



US star Serena Williams celebrates after winning her Wimbledon semifinal against China's Zheng Jie in London on Thursday.

Sister versus sister

AFP, London



Venus and Serena Williams, who boast six Wimbledon titles between them, will clash for the third time in an All England Club final on Saturday.

Venus, the four-time winner and defending champion, booked her place with a 6-1, 7-6 (7/3) win over Russian fifth seed Elena Dementieva to reach her seventh singles final.

Serena, the younger of the two sisters, then ended wildcard Zheng Jie's hopes of becoming the first Chinese player to reach a Grand Slam final with a battling 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) win.

The 26-year-old Serena will be looking to complete a hat-trick of Wimbledon wins over her sister having come out on top in the 2002

and 2003 finals.

Venus insists the final will be fully competitive despite scepticism in the past over whether the two perform to the maximum of their ability when they share the same court.

"I find the question pretty offensive because I'm extremely professional in everything that I do on and off the court," said Venus, the holder of six Grand Slam titles.

"I contribute my best in my sport, and I also have a ton of respect for myself and my family. So any mention of that is extremely disrespectful for who I am and my family."

Serena, 11 kilos heavier and more than 11cm taller than Zheng, had too much brawn for the world 133, who had made her mark by knocking out top seed Ana Ivanovic in the third round.

"She pushed me and really played a great match," said Serena of an opponent she had comfortably defeated in the first round here four years ago.

Zheng was left to regret a great opportunity to take the semifinal to a decider when she held set point in the 10th game of the second set but Williams was able to call on her powerful smash to rescue herself.

"She played like she had nothing to lose. I was able to hit a smash on that set point. I didn't really want to go into a third set," added the American sixth seed who will be facing her sister in a seventh Grand Slam final.

"I'm looking forward to playing Venus in the final. She'll be the toughest opponent I've faced."

"We haven't played each other in a Grand Slam final for five years but that's because our rankings fell or we were in the same side of the draw. I guess this is a new start for both of us."

Serena's last Wimbledon final appearance was in 2004, when she lost to teenage Maria Sharapova.

Spain to receive 7.3 ton trophy from Austria

AFP, Vienna

Austria will present newly-crowned European football champions Spain with a giant crystal-encrusted trophy in commemoration of Euro 2008, the government's tournament coordinator Heinz Palme said Friday.

The trophy, commissioned by the Austrian government and designed by Swiss artist Sylvie Fleury, measures 5.11 metres (16.7 feet) in height and weighs 7.3 tonnes.

The sculpture, which has been decorated with some 11,000 Swarovski crystals and can be lit from within, will be handed to the Spanish team within the next two months, Palme said.

Spain took home the smaller and lighter European championship trophy Sunday, after beating Germany 1-0 in the Euro 2008 final in Vienna.

Spain last won the competition in 1964.

Rensing gets his chance

AFP, Munich

Bayern Munich's goalkeeper Michael Rensing admits he will be glad to finally step out of Oliver Kahn's shadow after five years on the sidelines as he targets a place in the Germany team.

The 24-year-old joined Bayern's senior squad in 2003, but has only made 23 Bundesliga appearances in the last five seasons with former Germany captain Kahn dominating Bayern's number one shirt.

But after Kahn retired in May, Rensing is ready to take his place in goal and with ex-Arsenal shot-stopper Jens Lehmann, 38, approaching the end of his career in the Mannschaft, Rensing wants a place in Joachim Loew's Germany team.

"If you perform well as Bayern goalkeeper, you're bound to be in the frame for the national team," said Rensing.

"But first of all, my focus is on Bayern, although obviously my dream is to play for Germany at some point."

And having so often sat on Bayern's bench, Rensing is relishing the chance to take his place in the first team.

"I've spent so long yearning for this moment, and it's arrived at last," he said with a smile.

"This is a dream come true for me."

"That's why I'll be giving it even more effort than ever."

