

Spaniard Rafael Nadal is a picture of concentration as he prepares to make a backhand return during his third round match against Frenchman Giles Simon at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Friday.

Nadal sneaks through

Australian 30pen

AFP, Melbourne

Rafael Nadal used his get out of jail card while Nikolay Davydenko rallied his way from the baseline into the fourth round of the Australian Open on Friday.

Nadal, the Spanish world number two, fought off six first set points to seal a 7-5, 6-2, 6-3 win over French 28th seed Gilles Simon in two hours 26 minutes.

Nadal, bidding to win his first Australian title and in doing so capture the elusive world number one ranking off Roger Federer, has another Frenchman Paul-Henri Nadalsaid. Mathieunext up.

If he overcomes the 23rd French seed on Sunday he could face American sixth seed Andy Roddick in the quarterfinals.

Roddick takes on German 29th seed Philipp Kohlschreiber in a third round match later Friday.

Low-profile fourth seed Davydenko is looking forward to a point. familiar baseline duel with Russian Davis Cup teammate Mikhail Youzhny after making the fourth round.

Davydenko was too strong from the back court for Frenchman Marc Gicquel, winning 6-3, 6-2, 6-3 in two hours 20 minutes.

Youzhny, who played for Russia

in last month's Davis Cup final loss to the United States, defused rocket-serving Croatian Ivo Karlovic 6-2, 6-4, 6-2.

Eighth seed Richard Gasquet set up an all-French fourth round match with Jo-Wilfried Tsonga after a 6-3, 6-2, 4-6, 6-4 win over

Russian 31st seed Igor Andreev. Tsonga, who knocked out British ninth seed Andy Murray in the opening round, accounted for Spain's Guillermo Garcia-Lopez 6-

3, 6-4, 6-2. For Nadal it was an important victory in the context of chasing his first Australian Open title.

"Sure, it's an important win for me. In every tournament, you have to overcome difficult moments,"

"I had one in the first round (against Serbian Viktor Troicki). Today was another time. It's important because you feel the pressure.

"In the first set I knew I was not doing the things I would like to do because I didn't play aggressively and didn't have the control of the

"I knew at some point in the match I would have to change. I had to try to start to play my forehand and move Gilles around the

"When I did that the match changed a lot."

claiming the world number one

Madrid readies for derby

ranking off Roger Federer at this year's Australian Open.

Federer could lose the position he has held for a record 207 consecutive weeks if he fails to reach the

semifinals and Nadal goes on to win the Australian title. Federer, as defending champion, has plenty of rankings points to defend here while Nadal, a

quarterfinalist last year, has relatively few to carry over. Davydenko, who remains at the

centre of an investigation into a betting scandal following his defeat by Argentine Martin Vassallo Arguello last August, secured his third win over French opponents at the season-opening Grand Slam.

He followed up wins over Michael Llodra and Nicolas Mahut to outplay Tunisian-born Gicquel from the backcourt.

"I have a chance against Youzhny, playing from the baseline like today and control the ball like I did against Gicquel," Davydenko

The world number four has reached the quarterfinals or better in six of the last eight Grand Slam tournaments.

The Russian has yet to get past the quarterfinal stage in Melbourne, but despite his lack of popular appeal he is anticipating playing on centre court should he Nadal has the possibility of beat Youzhny and reach the last

the erratic Miguel Torres taking

Atletico's Kun Aguero believes

"Casillas is a good keeper but

his colleagues might be able to put

the brakes on Real's seemingly

runaway championship campaign.

he's not unbeatable, let's see what

happens on Sunday. I'd love to

score against Real but I'm also

patient. If I get the winning goal in

the last minute then that will be

fine," said Atletico's highly

with a point to prove after their loss

to Mallorca but we are also bidding

for a place in the Champions League

so we are not going to give up easily."

draw in the Vicente Calderon sta-

time in nine seasons, then

Barcelona will have the chance to

reduce their lead at home to Racing

dium, or even lose there for the first

If Real repeat last season's 1-1

"We know Real will come here

regarded teenage striker.

over at right back.

NEW ERA FOR MAGPIES Nervy times for Gunners

T AFP, London



Keegan's second spell in charge of Newcastle is

Manchester United in the title battle will also be under intense scrutiny this weekend. The Gunners, who travel to Fulham on Saturday, have lost the services of first-team regulars Kolo Toure and Emmanuel Eboue

because of the African Nations Cup

and they looked jaded last weekend when they were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Birmingham. The setback allowed United to move back to the top on goal difference with a crushing 6-0 demolition of Newcastle and another slipup from Arsenal could see the psychological balance of power tilt

Ferguson's men. A week after that Old Trafford hammering, Newcastle will begin a second era under Keegan by hosting Bolton at what is sure to be a

decisively in favour of Sir Alex

sold-out St James' Park.

