



Russian star Maria Sharapova shapes to serve during her first round victory over Serbian Jelena Tomic at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Monday.

SHARAPOVA TO FACE DAVENPORT

Top names cruise



AFP, Melbourne

Defending champion Serena Williams and world number one Justine Henin led a host of top names into the Australian Open second round on Monday, but Andy Murray became a high-profile casualty.

While the Scottish ninth seed crashed out, men's second seed Rafael Nadal, fourth seed Nikolay Davydenko, and sixth seed Andy Roddick all progressed.

Roger Federer kickstarts his drive for a 13th Grand Slam crown on Tuesday.

Women's third seed Jelena Jankovic almost joined Murray on an early plane home, narrowly avoiding a major upset in an epic encounter with 17-year-old Austrian Tamira Paszek.

The rest of the day's play went to plan with Russia's Maria Sharapova safely into the next round, where she will meet tennis mum Lindsay Davenport.

Under blazing sun, a super-fit Williams sailed past Australian qualifier Jarmila Gajdosova 6-3, 6-3 in just over an hour, but was below her best as she began her quest for a ninth Grand Slam title.

"I think everyone could probably tell I was a little scratchy. But it's the first round. Just moving forward," said the seventh seed. Williams stunned the tennis

world here last year when she beat Sharapova in the final unseeded and ranked 81 after an injury-plagued 2006.

She said the memories came flooding back when she walked out on centre court.

"Yeah, I just thought about last year, my last match on that court, I was able to win it. That's all I thought about," she said.

"I didn't think about the ceremony, holding up the trophy. I just got right back into the swing of things and thought, I have to stay focused."

Williams has highlighted top seed Henin, who won the Sydney International on Friday, and her sister Venus as her main threats.

The Belgian was given an unexpectedly tough workout by Japan's Aiko Nakamura in her match, before winning 6-2, 6-2.

"The first round is not my favorite one, so I'm glad it's behind me now," said Henin, who won here in 2004 but missed last year's tournament as she finalised her divorce.

"A Grand Slam, it's tough and it's long. You need to be consistent, at your best all the time, so that's not very easy."

She is now unbeaten in 29 matches, a run stretching back to the Wimbledon semifinal last July. Jankovic was almost bundled out by Paszek, ranked 39, before prevailing 2-6, 6-2, 12-10 in an epic three-hour, nine minute battle.

The highly-fancied Serb, who enjoyed a rapid rise through the women's rankings in 2007, gave away the first set but got back into her stride in the second.

The 22-year-old's characteristic vigour came to the fore in a thrilling third set which lasted almost two hours.

"I was just trying to stay positive somehow and I found a way to win," said a relieved Jankovic.

Davenport also came through a tough clash with Italy's Sara Errani, winning 6-2, 3-6, 7-5. The victory made her the all-time money winner in women's sport, surpassing Steffi Graf.

Among the men, Murray, the ninth seed, failed to fulfill his potential when he crashed to Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga 7-5, 6-4, 0-6, 7-6 (7/5).

The Scot, who arrived here full of optimism, blamed poor decision-making and not physical preparation for the exit.

"I don't think it's anything to do with not getting to Australia early enough," he snapped at a British reporter.

"It was nothing to do with the physical thing why I lost the match. It was just a few points here or there, I think a couple of bad decisions, a couple of net cords here and there, that was the end of it."

Nadal, who has finished the season second to Federer for the last three years, had some early wobbles against Serbia's Viktor Troicki, a qualifier ranked 126 in the world, before rallying to a 7-6 (7/3), 7-5, 6-1 win.

Roddick, fresh from winning the Kooyong Classic on Saturday, had no problems coasting past Czech qualifier Lukas Dlouhy 6-3, 6-4, 7-5 in his opener.

Sunderland gain lifeline

REUTERS, London

Two goals from Kieran Richardson gave Sunderland a 2-0 victory over Portsmouth on Sunday to boost their hopes of escaping the Premier League drop zone.

The former Manchester United midfielder struck after 33 and 44 minutes of a scrappy game to hand Roy Keane's side their fifth league victory of the season.

Sunderland remain third from bottom with 20 points from 22 matches, the same as Bolton

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TOP SCORERS

Leading English Premiership scorers after the weekend's matches:

- 16: Cristiano Ronaldo (Man Utd)
- 13: Emmanuel Adebayor (Arsenal)
- 11: Fernando Torres (Liverpool)
- 10: Nicolas Anelka (Bolton/Chelsea), Robbie Keane (Tottenham), Roque Santa Cruz (Blackburn), Carlos Tevez (Man Utd)
- 9: Yakubu Aiyegbeni (Everton), Benjani (Portsmouth)
- 8: Dimitar Berbatov (Tottenham), Dave Kilson (Reading)

Bayern snap up Borowski

REUTERS, Berlin

Germany international Tim Borowski will join Bayern Munich when his contract with Werder Bremen expires at the end of the season.

