

Barcelona forward Thierry Henry goes airborne as he controls the ball during their Champions League quarterfinal match against Schalke at the Veltins Arena Stadium in Gelsenkirchen on Tuesday.

Barcelona ride on Krkic

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

Barcelona's teenage striker Bojan Krkic gave his side the initiative in their Champions League quarterfinal after the Spaniards left Germany with a 1-0 win over Schalke 04 on Tuesday night.

Krkic, who will not turn 18 until the end of August, struck as early as the 12th minute with a valuable away goal to put the Spanish giants firmly in the driving seat for next Wednesday's second leg at the Nou Camp stadium.

Barcelona coach Frank Rijkaard was relieved that after a crushing league defeat by Real Betis last weekend which virtually erased their chances of the title that his side had rebounded.

"I think one can say that is a good result," said the former AC Milan and Dutch playing legend.

"The team worked well to earn this win and I would like to congrat-

ulate them. We can be happy with this evening's efforts. There were some things missing from our game. The squad have reacted well following the defeat by Betis, but we worked like we do every day, but everyone knew that it was an important match this evening."

Schalke striker Gerald Asamoah said that his side had been way too respectful of their opponents.

"We gave Barcelona too much respect in the first-half and then we did wake up," said Asamoah.

"We should have put them under pressure from the beginning, but unfortunately it didn't come to a goal."

"We lost today (Tuesday), but have to have hope for the replay. Without hope there is no point us travelling to Spain."

The goal came after a dream pass from Spanish international Xavi Hernandez split open Schalke's defence.

Ex-Arsenal striker Thierry Henry seized the chance and fired at Schalke's keeper Manuel Neuer

who parried the shot, but Henry snatched the re-bound and slid a pass to teenager Krkic to bury his shot in the top of the net.

It was cruel luck on Neuer, the hero in Portugal last month when his outstanding performance denied FC Porto to book the Germans into the last eight.

Schalke immediately worked hard to get back in the game but Asamoah and Kevin Kuranyi could only manage four first-half shots on goal, despite the Germans having more possession in the first-half.

Schalke have not reached the last eight of Europe's elite club competition for almost five decades, but now face a mountain to climb for next week's return leg as the second-half proved as fruitless as the first 45 minutes.

Germany striker Kuranyi is a concern for next week's second-leg after he was taken off after 60 minutes after struggling with a virus.

Both Asamoah and Turkey striker Halil Altintop went perilously close to forcing the equaliser

within minutes of each other at the 70 minute mark, but Barcelona's defence held firm.

A curling pass from Germany defender Heiko Westermann put Danish substitute striker Soeren Larsen into a threatening position, but his header went wide with ten minutes to go.

And Westermann was incensed when his appeals for a penalty were turned down moments later.

"That was for me a totally clear penalty and the defender hit me in the back, the replay will clearly show it," said a fuming Westermann after the final whistle.

There was a flurry of late yellow cards, four to each side, as Schalke pushed to level the scores while Barcelona worked just as hard to run the clock down, but there was to be no late drama.

The second leg will be played at Barcelona's Camp Nou on 9 April and the home side are now overwhelming favourites to make the semifinals in their bid to repeat their 2006 Champions League win.

FA charges Ferguson

AFP, London

Manchester United manager Sir Alex Ferguson and his assistant Carlos Queiroz were both charged with improper conduct by the Football Association (FA) here Wednesday.

The duo face disciplinary action following comments they each made regarding referee Martin Atkinson following United's shock 1-0 FA Cup quarterfinal defeat against Portsmouth at Old Trafford on March 8.

Ferguson's charge also relates to comments he made regarding Keith Hackett, English football's referees' chief.

Both men have until April 17 to respond to the charge.

Ferguson said Atkinson's display was "unacceptable" and also accused Hackett of "not doing his job properly."

Ferguson and Queiroz were unhappy United were not given a first-half penalty for a challenge on Cristiano Ronaldo.

