

Venus-Kim showdown

AFP, New York

US OPEN
Wins for Venus Williams and Kim Clijsters on Friday set up a mouth-watering US Open fourth-round clash between the two former champions.

Third seed Williams, a back-to-back winner here in 2000 and 2001, defied a sore left knee to defeat Magdalena Rybarikova of Slovakia 6-2, 7-5.

Unseeded Clijsters, the 2005 champion who is on the comeback trail after two years out of the sport during which she married and had a baby daughter, blasted past Belgian compatriot Kirsten Flipkens 6-0, 6-2.

Defending champion and tournament favourite Serena Williams also made it into the last 16 from the bottom half of the draw, beating Spain's Maria Jose Martinez Sanchez 6-3, 7-5.

That put her into a fourth-round showdown with Slovakian Grand Slam regular Daniela Hantuchova, who eased past Vania King of the United States 6-2, 6-2.

It was a good day for Italy as in-form Flavia Pennetta swept aside Canada's Aleksandra Wozniak 6-1, 6-1 and Francesca Schiavone upset eighth seed Victoria Azarenka of Belarus 4-6, 6-2, 6-2.

Russian seventh seed Vera Zvonareva saw off compatriot Elena Vesnina 6-2, 6-4 in 85 minutes while Li Na kept Asian hopes alive with a 6-4, 6-2 win over Maria Kirilenko of Russia.

Venus Williams showed glimpses of her best form against Rybarikova, especially in the first set, but she struggled at times on her serve and needed to battle back from a break down in the second to

go through.

She leads Clijsters 6-4 in career meetings, but lost in three sets to her the last time they played in the quarterfinals of the 2005 Open, which Clijsters went on to win for her only Grand Slam title before she walked away from the sport in May, 2007.

Her return to competition could only be good for women's tennis, the 29-year-old American said, but she insisted there would be no room for sentiment when they play each other.

"She's been playing really well and I've been playing really well. Obviously it's great to see her back, but I want to advance to the next round," she said.

The 26-year-old Clijsters, playing in just her third tournament since her return, showed all her old shot-making skills and superb movement about the court as she outplayed Flipkens.

But Williams will represent her biggest challenge yet in her second coming and she expects a tough battle.

"I think she's been a little bit up and down in her matches, but I think overall when she has to bring it she's been able to bring it," Clijsters said.

"That's what they both have been really good at. They can really lift their level when they're struggling."

The Williams-Martinez Sanchez match had an undertone of friction as the two had clashed during a third-round match at the French Open when Williams accused her opponent of cheating by refusing to admit that a ball had hit her arm.

The American eventually won that match in three sets, but she was outspoken in her criticism of Martinez Sanchez afterwards.

This time around, 27-year-old Williams let her tennis do the talking although she was made to work hard in the second set as the Spaniard decided that if she was to seek salvation it would only come at the net.

"She was serving really well, especially in the second set, but I just kept on fighting," she said.

"It's not often that I play someone that serves and volleys like that. Playing doubles here helped with that."

"I got super-pumped when I-3 down in the second set as I knew I had to recharge my batteries."

Pennetta underlined her challenge with another rapid-fire win.

The 27-year-old 10th seed demolished Canada's Aleksandra Wozniak 6-1, 6-1 and she has lost just four games in three rounds.

She defeated Romania's Edina Gallovits 6-0, 6-4 in the first round and then whitewashed India's Sania Mirza 6-0, 6-0 in the second round.

Asked what had inspired her rich vein of form over the last few weeks, Pennetta replied: "I started to have more confidence and everything has come around."

"Tennis, it's a very strange sport, because for one point everything can change. You have to be very mentally focused at all moments."

Pennetta will next play Zvonareva for a place in the quarterfinals, where she could run into tournament favourite Serena Williams.

The veteran Schiavone took full advantage of Azarenka's fickleness to bounce back from losing the first set and by the end, despite a painful thigh strain, she was in control of the match as the east European crumbled.



Kim Clijsters of Belgium plays a backhand against compatriot Kirsten Flipkens during their 3rd round match of the US Open at the Flushing Meadows in New York on Friday.

Yorke calls it quits

Football

AFP, London

Dwight Yorke, the former Manchester United forward, has retired from football after being released by his last club, Sunderland, at the end of last season.

Yorke, 37, won the 1999 Champions League and three successive Premiership titles in a four-year spell at United. He also captained Trinidad and Tobago, at the 2006 World Cup, and has agreed to become an assistant manager of his national team as a first step into coaching.

"It's time to hang up my boots," he said. "While I'm still in great shape, I'm not getting any younger. I've had the time of my life. I hope people will say that I played the game in

the right way with a smile on my face. "I've been blessed really. I've played alongside some of



DWIGHT YORKE

the greatest players the Premier League has ever seen in Roy Keane, Paul Scholes, Ryan Giggs, David Beckham,

Peter Schmeichel, and played for the greatest manager in Sir Alex Ferguson.

