



PHOTO: AFP

Swiss world number one Roger Federer plays a forehand during his match against Russian Igor Andreev at the Australian Open in Melbourne on Tuesday.

Roger overcomes Igor



AFP, Melbourne

World number one Roger Federer, former champion Novak Djokovic and Nikolay Davydenko won through to the second round but Robin Soderling was a seeded casualty at the Australian Open on Tuesday.

Federer, chasing his 16th Grand Slam title, dropped the opening set, but rattled home against the 37th-ranked Russian Igor Andreev 4-6, 6-2, 7-6 (7/2), 6-0 in two hours 44 minutes on Rod Laver Arena.

Djokovic, who won the Open two years ago, accounted for Spaniard Daniel Gimeno-Traver 7-5, 6-3, 6-2, while Davydenko continued his impeccable start to the year, cruising past German Dieter Kindlmann 6-1, 6-0, 6-3.

But Swedish eighth seed Soderling became the first men's top-10 casualty, bowing out to Spain's 113th-ranked Marcel Granollers 5-7, 2-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-2.

Federer's performance gave him an early indication of how he stacks up in the opening Grand Slam of the season after losing to Russian Davydenko in his last two matches.

"I know if my body is there and my game is there, I can

beat anybody," Federer said. "I'm through in the second round. It's not very deep yet, but at least I got some information, and I feel like I'm playing really well."

Although he stormed through the final set to love with three service breaks, it looked early on as though the Swiss legend was facing a tough tussle against the man who took him to five sets in the fourth round at the 2008 US Open.

Third seed Djokovic fought back from an early break in the opening set to beat the 74th-ranked Spaniard in just over two hours.

Djokovic's path in his quarter was cleared somewhat by the upset loss of Soderling and 16th Spanish seed Tommy Robredo earlier Tuesday.

Davydenko beat world number two Rafael Nadal in the final, and Federer in the semis, in Doha before heading to Australia for the year's first Grand Slam.

The Russian, four times a Grand Slam semifinalist but yet to reach a decider, said his confidence had never been higher.

"Now I feel like I can beat everyone," he said.

"Before no, mostly I was losing against these guys (top players).

"But now I can beat everyone, it's a good feeling."

French Open finalist Soderling made 67 unforced

errors and was scathing in his assessment of his performance.

"I started terrible and finished terrible," he said. "I played a horrible match today and I am terribly disappointed. I didn't feel good at all and I didn't play well."

Elsewhere, qualifier Louk Sorensen became the first Irishman to win a Grand Slam singles match for 30 years, beating Taiwan's Lu Yen-Hsun, 6-4, 3-6, 6-2, 6-1.

Spanish ninth seed Fernando Verdasco progressed with a hard-fought 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/1), 7-5, 6-2 win over Australian Carsten Ball and French 10th seed and 2008 finalist Jo-Wilfried Tsonga beat Sergiy Stakhovsky of Ukraine.

Unseeded Cypriot Marcos Baghdatis, the 2006 finalist, said he was fitter than ever after cruising to a straight sets win over Italy's Paolo Lorenzi.

Meanwhile, French veteran Fabrice Santoro had no regrets as he made his final farewell to Grand Slam tennis.

Santoro, 37, and still ranked 67, retired last November and only decided this month that he would play at Melbourne to become the first player to compete in 70 Grand Slam tournaments in four decades.

Santoro, in a record 18th Australian Open, made his final bow when he went down 7-5, 7-5, 6-3 to 14th seed Croatian Marin Cilic.

Henry escapes punishment

AFP, Zurich

French captain Thierry Henry escaped being punished for his infamous handball incident in the 2010 World Cup finals play-off against Ireland, FIFA announced on Monday.

FIFA's disciplinary committee said that they were powerless to punish the 1998 World Cup winning striker because their rules forbade them to do so if the original misdemeanour had not been seen by the match officials.

"On December 2, 2009, the FIFA executive committee asked the FIFA disciplinary committee to analyse the handling offence committed by Thierry Henry during the France v Republic of Ireland match on November 18, 2009, and to consider the possible disciplinary consequences," read the statement from the committee.