But what really angered Ferguson was Atkinson's decision not to award a penalty when Sylvain Distin appeared to barge Ronaldo off the ball.

The Scot, who admitted a charge of using abusive language towards referee Mark Clattenburg after the Premier League leaders' 1-0 defeat at Bolton earlier this season, also felt Atkinson let Portsmouth players get away with too many fouls and accused the referee of being "on their side."

"It's absolutely ridiculous. I cannot explain it," said Ferguson.

"Managers get sacked because of things like that and he's going to referee a game next week."

He then turned his fire on Hackett, saying: "He's not doing his job properly and he needs to be assessed. I'm assessed as a manager, players are assessed, and referees should be assessed properly by the right people."

"That performance today should not be accepted by our game."

Queiroz called Atkinson "a disgrace", while Ronaldo said afterwards he felt "scared" playing in England because he feels officials do not protect him.

Hackett, however, is not responsible for the selection of referees and match officials in FA Cup ties.

Pompey face injury worries

AFP, Portsmouth

Portsmouth manager Harry Redknapp is sweating on the fitness of left-back Hermann Hreidarsson ahead of Saturday's FA Cup semifinal against West Bromwich Albion at Wembley.

The Iceland international has three stitches in an Achilles wound while, up front, winger John Utaka is doubtful because of a hamstring problem.

Pompey, the only Premier League side left in this season's FA Cup, may be firm favourites for this weekend's clash but that won't stop Redknapp sending the duo to a local hospital to receive oxygen chamber treatment.

Hreidarsson's injury is a particular concern as Noe Pamarot, who would normally provide left-back cover, is still out with a knee injury.

Forward options are less of a headache for Redknapp even though he will be without in-form striker

Jermain Defoe, who is cup-tied.

If Hreidarsson is ruled out Lauren could start in his place even though the former Arsenal star is more at home at right-back.

On-loan French defender Lucien Auby has made just two appearances since his move from Lens in January and one of those was a substitute.

It all adds to the pressure as Portsmouth bid to win the FA Cup for the first time in 69 years with that 1939 triumph being the only time in the south coast club's history that they've lifted the knockout trophy.

"Hermann is determined to play but he had a big hole in his foot and it's nasty," Redknapp said on Tuesday.

"John's injury is a dangerous one too. If we rush him back too soon he could do more damage and be out for weeks."

As for Defoe's absence, he added: "Of course we are going to miss him, he's scored eight goals in seven games but we've played most of the season so far without him and done well."

"We've got Kanu, Milan Baros and David Nugent who could all come in. So we are OK. Utaka is probably our only out-and-out

winger but there are several ways we can play."

Baros has yet to score in 10 games for Portsmouth but Redknapp had no doubt a goal was on its way from the on-loan former Liverpool and Aston Villa forward.

"We need a goal from him but I think he's ready to score."

He's shown excellent movement in training, he's played at the very top level with Liverpool, Aston Villa and the Czech Republic and he's a great loan signing for us."

"I'm sure he's ready to come in and do a job for us. We've still got the option to sign him at the end of the season and I think a few people were surprised we were able to get him on loan from Lyon. There's nothing wrong with his confidence."

Portsmouth and England goalkeeper David James pulled out of training with a stomach bug on Tuesday but the 37-year-old, who kept a clean sheet when Pompey dramatically beat Manchester United 1-0 at Old Trafford in the quarterfinals, is expected to be fit come the weekend.

Sunday's second semifinal sees two of West Brom's second-tier Championship rivals in action when Barnsley play Cardiff.

Anelka accepts his role

Football

AFP, Istanbul

Nicolas Anelka insists he is willing to stay in the shadows at Chelsea because he knows he will get the chance to win the game's top prizes.

Anelka has often been reduced to a bit-part role since his move from Bolton in January, but the France striker is a more mature character than earlier in his career and has no intention of causing problems for Blues manager Avram Grant.