United are at Reading on Saturday and, with Cristiano Ronaldo in rampant form, will regard the trip south as a banker for three points. With 22 goals already this season

and 16 in his last 13 games, Ronaldo has, in Reading boss Steve Coppell's view, redefined the role of wide players in the modern game. "When I was player I went into the

start of a season thinking a goal every six games would be a great return for a winger," said Coppell. "But Ronaldo is scoring almost a goal a game-andhe's not even a striker.

"He's scoring goals and he's also creating things for the team as well. He's got an awful lot going on in his game and he's a threat to any side in the world. You can only stand back and admire him because he's broken the mould in terms of what wide players can do."

Reading have a reasonable record in terms of frustrating United, having secured three draws from five league and Cup meetings over the last two seasons.

But Coppell admits his side will be hard pressed to do any more than contain the champions.

"These are the elite teams by some way and they are always going

to be difficult tests for us," he said. "But we've got to think we're capable of getting points off them. We know we've done it before, but

that doesn't make it any easier." Relegation-threatened Fulham could have Marlon King in their squad after agreeing a fee to take the former Jamaica striker from Watford.

While Arsenal have shown signs of weariness in recent weeks, there have been few indications that Chelsea are about to falter.

FIXTURES

(1400 GMT kick-off unless stated) Saturday

Birmingham v Chelsea, Blackburn Middlesbrough, Fulham v Arsenal, Newcastle v Bolton (1615 GMT), Portsmouth v Derby, Reading v Manchester Utd, Tottenham v Sunderland

Manchester City v West Ham (1500 GMT), Wigan Athletic v Everton (1230 GMT)

Liverpool v Aston Villa (1900 GMT)

Inter crush Reggina

Inter Milan set up an Italian Cup quarterfinal tie with Juventus after beating Reggina 3-0 at home on Thursday and 7-1 on aggregate.

on aggregate in their last 16 tie after a 1-1 second leg draw in Naples. Igli Tare scored for the visitors in the second half before Maurizio Domizzi's equaliser. Lazio face Fiorentina in the next round.

Inter coach Roberto Mancini was able to field a second-string side, with his 17-year-old son Filippo coming off the bench, having won December's first leg 4-1 at Reggina.

known player on show at an near empty San Siro and he made his class count with a dipping long0range effort on 33 minutes. Reggina's Emmanuel Cascione then diverted the ball into his own net just before halftime.

Cesar dinked in a third from a

The quarterfinal first legs will be held next week with a draw taking place on Friday to work out which teams have home advantage first. The second legs are scheduled for Jan. 30.

Holders Rome overcame a 3-1 first leg deficit against Torino to win 5-3 on aggregate on Wednesday but European champions AC Milan went out after losing 3-2 on aggregate to Catania.

Adriano gets off to dream

REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Adriano made a dream start to his six-month loan spell in Brazil on Thursday by scoring both goals in Sao Paulo's 2-1 state championship win at Guaratingueta.

tional was loaned to Sao Paulo after a loss of form associated with personal problems and a reported struggle with alcohol-

Adriano's return to home soil has generated a buzz of excite-

The home club took a first half lead when a free kick by central defender Renato was deflected past Sao Paulo keeper Rogerio

gish and was easily contained by

Guaratingueta threatened to

Daisuke Matsui ensuring Le Mans' progression to the semifinals.

with the club after he said he had failed to garner any "good offers".

Hatem Ben Arfa, who missed the Cup disappointment through

centre of the defence alongside with Sunday's opponents Atletico a further three points back. Fabio Cannavaro with either the slowing veteran Michel Salgado or

AFP, Madrid



leaders Real Madrid hope to bounce straight back from their shock mid-week Spanish Cup exit when they tackle city rivals Atletico Madrid

on Sunday. The Spanish giants went down 1-0 at home to Real Mallorca on

Wednesday, losing their 100 per cent record in the Santiago Bernabeu stadium and delivering a huge blow to the morale of the reigning Spanish champions.