"I'll always count myself lucky. I was a boy on a beach from a little Caribbean island that got the chance to fulfil his dream of winning trophies at the highest level and captaining his country in their first ever World Cup finals."

Yorke played 480 club games and scored 147 goals, including 64 in 151 appearances for United.

On his plans to work with the Trinidad and Tobago national team for the rest of the World Cup qualifiers, he added: "I always planned to stay in football. My aim is to build up some experience and then use what I've learnt from my playing days to coach and one day manage a team in England."

IN BRIEF

Capello plans long stay

AFP, London

Fabio Capello confirmed Friday that he intends to remain England manager until after the next European Championships in 2012.

The 61-year-old Italian is under contract until then with the Football Association (FA) but there had been speculation that he might opt to step down after next year's World Cup finals in South Africa.

"My contract ends in 2012 and I want to respect it," Capello said. "It is not only a matter for me but also the FA but in my mind the target is to respect my contract."

England have won all seven of their competitive matches under Capello so far and another victory, over Croatia on Wednesday, would clinch their place in South Africa.

S Africa launches Football Fridays

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa wants to change to the nation's wardrobe in the run-up to the 2010 World Cup, urging people to wear football jerseys every Friday until the kick-off in June.

"We are encouraging everyone to adopt Football Friday and to wear the shirt of their favourite team. Obviously, we'd prefer it if their favourite team were the national team," said Paul Bannister, head of the International Marketing Council of South Africa (IMC).

The IMC is heading the government's efforts to promote the games, having already launched TV commercials to promote the "diski" -- a dance that mimics footballers' moves.

Organisers also hope to encourage South Africans to learn their national anthem, which is sung in five of the country's most spoken languages, leaving many people stumbling over some of the verses.

Bates blasts Blues

Football

AFP, London

Former Chelsea chairman Ken Bates has welcomed FIFA's transfer ban for the Blues over their controversial capture of teenager Gael Kakuta, saying top clubs have been riding for a fall in trading youngsters "like horsemeat".

"Carlo Ancelotti's side were rocked this week by a FIFA ban on signing any players during the next two transfer windows after snatching Kakuta and the English Premiership side have appealed the decision."

But Bates, now chairman of third tier fallen giants Leeds, says such practices "are widespread and a crackdown is needed."

Leeds and Bates themselves successfully won a reported 5 million pound (seven million euro) compensation package from Chelsea three years ago after the Londoners signed up Leeds teenagers Michael Woods and Tom Taiwo.

Bates, currently Leeds chairman, told Saturday's Daily Mail: "The problem here is that the big clubs are stripping the small clubs of their youngsters."

"They are like Japanese fishing trawlers, just sweeping up everything in their nets."

"Right now some of these boys are just being traded like horsemeat."

The FIFA transfer ban on Chelsea will see the club banned from making signings until January 2011 follows a decision by the world governing body's Dispute Resolution Chamber (DRC).

The DRC found Kakuta guilty of breach of contract and also found Chelsea guilty of inducing the player to break his contract with the French club, which had lodged a claim with FIFA seeking compensation and demanding sporting sanctions both on the player and Chelsea.

A statement from FIFA said the DRC "found that the player had indeed breached a contract signed with the French club."

"Equally, the DRC deemed it to be established that the English club induced the player to such a breach."

As well as paying 780,000 euros in compensation to Lens, for which Chelsea are jointly liable, Kakuta has been sanctioned in accordance with article 17, paragraph 3 and 4 of the Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players while the Blues must also pay Lens 130,000 euros compensation.

Kakuta was just 15 when he signed a contract with Chelsea, owned by Russian billionaire Roman Abramovich.

Milan not for sale

AFP, Rome

AC Milan have dismissed speculation that the club is looking for a buyer following a report in a national newspaper on Friday.

La Repubblica claimed that club president Silvio Berlusconi, who is also the Italy Prime Minister, looked into the possibility of finding investors on a trip to Libya.

However, Fininvest, a financial holding company owned by the Berlusconi family and composed of various other entities, such as Milan and Berlusconi's Mediaset company, denied the club president is looking to sell.

"In relation to the latest press indiscretions, Fininvest repeats once again that there is no plan to sell AC Milan," said a company statement.

Italy and Berlusconi in particular are known to have good relations with former colony Libya and its eccentric ruler Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

However, the idea of being owned by the veteran leader has not received a favourable reception from certain Milan players.

"I hope not," said Andrea Pirlo from Tbilisi in Georgia -- where he was preparing for a World Cup qualifier with Italy -- when asked what he thought about a possible Gaddafi take-over.

Roman scaling Kilimanjaro

AFP, Arusha

Roman Abramovich, the billionaire owner of under-fire English Premiership giants Chelsea has begun scaling Africa's highest mountain, Mount Kilimanjaro, at the start of a 10-day visit to Tanzania, officials said on Friday.

