kick. But two minutes later, Ronaldinho scored the winning goal on a 20-yard free kick after referee Armando Archundia charged Bocanegra with fouling Brazilian defender Daniel Alves just outside the middle of the penalty area. Ronaldinho celebrated the goal by running to the sideline, stretching out his arms in a cradled position and rocking an imaginary baby.

Ronaldinho was cheered as he was replaced in the 85th minute by midfielder Diego. In stoppage time, U.S. defender Michael Bradley -- the coach's son -- was charged with a foul in the penalty area, resulting in a penalty kick. Midfielder Elano kicked it into the left corner after Howard dove to Elano's right.

"The score doesn't really tell how well we played," Bocanegra said. "Our effort to come back when we were down 2-1 was really good."

"But the thing that stinks is that they beat us on dead-ball plays. We are usually pretty good at defending those. And you usually think of Brazil beating you on plays where they are passing the ball through. But when you give Ronaldinho free kicks, he's going to hurt you."



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil star Ronaldinho (L) holds off USA defender Michael Bradley during their international friendly at Soldier Field in Chicago on Sunday.

# Kaiser backs S.Africa WC

AFP, Berlin

Franz Beckenbauer, the president of the 2006 World Cup's steering committee, is convinced the 2010 tournament in South Africa will be a "great success."

"I am completely convinced the next World Cup will be a great success and that South Africa will put on a good tournament," Beckenbauer told German sports agency SID.

"From what I have seen and heard, the South Africans are on time and I do not have any doubt that all the stadiums will be ready," said the German legend.

Beckenbauer recently visited the building site of Cape Town's Green Point Stadium, which has been earmarked to host the semi-finals, and said he was "very impressed with the project."

Beckenbauer, who lifted the 1974 World Cup as a player and as a coach in 1990, criticised the 2010 tournament last year questioning the progress of building work and had expressed concerns over security.

The remarks came amid rumours that world soccer's governing body FIFA was worried about the slow pace of stadium construction and was interpreted as support for moving the tournament to another country, possibly Germany.

Beckenbauer later wrote to the organisers saying his comments had been falsely portrayed and at no point had he suggested Germany or another country should be made a substitute host.

And the German has pledged his support for South Africa urging organisers "not to try to copy the World Cup in Germany", saying the event should reflect the unique culture and environment South Africa provides.

# Shevchenko warns Italy

INTERNET, undated

Ukraine captain Andriy Shevchenko has warned Italy they will have to fight for three points in Wednesday's Euro 2008 qualifier in Kiev.

The former AC Milan striker is a first-choice starter for his national team even though he is not a regular in the Chelsea line-up, and is ready to put one over the nation where he enjoyed the most success in his career.

"I can guarantee that I will be ready, both in my head and with my legs," he told Gazzetta dello Sport.

On Saturday, both nations drew their latest qualifiers, compromising their chances of qualifying for Euro 2008 and making Wednesday's match all the more important.

If Ukraine lose, they are practically eliminated while a similar result for the Azzurri would damage their hopes of qualifying and allow Ukraine to join a four-nation challenge for two qualifying berths, along with France and Scotland.

"Winning is the only thing that can save us," admitted Shevchenko, whose side were held to a 1-1 draw in Georgia on Saturday.

"We have got to play this game at 200%. We are battlers and this is our quality."

"To beat them, we are going to have to fight."