His spells at Arsenal, Real Madrid and Liverpool were spoiled by his occasional outbursts when he felt hard-done-by, earning him the nickname 'le sulk'.

Hackett, however, is not responsible for the selection of referees and match officials in FA Cup ties.

Now Anelka cuts a far more humble figure. He has only started

10 matches so far and could be on the bench again in Wednesday's Champions League quarterfinal first leg at Fenerbahce.

That would have been the signal for a tantrum for the young Anelka. Now a desire to be involved in the race for the Premier League and Champions League seems to have convinced him to put the team ahead of his ego.

"I'm very new at the club so I need to get used to my teammates and learn the way we play. It's not difficult, when the manager asks me to play I play, when he asks me to be on the bench I try to help the team when I go on," Anelka said.

"It will be the same until the end of my contract. I'm just pleased to be here and playing for Chelsea and will try my best all the time."

"It's always difficult to win the

Champions League but I think we have the quality to win this title because of the way we play and the number of big players we have."

"I won the Champions League already with Real Madrid. I would love to do it with Chelsea - I know we are going to win a lot of trophies."

Anelka is back on familiar ground as he returns to Fenerbahce for the first time since leaving the club two years.

He will get a mixed reception from fans who idolised him for his performances but were unhappy with the hasty manner of his departure to Bolton.

"I was happy when we drew them because I would be coming back to a stadium I like and could see friends left," he said.

"But if I have the chance to score I will. I play for Chelsea now and I would be happy."

German duo look at semi meet

AFP, Paris



German powerhouses Bayern Munich and Bayer Leverkusen will look to record comfortable first leg leads in their UEFA Cup quarterfinals on Thursday and all but set up a tantalising semifinal between themselves.

Bundesliga leaders Bayern host Spanish side Getafe while Bayer are at home to Russian champions Zenit St Petersburg - the other two ties see Britain's sole remaining representative Rangers at home to Portuguese outfit Sporting Lisbon while Fiorentina receive Dutch side PSV Eindhoven.

Bayern last won this trophy in the 1995/96 season and it is one that has eluded the grasp of their master coach Ottmar Hitzfeld, who would love to round off his time in charge - he is leaving to take over the Swiss national side at the end of this campaign - by landing it.

Getafe, though, might only be 12th in their championship but have punched above their weight this term in the UEFA Cup, eliminating Portuguese giants Benfica in the last round.

However, they travel to

Germany with a bad omen hovering over them as coach Michael Laudrup has never won there even during his stellar playing career and the former Danish playmaker is far from confident that record is going to end.

"We are talking about the best team in the tournament and the best players," he told UEFA.com.

Laudrup will be praying that Bayern are still a little leg weary after their tired performance last Saturday saw them held 1-1 by strugglers Nuremberg, which Hitzfeld claimed was just a bad day at the office but added he would be holding frank discussions with the players.

Indeed Bayern's rugged Argentinian international defender Martin Demichelis is convinced that Bayern will face a tough battle with their opponents.

"I rate Getafe as one of the best teams still in the competition," he told the club's website.

"They will be totally motivated and are not coming here for a kickabout. They are as keen to make the semifinals," added Demichelis, who has had a bet with compatriot and Getafe goalkeeper Roberto Abbondanzieri over the outcome.

Bayer, winners of this tournament in 1988, can only really think of the UEFA Cup as the sole chance of silverware this term as they are 10 points behind Bayern in the title

race, having failed to take advantage of Bayern's draw last weekend by losing 2-0 at home to Eintracht Frankfurt.

However, they face tough opposition in Zenit, coached by two-time former Dutch national handler Dick Advocaat, and Bayer's Swiss midfielder Tranquillo Barnetta admitted they would have to up their game to take a lead to Russia.

"We have to produce the right response (from the Eintracht defeat) against Zenit," he said.

