

Red-hot Clijsters

AFP, Melbourne



The Kim Clijsters express rolled on relentlessly on day four of the Australian Open Thursday as second seed Vera Zvonareva survived a scare and former number one Jelena Jankovic crashed out.

Tournament favourite Clijsters continued her impressive start to the year's first Grand Slam as she cleaned up Carla Suarez Navarro 6-1, 6-3, following her 6-0, 6-0 demolition of Dinara Safina in the first round.

However, Russia's Zvonareva was pushed to the limit by Serbian Bojana Jovanovski before recovering to reach the third round 1-6, 6-3, 6-1.

But there was to be no reprieve for Jankovic, who became the tournament's biggest casualty when she was beaten by China's Peng Shuai 7-6 (7/3), 6-3.

The seventh seed joined fellow Serb Ana Ivanovic on the sidelines after failing to deal with the consistency of her Chinese opponent, who now moves into an all-Asian clash against Japan's Ayumi Morita.

Local hero and fifth seed Samantha Stosur cruised Russia's Vera Dushevina in straight sets 6-3, 6-2.

But once again all eyes were in Clijsters, who blitz Suarez Navarro and then warned that she was fitter now than when she became world number one in 2003 aged just 20.

"(I was) not as fit as I am now. (In the past) I felt I needed to retrieve a little bit," Clijsters said.

Clijsters, now 27 and a mother to two-year-old Jada, was never seriously threatened against the tricky Suarez Navarro, winning comfortably in 62 minutes.

The Belgian said she had changed the way she played since she came back to tennis in mid-2009 following her career-break to have her child.

Zvonareva was forced into an almighty battle against Jovanovski, who came out with all guns blazing in the first set, blasting 11 clean winners, serving at 82 percent and forcing the world number two into a host of errors.

There was nothing Zvonareva could do in the face of brilliant shot-making from the 19-year-old Serb, who broke her opponent three times in the first set.

However, the far steadier Zvonareva held her nerve and waited for Jovanovski to lose some of the intensity that had sustained her over the first set. When she did, Zvonareva seized her chance and gradually began turning the screws.

While the winners kept coming from Jovanovski's racquet, the unforced errors came in equal numbers as Zvonareva raced away with the decider to take the match in 1hr 48min.

Israel's Shahar Peer, the tournament's 10th seed, made short work of Sorana Cirstea of Romania, winning 6-3, 6-2, while 13th seeded Russian Nadia Petrova ended the hopes of Australian Alicia Molik 6-4, 6-1.

Twelfth seed Agnieszka Radwanska from Poland also progressed, beating Croatia's Petra Martic 6-3, 6-4, and 16th-ranked Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova was too good for German Kristina Barrois 6-2, 6-2.



Belgium star Kim Clijsters plays a forehand during her Australian Open second round match against Carla Suarez Navarro of Spain in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Nasri fires Gunners Iraq edge N. Korea

AFP, Leeds



CUP

Samir Nasri helped Arsenal overcome a potentially tricky FA Cup third round replay as Arsene Wenger's side defeated Leeds 3-1 on Wednesday to book a fourth round date with Huddersfield.

After being held 1-1 by Simon Grayson's Championship team at the Emirates 11 days earlier and losing to Ipswich in the League Cup semifinal first leg, the pressure was on Arsenal to avoid another embarrassing slip-up.

Nasri eased any nerves before Bacary Sagna doubled their lead at Elland Road.

Bradley Johnson's spectacular 30-yard effort before half-time lifted a 38,000 full house at Elland Road before substitute Robin van Persie killed the tie off just six minutes after coming on.

Leeds, 22 places below Arsenal on the league ladder, had come within seconds of eliminating the 10-times FA Cup winners at the Emirates Stadium.

But Nasri seemed determined to ensure there would be no shock on the cards this time as he beat keeper Kasper Schmeichel in the fifth minute with an 18-yard finish.

The French international took his tally for the season to 14 after a delightful pass by Andrey Arshavin had left the Leeds defence in tatters and Nasri clean through.

Arsenal are looking to avoid a sixth successive season without a trophy and Wenger's side appeared anxious to kill this replay off at an early stage.

Only a stunning one-handed save by Schmeichel denied Marouane Chamakh from doubling the lead with an 11th minute header, while Arshavin looked in the mood to add to his goal tally.

The Russian international fired one

effort over the bar before failing to connect with Chamakh's pin-point cross six yards out.

Grayson's promotion hopefuls were unable to find the form that helped beat Manchester United in the third round at Old Trafford 12 months earlier.

Arshavin again fluffed a great chance after Sagna's cross before the latter doubled the lead 10 minutes before the interval.

Sagna let fly with a ferocious effort which punished Andy O'Brien's poor clearance soon after a move between Nicklas Bendtner and Nasri had broken down.

Arsenal appeared to be in cruise control. But Elland Road erupted after Johnson reminded the visitors that the tie was far from over after beating Wojciech Szczesny with a glorious 30-yard effort.

It is unlikely there will be a better goal in this season's competition yet Leeds were unable to build on the momentum.

Arsenal came out firing on all cylinders at the start of the second half, Schmeichel denying Song and Nasri within two minutes of the re-start.

Max Gradel and Robert Snodgrass continued to ask questions of the Gunners defence, but the visitors stood firm and would have had a more comfortable ending had Arshavin not spurned another glorious chance in the 58th minute.