"Obviously there'll be more focus on me than before."

"A completely different season lies ahead for me personally."

"But in any case, I'm the most demanding critic of my own performances."

And new Bayern coach Jurgen Klinsmann has already said Rensing is his first-choice goalkeeper with former international Hans-Joerg Butt as his back-up and mentor.

"Michael is undisputed number one," said former Germany boss Klinsmann who started as Bayern coach on Monday.

"We're looking to help him develop, and we'll give him the time and the support he needs."

"He can become an outstanding goalkeeper, both here and internationally."

And Rensing is hoping he can keep his unbeaten run for as long as possible - in all of his 23 Bundesliga appearances he has yet to be on the losing side.

Ronnie tests City's patience

INTERNET, undated



Manchester City have warned Barcelona playmaker Ronaldinho that they will not wait much longer for a decision on his future, while the player's brother says he is close to agreeing a move to Milan.

City have been tracking the Barca superstar since the end of last season and are believed to have held discussions with the Brazilian's representatives on at least one occasion.

A deal is thought to have already been agreed with his current employers, and the Premier League club are now waiting to hear back from the player himself.

However, with reports on Thursday suggesting that the former World Player of the Year is closing in on a move to Italian giants Milan and is also open to a Chelsea switch, City's patience is wearing thin.

With Mark Hughes keen to press on with his summer transfer plans, the club's executive chairman Garry Cook admits that the Premier League side will turn their attention elsewhere should the saga continue to drag on with no apparent end in sight.

"We definitely don't want to be sitting waiting for a decision from Ronaldinho," he said in the Daily Mail.

"A mutual decision has to be made. We are setting our own timeline."

"We're not going to sit and wait. This is too big a football club for that."

Cook is refusing to give up hope, though, that an agreement can be reached and believes that City are now a attractive proposition for the world's best players.

"Ronaldinho wants to be in the best league with a big club," Cook added.

"There is no hiding the fact that success for this club is imminent," Ronaldinho's brother and

agent, meanwhile, claims it is "90 per cent" likely that the Barcelona star will join Milan.

Milan have long been favourites to sign the playmaker, despite vice-president Adriano Galliani stating the club would not break the bank end for Ronaldinho.

The player's representative Roberto de Assis now appears to be confident that Ronaldinho will move to the San Siro this summer.

"It's true, he is likely to go to Milan," De Assis told Telemorbardia.

Everything is ready for the transfer. It is 90 per cent and we are heading in this direction."

Los Angeles Galaxy had also been linked with a big-money offer to tempt Ronaldinho to Major League Soccer, but De Assis insists his brother will not join David Beckham in the United States.

He added: "He will never play there. He will play a tournament in Houston for his sponsor, but a transfer to the USA is excluded."

Chivu marries TV presenter

AFP, Bucharest

Romania football captain Cristi Chivu on Thursday married television presenter Adelina Eliset in a small ceremony in Bucharest.

The 27-year-old Chivu and his bride, a year younger and a sports news presenter for one of the top television stations in the country, tied the knot in front of a small group of friends, including Romanian international Bogdan Lobont.

Inter Milan player Chivu played in last month's Euro 2008 competition, where Romania failed to get through the group stages, although he had a dislocated collarbone.

Zheng Zhi could miss Olympics

AFP, Beijing

China's star footballer Zheng Zhi, a fixture with the English club Charlton, is likely to miss the upcoming Beijing Olympics due to a back injury, state media reported.

Zheng has a herniated disk in his lower back and doctors say he may have to sit out the Olympic Games to recuperate, the Titan Sports Weekly reported.

However, there was a chance that the star midfielder would recover in time for the August Games, the paper said.

"We will not easily let Zheng Zhi sit (out the Olympics), he is China's best player at the moment, the Olympic team needs him, but we need a Zheng Zhi in top form," the paper quoted China's Serbian coach Ratomir Djukovic as saying.