"At its meeting on January 18, 2010, the disciplinary committee reached the conclusion that there was no legal foundation for the committee to consider the case because handling the ball cannot be regarded as a serious infringement as stipulated in article 77a) of the FIFA disciplinary code."

Real eyeing Canales

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid is hoping to sign much-coveted 18-year-old offensive midfielder Sergio Canales from fellow Primera Liga side Racing Santander, Spanish newspapers said Tuesday.

Real's director of football, Jorge Valdano, discussed the move on Monday with the chairman of Santander, Francisco Perria, the AS and Marca sports newspapers said.

The Spanish giants have proposed that the player, whose contract ends in June, remain on loan at Santander for the next two seasons, AS said.

Marca said Canales - who has been in fine form scoring five goals in eight league games this season - has also had talks with English Premier League sides Chelsea, Arsenal and Manchester City.

Olympiakos fire Zico

AFP, Piraeus

Brazilian legend Zico was fired Tuesday as the coach of Greek champions Olympiakos as the team fell seven points behind arch-rival Panathinaikos in the domestic table.

Olympiakos announced that the caretaker coach will be the team's Bosnian Serb scout Bozidar Bandovic.

Zico, 56, joined Olympiakos last September signing a two-year contract after last coaching at CSKA Moscow but failed to lead the team to first place in the league.

After the weekend's scoreless draw at Kavala, Olympiakos finds itself in second place, seven points behind leader Panathinaikos.

Gunners bid to go top

AFP, London



Arsene Wenger admits Arsenal have a golden opportunity to underline their title credentials as they bid to go top of the Premier League with a two-goal victory over Bolton on Wednesday.

Wenger's side defeated Bolton 2-0 at the Reebok Stadium on Sunday and a repeat of that result in north London would be enough to send the Gunners above Chelsea and Manchester United into first place.

After being widely written off as also-rans in November when Chelsea's 3-0 win at the Emirates Stadium left Arsenal 11 points behind the leaders, there has been a significant change in fortunes for Wenger's men.

While Chelsea and United have squandered points in matches they were expected to win, Arsenal have been able to put together an impressive run and Wenger knows it is essential not to waste the chance to grab that coveted first place.

"It is important psychologically, not mathematically so much," Wenger said. "We have a good opportunity to do it so we have to focus. "When the season started, we were not all convinced in our squad maybe that we could be where we are now. Now that we are there, we want to have a go."

Even if Arsenal do go top of the table, Chelsea will have a game in hand on their London rivals, so there is no chance of Wenger getting carried away.

But the French coach is convinced his young team are capable of lasting the distance in the title race as long as captain Cesc Fabregas

remains fit and in form.

Fabregas has been arguably the Premier League's best midfielder this season and produced a majestic display against Bolton capped by his 10th league goal of the season and a major role in Arsenal's second goal.

Games against title rivals Chelsea and United are looming on the horizon for Arsenal, so Wenger is well aware of the importance of keeping Fabregas on his game.

"He looks like a real general in midfield now and, of course, that helps as we go into a period of important games," Wenger said.

"It was a test of character (at the Reebok Stadium) and they have shown plenty, which is very good news for us.

"Over the years our strength has increased and we showed we have matured, we know when to go for the fights and we know when to put the ball down.

"Without a doubt there is still more to come because we are a young team. We have a very tough run of games coming up but let's be focused on the next one and keep it simple."

With French winger Samir Nasri and young midfielders Aaron Ramsey and Fran Merida - who scored Arsenal's second against Bolton - ruled out through injury, Wenger is relieved to welcome back Theo Walcott and Denilson.

England forward Walcott has struggled to shake off a host of different injuries this season, but his return will add a much-needed injection of energy to an attack already missing Robin van Persie and Nicklas Bendtner.

"They are available for Wednesday. It is a big boost to have them back of course because they were out for a while and it gives us some fresh players as well," Wenger said.

AT A GLANCE

AP, Melbourne

A look at Tuesday's second day of the Australian Open tennis championships:

Weather: Cloudy initially, then sunny with a high temperature of 73 degrees.