Werder said in a statement on Sunday that midfielder Borowski had rejected the offer of a new contract and would instead move to rivals Bayern, where he will be reunited with his former national team coach Juergen Klinsmann.

"It's a shame," coach Thomas Schaaf said. "We would have happily carried on working with Tim."

Borowski, 27, was part of the Germany squad that Klinsmann led to third place at the World Cup on home soil in 2006.

Bayern announced on Friday that Klinsmann would return to the Bundesliga to take over as their coach as of July 1.

Zaragoza axe coach

AFP, Madrid

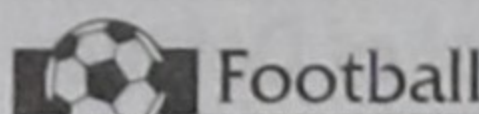
Spanish League side Real Zaragoza on Sunday sacked coach Victor Fernandez following the 2-2 draw with Real Mallorca.

Zaragoza confirmed the exit of Fernandez, 47, who has seen his team, a creditable sixth last season, fall to 12th in the Spanish top division.

Local favourite Fernandez coached Zaragoza from 1990 to 1997 winning the now defunct Cup Winners' Cup in 1994 before returning to the club in June 2006 after a spell with Portuguese side FC Porto.

Fernandez becomes the fourth managerial casualty in the Spanish top-flight this season following the departures of Abel Resino (Levante), Quique Sanchez Flores (Valencia) and Hector Cuper (Real Betis).

Day for veterans



AFP, Paris

Deadly strikers Ronaldo, Ruud van Nistelrooy and Pauleta proved on Sunday that their eye for goal hasn't been dimmed by the passing years.

Brazilian World Cup winner Ronaldo scored twice as AC Milan won their first home league game of the season, a 5-2 demolition of Napoli, while Dutch master van Nistelrooy also grabbed a brace to keep Real Madrid on course for a Spanish title repeat after a 2-0 win at rock-bottom Levante.

Portugal international Pauleta, meanwhile, came off the bench to help breathe new life into Paris Saint Germain's desperate season in a 3-0 win over Lens.

Former Arsenal star Sylvan Wiltord also struck a blow for the continent's dad's army attackers with two goals in Rennes' comeback behind 3-1 win over Marseille.

Any doubts about whether or not former three-time world player of the year Ronaldo could still be a force were dispelled in just over 45 minutes at the San Siro.

That was the time it took for him to score twice and set up a third.

"We were fantastic, particularly Ronaldo," Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti said of his 31-year-old striker.

"He is a phenomenon and he proved it even though he wasn't in great shape. I'm happy for him, he's suffered a lot."

In Spain, van Nistelrooy scored two late goals as champions Real defeated bottom side Levante 2-0 to re-establish their seven-point lead over Barcelona.

The Dutch striker stole the points with his 10th and 11th goals of the campaign. He put Real ahead on 76 minutes from the penalty spot before adding a second two minutes from time with a clinical right-footed strike.

"What matters to me is that I'm training well and physically fit," said the 31-year-old former Manchester United striker.

"It's essential for a professional. Football is my life."

Portuguese striker Pauleta came off the bench to help fire Paris Saint Germain to their first home French League win of the season.

Pauleta fired the hosts into the lead just under the hour mark when he wrong-footed Lens keeper Vedran Runje with a well-placed shot from just outside the six-yard box.

Marseille are marooned in 12th place, one spot below PSG, after they squandered a 1-0 lead at Rennes.

Djibril Cisse opened the scoring after fifteen minutes but Mickael Pagis levelled seven minutes from half-time.

Marseille were reduced to ten men in the 67th minute when Argentinian import Juan Angel Krupovics was red-carded which was just the invitation Wiltord needed to score twice in the 82nd and 87th minutes.

L'pool admit to Klinsi meeting

REUTERS, London

Liverpool's American owners met former Germany manager Juergen Klinsmann in November to discuss the possibility of him replacing Rafael Benitez, chairman Tom Hicks said on Monday.

Hicks admitted they had sounded out Klinsmann, who has since been appointed as Bayern Munich boss from next season, but said they had now given Benitez their full backing after a meeting with the Spaniard.

"In November, when it appeared we were in danger of not advancing in the Champions League, weren't playing well in our Premier League matches, and Rafa and we were having communication issues over the January transfer window, George and I met with Juergen Klinsmann to learn as much as we could about English and European football," Hicks told the Liverpool Echo.

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Spalletti unhappy with Totti

AFP, Rome

Roma coach Luciano Spalletti launched a surprising attack on his captain Francesco Totti after Roma's come-from-behind 2-1 victory at Atlanta that kept them in the title hunt.

Roma had to bounce back from an early set-back when Adriano Pinto gave the hosts a 17th-minute lead on Sunday.

And although it was Totti's fierce free-kick that drew the visitors level - before Alessandro Mancini's winner on the stroke of half-time - the team talisman still came under fire from his boss.