Djukovic said he was prepared for the worst and had already begun searching for another player to take Zheng's place.

Zheng skipped China's national team last month when it failed to advance out of the first round of World Cup 2010 qualifying, posting a one win, three ties, two loss record and greatly disappointing Chinese fans.

The Charlton midfielder played injured during several of the World Cup qualifying matches.

Boro sign Emnes

AFP, London

Dutchman Marvin Emnes on Friday signed a 3.2-million-pound (6.3m dollar) deal with English Premier League side Middlesbrough.

The 20-year-old Sparta Rotterdam player has signed a four-year deal after agreeing personal terms and passing a medical.

"We feel we have signed an exciting young player in Marvin," manager Gareth Southgate told the club's website.

Last season was his breakthrough year at Sparta Rotterdam and he ended the campaign with a flurry, scoring eight goals in his final 10 games.

"He can play anywhere across the front line, so he has versatility to go with pace, energy and technical skills."

Emnes is likely to be employed as an attacking midfielder as Fabio Rochembach's departure, along with that of Gaizka Mendietia, has depleted the club's midfield resources, and with uncertainty persisting over the futures of George Boateng and Gary O'Neil.

Rotterdam-born Emnes, a Holland Under-21 international, could join up with his new teammates when they return for pre-season training on Monday.

Jurgen bans cell phones

AFP, Munich



New Bayern Munich boss Jurgen Klinsmann has banned his players from using mobile phones on the club's premises as the ex-Mannschaft coach rings the changes at the German giants.

According to reports in Thursday's edition of Munich daily newspaper Taz, one of Klinsmann's first rules in charge has been to ban mobiles, especially in the club's refurbished training complex at Munich's Saebener Strasse ground.

Having guided Germany to third-place at the 2006 World Cup, Klinsmann replaced new

Switzerland coach Ottmar Hitzfeld as head coach at Bayern on Monday -- his first role as a club coach.

The Bayern squad now face eight-hour days and the 43-year-old Klinsmann insists his players focus solely on their work -- whether they are training, resting or studying -- without the distraction of mobile phone calls.

Adorned with buddhist statues, the refurbished performance centre has been designed by Klinsmann to "release positive energy" and contains areas for relaxation, rest, study and massage.

Despite Wednesday's boycott by 20 photographers from his first press conference due to the strict regulations imposed, Klinsmann's former critic Oliver Khan says the

ex-Germany striker will help Bayern.

Former Germany captain Kahn retired from Bayern in May after 14 years at the German giants.

He was famously dropped by Klinsmann during the 2006 World Cup in favour of ex-Arsenal shot-stopper Jens Lehmann.

"He always tries to develop things, he likes to learn, he tests new things," said Kahn on the website Eurosport.de.

"I have confidence: he will pass his first test at a large club. In football, it is always necessary to bring new ideas."

And Kahn says he would like to meet Klinsmann and the new Bayern boss said on Wednesday: "Kahn is always welcome at the club after all he has done for Bayern."

'No need for overhaul'

Football

REUTERS, Bern

Ottmar Hitzfeld said he had no plans to radically overhaul Swiss football after completing his first working day as the country's new national coach.

Former Bayern Munich manager Hitzfeld, 60, said the achievements of the team under former coach Koenig Kuhn already demonstrated that Switzerland were well prepared for the next task of qualifying for the 2010 World Cup.

"Koenig Kuhn took Switzerland to three consecutive major finals, so there is no need to revolutionise Swiss football," Hitzfeld told reporters following meetings with Swiss FA officials on Thursday.

"Our clear aim now is to get stuck into the World Cup qualifiers as we will need utmost professionalism. Even if the team has made it to the last three tournaments it is by no means a foregone conclusion that Switzerland can always qualify."

Switzerland qualified for Euro 2004 and the 2006 World Cup and were then given free passage into Euro 2008 as co-hosts along with neighbouring Austria.