The head of the Kilimanjaro National Park Authority (KINAPA), Mapinduzi Mdesa said Abramovich was accompanied by 113 local porters when he started trekking up the 5900m (19330 feet) Kilimanjaro on Thursday night with six other foreign nationals.

"He landed here by a chopper in the morning from Dares Salaam and registered ready for the exercise. It will take

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Fletcher fired up

AFP, Dumbarton



Scotland skipper Darren Fletcher believes the heavy criticism he and his teammates received after the recent defeat in Norway can inspire them to get their World Cup bid back on track.

Fletcher has been stung by the abuse that followed the 4-0 loss in Oslo and the Manchester United midfielder is determined to set the record straight in the country's make-or-break final two qualifiers.

Scotland went into Saturday's game against Macedonia knowing they had to win their main rivals for second place in group nine and then beat the group winners the Netherlands on Wednesday to give themselves a chance of making the play-offs for next summer's competition in South Africa.

The odds are against them but the 25-year-old Fletcher is convinced the players are more focused than ever in light of the reaction to the disaster in Norway.

"I can sense a real determination amongst the players," he said.

"People are writing us off and that has brought the players together. They want to prove people wrong."

"People talk about the disastrous performance in Norway but that game was dictated by the referee and a variety of other things."

"The players gave their best but we were down to ten men for most of the match. We lost 4-0, which don't get me wrong is a bad result, but what do you do? Do you sit back with ten men after just losing a goal? You're still going to lose the game that way, but we tried to come back into it and took some chances. We opened up and ended up losing by a few. That's the risk we took. We are in the position we're in because that's where we deserve to be. But we have a chance to put that right."

Fletcher has grown at club level in recent years, from squad man to ever-present in a Manchester United side full of superstars. But many feel he hasn't been able to replicate his vintage displays for his club in the dark blue of his country.

His status as a Premiership winner makes him the biggest-profile name in the squad but he insists that doesn't put him under any extra pressure.

"The fans expect from everyone," Fletcher said.

"If there is more expectation on me that's something I'm prepared to take. But because you play for Manchester United shouldn't mean there is more expectancy. Regardless, I

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PHOTO: AFP

(L to R) Russian Yelena Isinbayeva (pole vault), Kenya's Kenenisa Bekele (5000m) and American Sanya Richards (400m) pose with their trophies after winning the Golden League meetings of the season in Brussels on Friday.

Trio shares the jackpot

Bolt cruises to 200m gold in Brussels

Athletics

INTERNET, undated

Triple Olympic and world champion Usain Bolt cruised to 200 metres victory in a Brussels Golden League meeting record while three athletes shared the final 1 million dollar jackpot.

The irrepressible Jamaican, paraded around the King Baudouin stadium in a convertible car at the start, glided round the bend on the newly-laid track to clock 19.57 seconds and beat the previous best of American Tyson Gay (19.79secs) in 2006.

"I was feeling kind of fatigued. That's why I backed off in the last 25 to 30 metres," Bolt said.

"Oh my God, I can't wait. I'm really looking forward to going home," added the sprinter, who has been on the road since July 1.

Bolt delighted the capacity crowd at the rain-soaked meeting with his customary theatrics and broad grin.

"I was just having some fun out there... the crowd gave me the final push... I enjoy giving the fans a show," he said.

Earlier, world champion Sanya Richards romped to victory in the 400 in a meeting record of 48.83secs to claim a share of the 1m dollar jackpot.

The American said the money would ensure her wedding in February would be even more lavish.

Competitors must win their events at all six of the season's Golden League meetings to earn the cash prize.

Olympic pole vault champion Yelena Isinbayeva and Ethiopian Kenenisa Bekele, Olympic and world champion at 5,000m and 10,000m, shared the money with Richards.

Isinbayeva, who failed to retain her world title in Berlin last month, secured victory by dint of fewer failures at 4.70m before making three failed attempts to break her world record of 5.06m set in Zurich last week.

The Russian said she was over-confident and too relaxed in Berlin.

"There, my head was at the top of the mountains, in the sky. Now I'm back on earth," said Isinbayeva.

Bekele was made to fight hardest for his prize, pushed all the way to the line in the 5,000m by four other Africans who all set personal bests. His winning time was 12:55:31.

The capacity crowd at the Memorial Van Damme meeting were denied a sprint duel between Bolt and the world's second fastest man when Gay opted to run the 100m.

Gay (10.00secs) made a poor start and finished second in the blue relay event to Jamaican Asafa Powell (9.90secs).

"I just got my butt kicked," said Gay. Kenya broke the world record in the rarely run 4x1,500m relay with a time of 14:36:23.

The time was almost two seconds better than the previous best set by a West Germany team in 1977, which until Friday was the oldest existing world record.

The meeting marked the end of 12 seasons of the Golden League. Next year it will be replaced by the Diamond League, a 14-city tour including events in Asia and United States.

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