"We could have won handsomely but if you let teams off the hook, you pay the price," said Real coach Bernd Schuster. Despite being well into January,

Real seem to be suffering from a hangover from the two-week holiday period, which no doubt including some celebrations after winning at their bitter rivals Barcelona in their last game of 2007. "We've got to put Christmas

behind us now but it's difficult to go from zero to 100 per cent in such a short space of time," admitted Schuster. Nevertheless, while not yet

reaching the heights of their form which they displayed at the end of 2007, Real still lead the league at the halfway point in the Spanish season with 47 points from their 19 games.

They have a comfortable seven point advantage over Barcelona

Much of the credit for Real having such a substantial lead must go to their goalkeeper Iker Casillas, who has kept a clean sheet in their last five league games.

Casillas, who was rested against Mallorca to leave reserve Jerzy Dudek to take his share of the blame, will almost certainly face his strongest test for some time against Atletico.

"I don't think Atletico's defence is as good as ours but they have some huge threats among their forwards. Reyes, Forlan, Aguero and Simao are all very dangerous," said Casillas's teammate Sergio Ramos.

The central defender was one of the few players to come through the Mallorca defeat with some credit.

With injuries to both Gabriel Heinze and Christophe Metzelder, and Pepe doubtful with a sore right achilles, Schuster has limited options at the back.

Ramos is expected to play in the

Getafe v Sevilla (1900), Villarreal v

Almeria v Deportivo La Coruna (1600)

Real Betis v Recreativo Huelva (1600)

Levante v Real Mallorca (1600),

Osasuna v Athletic Bilbao (1600),

Valladolid v Espanyol (1600), Real

Zaragoza v Murcia (1600), Atletico

Valencia (2100)

Sunday

Santander later on Sunday. Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard has lost his Cameroon striker Saturday (kick off times in GMT)

Samuel Eto'o, who has scored four goals in as many league games, to African Nations Cup duty. Former World Player of the Year

Ronaldinho is still recovering from tendinitis in his left knee and will also be absent but Rijkaard will at least be buoyed by the likely return of Lionel Messi.

The Argentine winger has been absent for a month with a torn muscle in his left thigh but has trained this week.

Tough test for Milan

AFP, Rome



AC Milan face a Champions League qualification test when they travel to Udinese

Despite the euphoria surrounding Ronaldo's return to form and Pato's stunning arrival in Serie A in last week's 5-2 thrashing of Napoli, Milan are still down in 12th place in the league.

this weekend.

Already their players have written off their title prospects and admitted they are playing for fourth place - a position currently occupied by Udinese. The north-eastern outfit lead the European champions by 11

points, although Milan have three

games in hand, and this match

could prove decisive in the battle

for the fourth and final Champions League qualification berth. Defeat for Milan would leave them with an uphill battle to finish in the top four as it would leave them 14

points behind the team from Udine.

That result could also give Udinese the belief that they are good enough to hold off Milan and Fiorentina to take their place in the continent's

expected charge up the table.

get as they face a game almost every three days this month as they play catch-up for all the matches they

move back up the table," said Milan playmaker and world player of the year Kaka.

form having suffered a blip in

They ended that just before

Milan need every point they can

"Right now in the league we've

next season's Champions League." don't just have Udinese to worry about as Fiorentina are also back in

the winter break with a 5-1 defeat of Cagliari and then came back after three weeks off to win 2-1 at

If they beat Torino at home on Saturday, 24 hours before Milan play, they will go fourth and open up a 13-point gap to the Meanwhile, on-loan Portugal midfielder Maniche could make

his Inter Milan debut as the champions and runaway leaders entertain Parma, including new Italian international striker signing Cristiano Lucarelli.

beyond helping Inter to retain their

FIXTURES

Fiorentina v Torino (1930 GMT), Genoa v Atalanta (1700 GMT) Sunday (1400 GMT unless stated)

AC Milan, Inter Milan v Parma, (1930)

Maniche, though, is looking

"I've already had the opportunity to win the Champions League (with Porto in 2004)," he said. "And I'd like to win another given that once again I've got a good chance to challenge for that title. That's something positive and motivating."

The arrival of Nicolas Anelka has

assuaged concerns over Didier

Drogba's absence on Nations Cup

duty and Avram Grant's side are in

a rich vein of form going into

parade James McFadden as a

Birmingham player after their

manager, Alex McLeish, finally had

an offer accepted for the Scotland

Diarra is expect to make his

Portsmouth debut against bottom

side Derby following the 22-year-

old's midweek move from Arsenal.

surprise people, I am conscious of

that," Diarra admitted. "It isn't

Arsenal, it isn't Chelsea - but I know

the Portsmouth manager, I know

of getting back into the title race

appear now to depend on an unlikely

level of carelessness by the teams

above them and Rafael Benitez's side

will know they are in for a battle just

to ensure a top four spot if they are

unable to overcome Aston Villa at

Liverpool's fast-receding hopes

he is going to play me."