Bayer coach Michael Skibbe confessed that he would have preferred to have played the first leg in Russia, especially as Zenit showed what a force they are in their lair by overturning a 3-1 deficit from the first leg in Marseille by beating the French side 2-0 in St Petersburg to win on the away goal rule.

They will have to be especially wary of Zenit frontman Pavel Pogrebnyak, who has scored four times in the last four UEFA Cup matches to take his total to seven for the competition this term.

Rangers will be looking to add the UEFA Cup to their sole European title win, the now defunct Cup Winners Cup in 1972, by establishing a comfortable advantage to take to Lisbon next week against a side they beat on their way to the Cup Winners Cup.

Sporting, however, are determined to gain consolation for the fact they have failed to mount a strong challenge for the title with FC Porto, and trail them by 20 points with just six matches remaining.

Rangers should welcome back tough-tackling midfielder Ibrahim Hernani, who has had more of an impact on their European challenge this term than on the domestic title race, and he will have to be at his sharpest to deny Sporting's Brazilian sharpshooter Liedson, who scored twice at the weekend in league action.

Fiorentina will also be hoping to make home advantage count against PSV, who are five points ahead of Ajax in the title race with three matches remaining, but face a formidable obstacle in the Dutch side's 'keeper Gomes, who once again proved his credentials in the 0-0 draw with NEC Breda last weekend.

"He is a great goalkeeper, someone who does that little bit special," said PSV coach Sefer Vergoossen.

UEFA Cup quarterfinals, 1st leg Thursday
 Bayer Leverkusen (GER) v Zenit Saint-Petersburg (RUS)
 Rangers (SCO) v Sporting Lisbon (POR)
 Bayern Munich (GER) v Getafe (ESP)
 Fiorentina (ITA) v PSV Eindhoven (NED)

Moratti denies Jose rumours

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan owner Massimo Moratti denied on Wednesday persistent rumours that former Chelsea boss Jose Mourinho is due to take over the club's coaching reins from Roberto Mancini next season.

Speculation linking Mourinho to Inter has gathered pace since Mancini announced last month that he would step down at the end of the season, only to change his mind a day later.

Recently a Mourinho representative claimed he had been in Italy to meet with Moratti but Mourinho himself denied that meeting ever took place.

"For me the situation will not change because we want to go forward without making any great waves that you never know whether or not will be positive," said Moratti.

"These are other people's ideas but they're not true. But it's fascinating because everyone is waiting for some news."

"For many years now you (the press) start talking about this two months before the end of the season."

"I can't do anything about that and even less so Mancini."

"I read many things in the newspapers that I find tiresome but I'm used to it and I try to rise above it."

Inter have struggled recently at home and abroad after a block-buster opening to their season.

Get Gomez for 50m euros

Football

AFP, Berlin

Germany striker Mario Gomez now has a 50 million euros (78 million US dollars) price tag as VfB Stuttgart bosses show their determination to keep their hot-shot who is set to star at Euro 2008.

The 22-year-old is under contract until June 2012, but both Spanish giants Barcelona and Real Madrid have expressed an interest and the defending Bundesliga champions want to keep their goal-machine for as long as possible.

It would be a new Bundesliga record if either Spanish side pays such a high fee for Gomez and the 50 million figure is more than triple his 16 million market value at the start of the season.

"One cannot insure the market value of Mario, we feel he is worth about 50 million euros," said Stuttgart's director of sport Jochen Schneider.

Gomez, who will miss the next two weeks with a thigh injury, has bagged 15 goals in 20 league games even though Stuttgart have laboured this season with erratic form.

With six goals for Germany in just nine appearances, Gomez is set to partner Bayern Munich striker Miroslav Klose up front in the national side for June's Euro 2008 tournament.

"If I were Real's coach, I would want to sign him. But his favourite Spanish team is Barcelona - and Real are the arch-enemy," VfB coach Armin Veh told German magazine Sport Bild.

"The plan is that Mario will stay with us for another year that time is extremely important for his development."