Attendance: 45,594.

WINNERS

Men: No. 1 Roger Federer, No. 6 Nikolay Davydenko, No. 9 Fernando Verdesco, No. 12 Gael Monfils, No. 14 Marin Cilic, No. 19 Stanislas Wawrinka, No. 21 Tomas Berdych, No. 27 Philipp Kohlschreiber, No. 29 Viktor Troika, No. 33 John Isner.

Women: No. 1 Serena Williams, No. 8 Jelena Jankovic, No. 11 Marion Bartoli, No. 13 Sam Stosur, No. 19 Nadia Petrova, No. 20 Ana Ivanovic, No. 26 Arvane Rezaei, No. 31 Alona Bondarenko, No. 32 Carla Suarez Navarro.

Losers: Men: No. 8 Robin Soderling, No. 16 Tommy Robredo, No. 25 Sam Querrey, No. 28 Jurgen Melzer. Women: No. 18 Virginie Razzano, No. 23 Dominika Cibulkova.

Stats of the Day: 70, number of Grand Slam singles matches played by France's Fabrice Santoro spanning four decades; 4:19 WTA says the duration of Barbora Zahlavova Strycova's first-round win over Regina Kulikova is a record for a women's match at a Grand Slam.

Quote of the Day: "I was very happy to come back one more time here. No regrets." Santoro, after the 70th, a 7-5, 7-5, 6-3 loss to Marin Cilic in his 18th appearance at Melbourne Park.

On Court Wednesday: No. 2 Rafael Nadal vs Lukas Lacko; No. 3 Svetlana Kuznetsova vs Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, No. 5 Elena Dementieva vs Justine Henin, No. 15 Kim Clijsters vs Tamarine Tanasugarn.

Wednesday's Forecast: Cloudy with a maximum temperature of 82 degrees.

Angola, Algeria qualify

AFP, Luanda



Angola and World Cup qualifiers Algeria joined holders Egypt and Ivory Coast in the Africa Cup of Nations quarterfinals on Monday.

A goalless draw played out to another 50,000 capacity crowd at Luanda's 11 November stadium put both teams into the last eight mix, at the expense of Mali and Malawi.

Angola finished top of Group A with five points after sharing the spoils with Algeria, who took the runners-up spot by dint of their head-to-head record with Mali.

Mali inflicted a 3-1 defeat on Malawi up in Cabinda but the result was rendered meaningless by the draw in Luanda, leaving Mali's 2007 Africa Footballer of the year Frederic Kanoute distraught.

"I can't find the words to describe how upset I am," said Sevilla's 2007 Africa Footballer of the Year, who was the first non-Africa-born player to win the award.

"It really hurts me that after we were knocked out in 2008 we really wanted to do well here.

"For my last appearance in this competition I wanted to go as far as possible."

Angola manager Manuel Jose was in a far happier frame of mind after overseeing the Black Antelope's best ever first round showing in the Nations Cup.

Monday's game started at a breathless pace

but after the break degenerated into a cagey affair with both sides desperate not to make a mistake which could scupper their Cup campaign.

Angola now progress to face the runners-up of Group B - either Ivory Coast, Ghana or Burkina Faso, in their Luanda fortress on Sunday, with Algeria taking on the Group B winners in Cabinda the same day.

"We were nervous in the first half, and had a great chance but couldn't score," said Jose.

"Then we heard at half time that Mali were leading in Cabinda so in the second half we tried to minimise the risk of defeat. It wasn't good for the fans but we had to avoid risks, our main objective was to qualify."

He said the absence of key players Flavio and Dede and the suspended Stelvio had had a major bearing on the game.

"The return of players like Flavio will be fundamental to us. Our task now is to get them back for the quarterfinal."

Algeria coach Rabah Saadane railed at a suggestion from a Mali reporter at the post-match press conference that the draw had been rigged at Mali's expense.