Arsenal's subs bench was stronger than the team Wenger started with.

Cesc Fabregas, van Persie, Theo Walcott and Gael Clichy all started on the sidelines yet it was a sign of Wenger's concern that both Spanish World Cup winner Fabregas and van Persie were forced to come on for the final 20 minutes.

And van Persie ensured there would be no shock when he was allowed to rise unchallenged to head home Bendtner's 76th minute cross.

Football

AFP, Doha

Defending champions Iraq completed the quarterfinal line-up at the Asian Cup by beating North Korea 1-0 on Wednesday, while a second-string Iran crushed United Arab Emirates 3-0.

Iraq winger Kerrar Jasim converted a rebound mid-way through the first half at the Al Rayyan Stadium in Doha and his goal was enough to set up a clash with Group D winners Australia.

Arash Afshin and Mohammad Nori were Iran's goalscorers, with Walid Abbas also putting through his own goal as Afshin Ghotbi's team completed the group phase as the only side with a 100 percent record.

Afshin was later sent off, however, and UAE defender Khalid Sebil also saw red to leave both sides with 10 men on the pitch at the final whistle.

Iran will now meet in-form South Korea -- for the fifth consecutive time at this stage of the tournament -- having already secured top spot in Group C thanks to a superior head-to-head record against Iraq.

Iraq dominated the first half against North Korea, with Iraqi striker Mustafa Kareem diverting Samal Saeed's downward header against the crossbar in the 17th minute.

The 2007 champions made the breakthrough five minutes later.

Kareem sent in a powerful, swerving shot from 22 yards that North Korea goalkeeper Ri Myong-Guk could only parry and Jasim slid in to score.

Kareem volleyed narrowly over from close range in the 37th minute, with a 35-yard free-kick by Jong Tae-Se that Mohammad Kassid saved comfortably the best that North Korea could offer in the first half.

Jasim was narrowly off-target with a long-range strike early in the second period, while Bochum striker Jong squandered a clear sight of goal when he swivelled and shot straight at Kassid with 13 minutes remaining.

Having already qualified, Iran made no less than nine changes to their line-up at the Qatar Sports Club Stadium.

What to WATCH

- STAR Cricket**
Australia v England
Second ODI
Live from 9:20am
- TEN Cricket**
South Africa v India
Fourth ODI
Live from 6:30pm
- ESPN**
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
- STAR Sports**
Australian Open
Live from 6:00am
- AFC Asian Cup**
Uzbekistan v Jordan

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh League
Abahani v Rahmatganj
Time: 4:00pm
Venue: Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal



Arsenal playmaker Samir Nasri (R) scores the opening goal against Leeds United during their FA Cup third round replay at Elland Road on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

IN brief

Ribery to return in Feb

AFP, Berlin

France star Franck Ribery is not expected to return to league action for Bayern Munich until early next month following his knee injury, it was revealed on Thursday.

The 27-year-old limped off midway through the first-half of Bayern's 1-1 draw with Wolfsburg last Saturday, but a scan revealed he had only bruised his left knee and was expected to return against Bremen on Saturday January 29.

But Bayern's director of sport Christian Nerlinger has said Ribery is expected to be held back until the German league match with Cologne on February 5.

"He will be okay for the match against Bremen, but I think he will make his return against Cologne," Nerlinger told German magazine Kicker.

Gamba acquire Adriano

AFP, Osaka

The J-League side Gamba Osaka has acquired Brazilian striker Adriano on permanent transfer from Brazil's SC Internacional, officials from the Japanese club said Thursday.

The Brazilian, who turns 29 on Friday, played for Spain's Malaga CF, Vasco da Gama of Brazil and the J-League's Cerezo Osaka on loan after joining Internacional in 2007.

Adriano, whose full name is Adriano Ferreira Martins, scored 14 goals in 27 games in the last season for Cerezo Osaka.

Gamba Osaka finished runners-up to Nagoya Grampus last season to qualify for the AFC Champions League.

Duo after Wright-Phillips

AFP, London

Manchester City winger Shaun Wright-Phillips is a transfer target for Fulham and Newcastle, according to the England international's agent.

The 29-year-old is keen to quit City in search of regular first-team football after failing to impress boss Roberto Mancini, who admitted at the weekend that the former Chelsea star could be allowed to leave Eastlands.

Speaking to skysports.com on Wednesday, Wright-Phillips' agent Wayne Lindsay confirmed that both Fulham and Newcastle are keen to sign him before the transfer window closes on January 31.

"My understanding is that Fulham have made an enquiry for Shaun, as have Newcastle," Lindsay said.

Roma in last eight

AFP, Rome

Roma claimed derby honours as they progressed to the quarter-finals of the Italian Cup with a 2-1 win over Lazio at the Stadio Olimpico on Wednesday.

Brazilian Simplicio scored the winning goal after both sides had netted a penalty.

Roma opened the scoring on 53 minutes as Marco Borriello scored from the spot after Stephan Lichsteiner's handball.

But Juan felled Mauro Zarate four minutes later and Hernanes equalised from 12 yards.

Simplicio hit home a crisp right-footer 13 minutes from the end to put Roma into the last eight.

Sampdoria also reached the quarterfinals following a nail-biting victory over Udinese on penalties.

On-loan Manchester United forward Federico Macheda opened the scoring for the hosts in the 32nd minute but Mauricio Isla equalised for the