"Totti scored a goal and helped us out. He can do more and he can make more of a difference," said Spalletti.

"If a player scores two goals but

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'We don't need Ronaldinho'

AFP, Rome

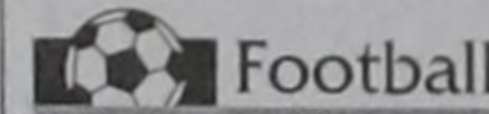
AC Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti on Monday ruled out making a move for Barcelona superstar Ronaldinho after watching Brazilian strike pair Ronaldo and Pato destroy Napoli on Sunday.

Ronaldo scored a brace and Pato also got his name on the score-sheet on his debut as the European champions tore their visitors apart 5-2 to end their seven-match winless home league run since the start of the season.

After fielding his much vaunted Brazilian attacking triumvirate Ka-Pa-Ro (Kaka, Pato and Ronaldo) for the first time, Ancelotti insisted that a fourth Brazilian forward would not be needed.

"No, Ronaldinho will not be joining us," he told Rai radio. "The club has invested heavily in this

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AFP, Rome

Any doubts about whether or not former three-time world player of the year Ronaldo can still be a force in football were dispelled in just over 45 minutes on Sunday.

That was the time it took for Ronaldo to score twice and set up a third as AC Milan finally managed to secure their first home league win of the season.

After five draws, two defeats and a paltry three goals during the first half of the season, Napoli were the unfortunate victims as Milan scorched to a 5-2 victory.

It wasn't just about Ronaldo, though, as the European champions' new Brazilian attacking triumvirate 'Ka-Pa-Ro' (Kaka, Pato and Ronaldo) combined for four of the five goals.

Fans have been talking about Milan's 21st century equivalent to

their famous 1950s Swedish 'Gre-No-Li' partnership (Gunnar Gren, Gunnar Nordahl and Nils Liedholm), and they didn't disappoint.

But it was the form of Ronaldo that most delighted Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti.

He latched onto an Andrea Piro pass to score the first goal, twice teed up Pato before Clarence Seedorf scored the second and then headed home a sumptuous cross from Seedorf 30 seconds after the break to notch the match-winner.

"We were fantastic, particularly Ronaldo," gushed Ancelotti.

"He is a phenomenon and he proved it even though he wasn't in great shape."

Ronaldo started training on January 2 after six months of injuries. I'm happy for him, he's suffered a lot."

Ancelotti thrust Pato straight into the starting line-up for his debut and restored Ronaldo despite the striker - once unkindly nicknamed 'El Gordo' ('Fatty') during

INTER KEEP WINNING

Samba powers Milan

AFP, Rome



Ronaldo was the inspiration as AC Milan ended their dismal winless home run with a 5-2 victory over

Napoli on a dream night at the San Siro on Sunday.

Ronaldo was playing only his second match of an injury-plagued season but scored a brace as he partnered debutant teenage sensation Pato in a new-look three-pronged Brazilian attack that included world player of the year Kaka.

Milan coach Carlo Ancelotti finally got the firepower that has been missing from the team at home in the league this season, as Pato and Kaka also got their names on the scoresheet.

In their previous seven matches - five draws and two defeats - Milan managed just three goals, they had doubled that tally 30 seconds into the second half against Napoli.

Ronaldo gave the hosts the lead on the quarter hour, latching onto Andrea Piro's clever through ball to fire home off goalkeeper Gennaro Lezzer's legs.

Milan were dominating but Napoli were dangerous on the counter-attack and soon levelled through Roberto Sosa, who converted fellow Argentine Ezequiel

TOP SIX

Italian league table on Sunday (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):										
Inter	18	14	4	0	40	11	46			
Roma	18	11	6	1	35	19	39			
Juventus	18	10	6	2	36	16	36			
Udinese	18	9	5	4	23	21	32			
Fiorentina	18	8	7	3	28	17	31			
Palermo	18	6	7	5	25	30	25			

Lavezzi's right wing cross.

Ronaldo then tried to turn provider, twice teeing up Pato with just lezzo to beat but the keeper denied him both times before Clarence Seedorf smashed home the follow-up.

Maurizio Domizzi then levelled from the spot after Georgia centre-back Kakra Kaladze's clumsy challenge on Lavezzi in the box,

sending the teams in at half-time all square.

But just after the restart Seedorf picked out Ronaldo to head home from close in.

Kakra scored midway through the second half with a crisp shot from the edge of the box and minutes later Pato opened his account after racing clear and finally beating

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PHOTO: AFP

Real Madrid striker Ruud van Nistelrooy pumps his fist after scoring against Levante in the Primera Liga at the Ciudad de Valencia Stadium on Sunday.



PHOTO: AFP

AC Milan striker Ronaldo (L) shoots to score his first goal in their Serie A match against Napoli at the San Siro in Milan on Sunday.