Stuttgart captain Fernando Meira says there is little chance of Gomez remaining at the club for too much longer.

"It makes everyone proud at the club that we have such a good player as Mario in the side," Meira

told local paper the Stuttgarter Nachrichten.

"Sooner or later, Mario will join a big club, probably Real Madrid or Barcelona."

Gomez has said he wants to spend another season at Stuttgart, but admitted he is tempted by the prospect of life in Spain's La Liga.

"I would like to play abroad in the future and Barcelona is my dream team," said Gomez, whose father is Spanish.

"But at the moment, I have no plans to go and even if a top team comes in for me there is no guarantee I will leave."

Gomez will have to sit out this weekend's Bundesliga game against title rivals Hamburg and Bayer Leverkusen the following week, having been blighted by injury last season, the striker is impatient.

"It cannot be changed. I want to be fit again as soon as possible, but I have to be patient and wait," said Gomez, after tearing his thigh muscle against Hanover last weekend.

Federer, Nadal advance

Tennis

AFP, Miami

World number one Roger Federer rolled over unseeded Jose Acasuso 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 in a fourth-round match at the 3.8 million dollar ATP and WTA hardcourt tournament on Tuesday.

The top seeded Swiss star has not gone this deep into a season without winning a championship since 2000 - the last year he failed to win a title.

Winning here would be nothing new to Federer, who claimed back-to-back titles at this men's and ladies' tournament from 2004-05.

The 26-year-old reached the fourth round here last year, but was upset by Guillermo Canas.

Second seed Rafael Nadal, who lost to Federer in the 2005 final, also reached the quarterfinals on Tuesday by beating 15th-seeded Frenchman Paul-Henri Mathieu 6-4, 6-4.

The Spaniard owns a commanding 8-0 lead in the all-time series against Mathieu, who retired from their match at the Australian

Open in January. Like Federer, Nadal has yet to win on tour this season.

Ninth-seeded American James Blake is through to the quarterfinals after claiming a 6-3, 6-4 win over No. 27 Radek Stepanek.

Sixth seeded American Andy Roddick will try to join his compatriot in the last eight later on Tuesday when he takes on unseeded Frenchman Julien Benneteau, who upset countryman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga on Monday.

Roddick, who announced his engagement to swimsuit model Brooklyn Decker, won here in 2004 and is making his ninth-straight appearance.

Should he advance, Roddick will have to deal with Federer, who is 15-1 in their all-time series.

Russia's Dmitry Tursunov failed to move through as 10th-seeded Czech Tomas Berdych claimed a 6-2, 6-2 win in their fourth-round match.

On the women's side of the draw, Svetlana Kuznetsova spoiled an all-Williams semifinal.

Hours after Serena Williams was victorious in her quarterfinal,

Kuznetsova defeated Venus Williams 6-4, 6-4.

The Russian held serve throughout the first set, winning all 14 of her first-serve points. Tied at 3-3 in the second set, Kuznetsova broke Williams to go up 4-3 and ended up serving out for the match.