Anfield on Monday night.

"My choice could shock and

France midfielder Lassana

star by Everton.

Their hosts will be hoping to

Saturday's trip to Birmingham.

Maniche knows it will be tough to break into a winning team - Inter have won 14 of their 18 league matches this season, drawing the other four. "I'm not here on holiday, nor for

the money but because I deserve this big chance," he added. "You don't get the chance to play

for Inter every day, this is a privilege." There is unlikely to be too much change at the top of the table this weekend with the top five teams all

playing at home. Second-placed Roma entertain Catania, who knocked out a second-string Milan in the Italian Cup on Wednesday, while third-placed

Juventus host Sampdoria. At the bottom Cagliari travel to Reggina in a duel between the two

teams propping up the rest.

Last year also marked the first

Renato. extend their lead as Sao Paulo struggled to cope with the lively

Adriano took up deeper positions to escape his markers and the ploy proved successful when he crashed a loose ball into the Guaratingueta net shortly after the half time break.

Adriano's winning goal came from a well-placed free kick that escaped the lunge of goalkeeper Fabio.

start," Adriano told reporters. "It is a long time since I had a smile on my face but I am starting to enjoy myself again."

Madrid v Real Madrid (1800), Barcelona v Racing Santander (2000) Ronaldo is the best: Kaka

Football

AFP, Rome World player of the year Kaka paid tribute to club and international teammate Ronaldo on Thursday,

claiming he is still 'Il Fenomeno'.

That nickname, meaning the phenomenon, was more common for Ronaldo in his younger days but injuries and weight problems have seen him struggle with his form these last couple of seasons.

He was even unkindly nicknamed 'El Gordo' (Fatty) by some sections of the Real Madrid crowd

towards the end of his time in Spain.

But he made a match-winning comeback to the AC Milan team last weekend, scoring twice as the European champions thrashed Napoli 5-2 to end their seven-game winless drought at the San Siro.

Ronaldo formed a threatening

attacking partnership with Kaka

and teenage star Pato. "It's always great to play with great players. Here at Milan we have so many champions that it's great to go out on the field with my

teammates," Kaka told Milan TV.

with Ronaldo in the national team

and he really is 'Il Fenomeno' like

"I've had a few chances to play

ing things with the ball and when he takes to the field he shows his worth and always makes the difference." Kaka has was also impressed with Pato's goalscoring debut

everyone says because he does amaz-

against Napoli. "I'm happy for his debut, it went very well. All strikers dream about scoring on their debut and he managed to do just that, and at the

San Siro in front of our fans. "We hope he continues like that and fits into the team's way of playing. He's a calm lad; he's playing in a team with a lot of experience that can help him a lot so he gets even better."

Lyon aim to bounce back

available for the encounter.

be up for the Lens showdown.

Juninho, however, played down

"We didn't lack desire but con-

the Cup loss and said Lyon would

centration (against Le Mans). It was

there for the winning. It's a shame

to be knocked out in the

quarterfinals of a competition in

which we played the final last

season, especially against a team

that included many second-choice

"But we must not over-dramatise



win against third-from-bottom Lens this week-Lyon crashed out of the French League Cup midweek, a solitary goal from Japan midfielder

Six-time

pions Lyon will

bid to consoli-

date their

league lead

with an away

But the Ligue 1 champions will travel to Lens buoyed by news that Brazilian striker Fred wants to stick

The bad news for Lyon is that captain Juninho suffered a broken toe in the defeat to Le Mans and is more than likely to be ruled out of Sunday's league game.

Saturday

players," said the Brazilian.

Lorient v PSG, Metz v Monaco, Toulouse v Caen, Sochaux v Lille, Le Mans v Bordeaux, Auxerre v Strasbourg, St Etienne v Rennes, Marseille v Valenciennes Sunday

Nice v Nancy, Lens v Lyon

things. We're still in three competitions," he said. "We must react, Lens, who lie third from bottom starting on Sunday at Lens. of the league with just 20 points "We'll have to be careful but if from 19 matches, have a full squad

> of winning. Second-placed Nancy, who face Nice in Sunday's other game - their fifth in two weeks, will be seeking to

we play at our level, we're capable

bounce back from a 3-0 Cup reverse at home to Lens. Central defender Gerald Cid will likely make his debut for Nice after

signing from English Premier League club Bolton. On Saturday, a resurgent PSG travel to mid-table rivals Lorient without Mario Yepes, who received a red card in the Parisian club's 4-0.

midweek Cup win over Valenciennes.