Kuhn's final campaign before his retirement ended in some disappointment as the Swiss

bowed out during the tournament's group stage, becoming only the second European Championship hosts to do so, soon followed by Austria.

"I was also very sad when the Swiss team went out but I thought the team acquitted itself very well, even if the results were not so good," Hitzfeld said.

"They were very unfortunate, particularly in losing their top scorer and captain Alex Frei to injury after just 40 minutes. Efficiency was perhaps another problem but hopefully that is something we can work on."

Hitzfeld said he was aware that his long list of achievements as a club coach had already raised expectations ahead of his first attempt at national team management.

"It is important though that everyone realises that what lies behind success is a lot of hard work," said Hitzfeld whose major club honours include two Champions League wins with Bayern and Borussia Dortmund.

"It is also sometimes difficult to get back to the gritty-gritty of daily business after the euphoria of a European Championship on home soil but I expect all the players to be fully motivated for the qualifying games."

Switzerland were drawn into European Group 2 for the World

Cup qualifiers where they will face Greece, Israel, Moldova, Latvia and Luxembourg.

Hitzfeld's first game in charge will be a friendly against Cyprus in Geneva on August 20.

Pongolle goes to Atletico

AFP, Madrid

Spanish first division side Atletico Madrid said Thursday it had signed French striker Florent Sinama Pongolle from Recreativo Huelva for four seasons.

The club gave no financial details.

Pongolle, 23, scored 22 goals in his 67 appearances for Recreativo over the past two seasons.

He played for French side Le Havre and English side Liverpool before joining Recreativo.

It is the third signing for Atletico for the upcoming season which will mark the club's return to the Champions League stage after an 11-year absence.

The club had up until now signed two defenders, John Heitinga from Dutch side Ajax and Tomas Ujfalusi from Italian side Fiorentina.

Another Maracana flop

Football

REUTERS, Rio De Janeiro

Memories of Brazil's 2-1 loss to Uruguay in the 1950 World Cup were revived when Ecuador's LDU won the Libertadores Cup at the same Maracana stadium against local side Fluminense, Brazilian media said.

Just as in 1950, when Brazil supporters believed defeat in the tournament's decisive game to be an impossibility, thousands of Fluminense fans went to the stadium on Wednesday believing the outcome to be a foregone conclusion despite LDU's 4-2 first leg win.

Fluminense duly followed the script by rushing to a 3-1 lead in less than one hour, wiping out the first leg deficit.

It was the second time this year

But, even with 30 minutes of extra time to play with, they failed to add to their tally, the tie ended 5-5 and an unexpected twist followed as LDU won 3-1 on penalties.

"The Maracana was prepared to crown Fluminense's Libertadores conquest with a big party but instead relived a drama similar to 1950, frustrating the 80,000 Tricolor fans," said the daily newspaper O Globo.

"In a dramatic end, Fluminense lost the Libertadores and the party turned to tears."

ODia followed a similar line.

"The mournful silence which fell over the Maracana after Washington missed Fluminense's last penalty... can only be compared to the Brazilian loss to Uruguay, also in July, 58 years ago," it said.

It was the second time this year

a Brazilian team has suffered a dramatic loss at the stadium.

Fluminense's arch-rivals Flamengo went out in the second round after slumping to a 3-0 defeat at home to Mexico's America, having won the first leg 4-2 away.

The game was their last under coach Joel Santana, before he left to take over the South African national side.

In contrast, Ecuadorian media were jubilant after LDU, full name Liga Deportiva Universitaria, brought the trophy to the Andean nation for the first time.

"Liga had their carnival in Rio," said El Comercio, based in LDU's home city of Quito.

Guayaquil's El Universo said: "LDU wrote the most brilliant chapter in the history of Ecuadorian football."



The players of Ecuadorian club Liga de Quito celebrate with the Libertadores trophy upon their arrival in Quito on Thursday. The sign in front of the bus reads "Ecuadorianly refreshing".