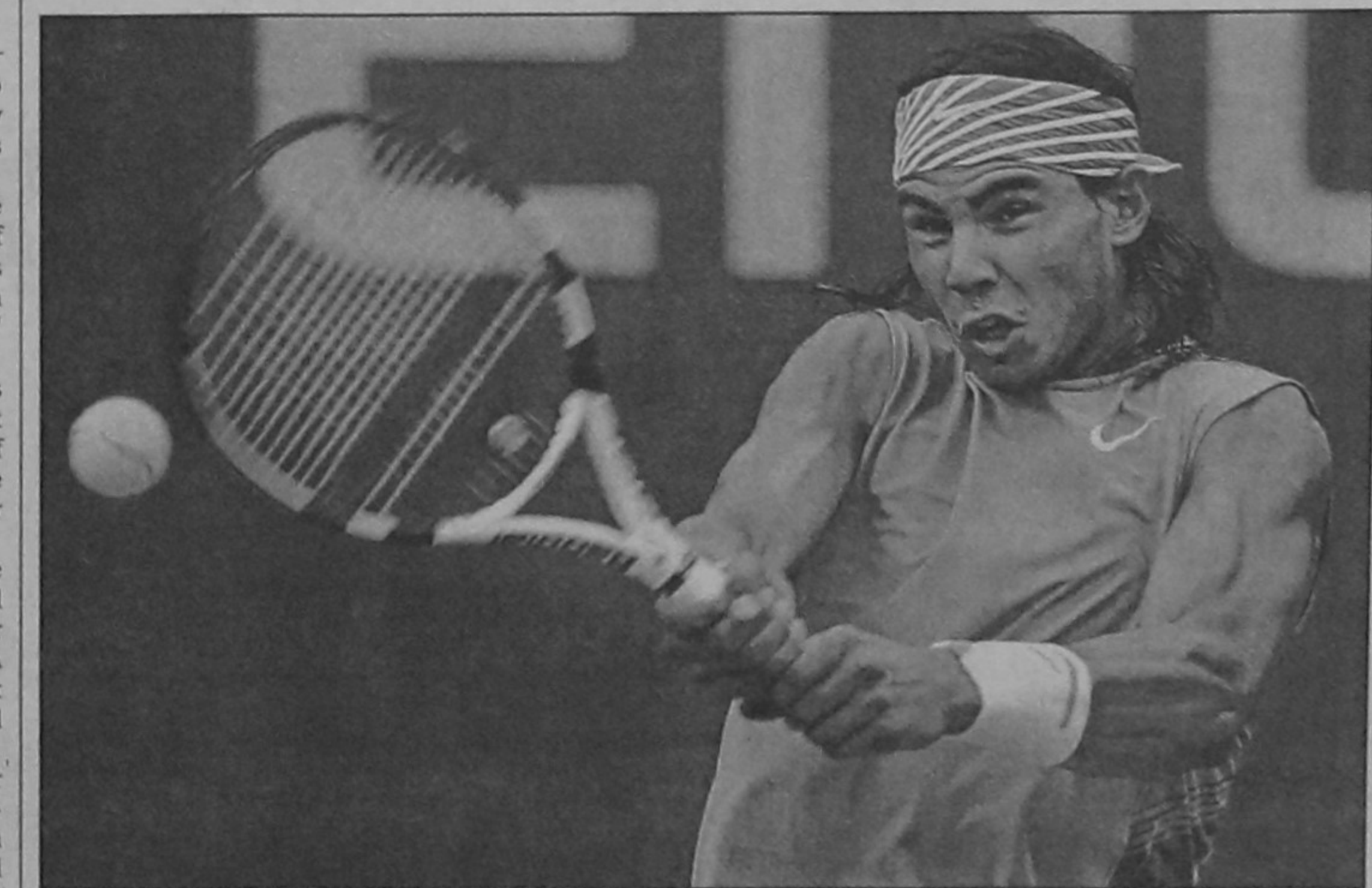
Williams was attempting to capture her fourth title at the event, having won the tournament in 1998, 1999 and 2001.

Younger sister Serena had held up her end of the bargain earlier Tuesday with a 6-2, 6-0 victory over top seed and world No. 1 Justine Henin.

Henin had won three straight in the series against Serena - claiming quarterfinal victories at Roland Garros, Wimbledon and the US Open - but was outplayed by the American.

Serena, who beat Henin here in last season's championship match, captured three breaks in each set of the 80-minute match.

It was another tough loss for the 25-year-old Belgian, who was playing her first tournament since being upset by Francesca Schiavone in the quarterfinals at Dubai.



Spaniard Rafael Nadal makes a backhand return against Frenchman Paul-Henri Mathieu during the Sony Ericsson Open in Florida on Tuesday.