"Don't come out with that sort of question, I don't accept at all that this was a fixed match and that we had some sort of agreement with the Angolan team to play for a draw," said Saadane, who was assistant coach at the 1982 World Cup when Algeria were victims of the infamous draw between Austria and the then West Germany which saw those two neighbours progress to the second round at their expense.

Zaki set for Hull move

AFP, Hull



Egypt's Amr Zaki is set to return to the English Premier League in a loan spell with Hull until the end of the season, subject to receiving a work permit, the top-flight strugglers said Monday.

Zaki, who scored 11 Premier League goals for Wigan during a loan spell last term, will be joining from Egyptian club Zamalek if the deal is approved.

Hull manager Phil Brown will hope Zaki's latest stint in England is as productive as his last as the Tigers look to climb out of the relegation zone.

"We are pleased to confirm the loan signing of Amr Zaki from Zamalek FC," a statement on Hull's official website, www.hullcityafc.net, said Monday.

join Hull City AFC.

"As is the case with all non-EU (European Union) transfers, there are work permit and other red tape issues still to be confirmed, but we are expecting the player to return to England and join Hull City on Friday this week.

"The playing contracts are signed and confirmed, however the final details must be undertaken before the loan can commence."

Zaki said he was looking forward to playing in the Premier League again.

"I'm happy to be back in the Premier League through Hull City," he told his official website, www.amrzaky.com, on Sunday.

"Tigers are good side and I'm looking forward to do my best for the team.

"I want to thank both Phil Brown and (chairman) Adam Pearson for the faith they showed in me and my target is to repay this faith on the field by helping my teammates to do the best for the club and for the fans.



Fans of Richard Gasquet paint themselves with French colours during the Australian Open in Melbourne on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

81 Bayern fans banned

AFP, Paris

The German Football Federation (DFB) on Tuesday announced they have banned 81 Bayern Munich fans, who are currently under police investigation, from attending Saturday's Bundesliga clash against Mainz.

Police are investigating a disturbance last August in Wuerzburg, Bavaria, which involved 130 Bayern fans after their team lost 2-1 at Mainz and three officers were injured after clashes at the town's railway station.

Saturday's return game at Munich's Allianz Arena has seen 81 fans banned, although there are court cases pending for charges of assault and breach of the peace against only 22 of those who have been excluded.

Bayern are currently third in the Bundesliga, two points behind leaders Leverkusen, while Mainz are 10th in the table.

Venus, whose best finish at the Australian Open was runner-up to Serena in 2003, looked in great shape physically as she broke Safarova twice in the first set and three times in the second.

The seven-time Grand Slam champion returned brilliantly throughout, putting enormous pressure on Safarova's second serve, which crumbled badly as a result.

Almost forgotten in the wake of the Williams sisters were Serbian duo Jelena Jankovic and Ana Ivanovic.

Eighth seeded Jankovic downed Romanian Monica Niculescu 6-4, 6-0 and Ivanovic, the 2008 runner-up, was too good for American qualifier Shenay Perry 6-2, 6-3.

Jankovic is flying under the radar after coming into last year's tournament as world number one.

The 24-year-old started slowly against Niculescu but

left knee injury that hampered her last week in Sydney, Serena broke twice in the first set and three times in the second on her way to a comfortable victory.

The 28-year-old said later the strapping was just a precaution because of her age.

"I've been having it strapped all week, all last week as well ... making sure I'm able to keep moving as best as I can," she said.

Serena is a clear favourite to lift the trophy again but may well have to get past Venus in the semi-finals.

Her sister was equally impressive in her win over Safarova.

"I was playing a really talented player -- everyone knows how well Lucie can hit the ball," Venus said.

"I just wanted to stay focused and execute my game -- a great way to start."

The defending champion, a four-time winner here, could be banned from future Grand Slams if she misbehaves after being hit with a \$2,000 US dollar fine and put on two years' probation for abusing a linesperson at last year's US Open.

"I don't think I was quiet at all," she said when asked whether she was more subdued during Tuesday's win because of the probation.

"I felt like I pumped my fist a little bit. I feel like I was definitely being who I could be, that's all I can do."

Playing with no sign of the