Bordeaux, behind Nancy on points difference, travel to Le Mans, while fourth-placed Valenciennes face a tricky trip to Marseille.

In Saturday's other games, Metz host Monaco, Toulouse entertain Caen, Lille travel to Sochaux, Auxerre play Strasbourg. and Rennes make the trip to St Etienne.

Hip-hop Henin August at the Beijing Olympics, Australian 5 Open where she is in the running for an IOC Athletes Commission seat. IOC Athletes Commission seat.

A very public divorce, two Grand

Justine Henin's life doesn't look

Slam titles, a seven-month winning streak, hip-hop dance lessons, and a bid for election to the International Olympic Committee.

AP, Melbourne

to be settling down anytime soon. Last January, there was the breakup of her marriage that forced her to pull out of the Australian Open. A month later, she started an amazing 2007 on the court that saw her retain the top women's ranking, win the French Open and the U.S. Open and start equal the consecutive matches an impressive streak that continued Friday at the Australian Open with her 31st match win in a row.

Henin also hopes to defend her behind Martina Navratilova's tour Olympic gold medal for Belgium in record of 74 in 1984.

premier competition next season. But a victory for Milan would give them a vital boost in their

missed due to their successful Club World Cup campaign in December. got many matches coming up in quick succession as we have to play every weekend and catch up the three matches we missed to try to

"Our aim is to earn a place in Milan's problem is that they

November and December where

they went on a run of picking up

And then there's the dance

"My fitness coach gives hip hop

lessons," Henin said Friday. "We

just started. Just for fun sometimes

we do it. It's just my relaxing time in

Which would be in direct con-

Henin's 7-5, 6-4 win over 25th-

seeded Francesca Schiavone on

Friday continued the streak -- her

last loss was in the Wimbledon

title on Jan. 26, the streak would

extend to 35 matches. That would

won by Venus Williams in 2000, the

WTA Tour. Although that's still well

most among active players on the

preparation. I'm so bad."

trast to her play on court.

semifinals last June.

just two points from five games.

Juventus v Sampdoria, Livorno v Empoli Napoli v Lazio, Palermo v Siena, Reggina v Cagliari, AS Roma v Catania, Udinese v

Henin admits it's in her mind. "It's a kind of pressure ... I mean,

"The last year has been great, I've been so consistent. But every match is different, you have to start again. You know if you're not at your best level you can lose." While Henin says she has a good rapport with many players on the

WTA Tour, she's forged a close

friendship with Russian Svetlana

one day or another I will lose," she

said. "That's the game. I hope it's

going to be as late as possible.

Kuznetsova. "We have a good relationship ... she's very honest. She's just herself, If she wins the Australian Open always smiling," says Henin. "She's nice with everyone." Before her friendship with

Kuznetsova, hip-hop certainly was

not in Henin's MP3 player. "She listens to strange music, you know, not the kind of music that I'm used to," Henin says, smiling. "So I'm and it's very soon," said Henin. "I always teasing her with that."

time in her career that Henin was the only Belgian among the top players in the women's game. In the past, the French-speaking Henin had to share the national spotlight with the now-retired Kim

country of 10 million. Clijsters' retirement -- she married American basketball player Brian Lynch last July and is expecting the couple's first child has left Belgium with Henin as its only top 100 player -- at No. 1.

Clijsters, who spoke Flemish and

had a different support base in the

almost a perfect story," Henin said. "Now the attention is a lot on myself. but I don't feel extra pressure for that." Henin said she and Clijsters haven'tspoken or corresponded by e-mail. "I heard that she's pregnant,

"It was great for Belgium to have

two players like us at the same time,

wish her the best."

REUTERS, Milan

Lazio also defeated Napoli 3-2

Hernan Crespo was the best

tight angle in stoppage time.

start

Inter Milan's outcast striker

The former Brazil interna-

ment in Brazil and Sao Paulo fans outnumbered local supporters in the packed Guaratingueta sta-

Adriano initially looked slug-

midfield pairing of Alex Silva and

"Obviously there is still plenty of room for me to improve but it was great to get off to a good

injury, could make his comeback at