

# Novak denies Roger again

## Tennis

AFP, Dubai

Novak Djokovic, who took away Roger Federer's Australian Open title last month, beat him in straight sets again to prevent the former world number one from regaining the Dubai Open title here Saturday.

The second-seeded Serbian won with something to spare by 6-3, 6-3, out playing the top-seeded Swiss maestro in the first set and recovering from 1-3 down in the second as Federer had constant problems with his timing and rhythm off the ground.

It gained Djokovic his third successive title at the 1,600,000-dollar event, and suggested that he has every chance of leapfrogging Federer next month into the world number two ranking.

"Any time I win against Roger Federer it's a great success," Djokovic said. "I guess I rose to the occasion. I was aware of the challenge expected of me, and I was aware I needed to be at the top of my game."

"I am a different player from last year. I have this feeling in my head, and it's really important for me to know I can perform this well."

Federer said: "I have had a lot of success here, but it wasn't the night for me. I had a difficult start and Novak played solid all the way through. But for me it was still a great tournament."

Federer had described Djokovic as "a huge obstacle" before the final, and so it proved. Djokovic had his tactics well worked out -- directing a higher proportion

of his attacks to the backhand, and mixing athletic containment with fiercely angled counter-attacks which threatened to spread Federer.

It was hard to believe that Djokovic had described his performance against Tomas Berdych the previous day as a "catastrophe".

He started with a far better rhythm, even though

He remained prone to odd mistimings under pressure and ended the match with 20 unforced errors on the forehand drive which has sometimes been described as the best shot of its kind there has been.

One of these, dumped into the net, put Federer break point down in the third game, and another error, a backhand which sent

ably consolidated his advantage three times.

He then took the first set when Federer again dropped serve, again mistiming a backhand, replaying the shot with his hand after he had done so. The gesture indicated his concern.

But he only improved briefly. The only moments when Federer seemed likely to reward his enormous spectator support in a city which he has adopted as his training base, came early in the second set.

They happened when Djokovic had a couple of lapses with his backhand counter-hitting and Federer converted his second break point with some solid driving.

But the revival did not last long. Djokovic produced some magnificent containing to break back and Federer made four ground-stroking errors on his service game at 3-4, standing and staring in disbelief after one of them departed into the hinterland.

Djokovic closed the match out without alarms. He was, he said, especially pleased with the way he had been serving.

"I have been working really hard on this shot," he said. "If I want to play well and have a chance to win against the best players I have to serve well. That wasn't always the case in the past."

It meant that Djokovic has started the season with 12 wins out of 12. Though unwilling to say so, he will be wanting to show that it means he, and not Federer, is gradually becoming Rafael Nadal's closest rival.



PHOTO: AFP

Serbia's Novak Djokovic is all smiles as he holds the Dubai Open trophy after beating Swiss master Roger Federer in the final on Saturday. Djokovic won 6-3, 6-3.

the conditions were very different -- much cooler and slower -- than during his last two matches in the afternoon sun.

Federer, by contrast, struck his first forehand into the net and it proved a signal.

the ball in a jerky parabola over the baseline, conceded the first break of serve.

Djokovic served so well after this, directing more than 70 per cent of deliveries to the Federer backhand and establishing a dominance in that area, that he comfort-

## Pakistan fined for slow over rate

AFP, New Delhi

Pakistan have been fined for their slow over-rate during their 11-run win against Sri Lanka in the World Cup in Colombo on Saturday.

Match referee Chris Broad imposed the fines after Shahid Afridi's side were ruled to be one over short of their target at the end of the match when time allowances were taken into consideration.

Afridi was fined 20 per cent of his match fee while his players received 10 per cent fines.

## Aussies come

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committee and it will be approved by the board," he said.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh A team will tour South Africa for three weeks to play two four-day games and three one-dayers against their counterparts. The team will set off on April 4 and return on April 23.

## Masterful

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Yesterday too, well into his innings, the 37-year old was scampering his singles as if he was playing his first World Cup, not his sixth.

He has stated that a World Cup trophy is the only feather missing from his cap. In this, his last World Cup, that too on home soil, all other teams will be wary of the Tendulkar masterclass. On yesterday's evidence and considering the evolution of his game to a near-perfect one, there will not be much they can do about it.

**Lift fielding**

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"Reaching 300 wickets is a big achievement. I have always wanted to get to that mark and always prefer my bowling over my batting," said Afridi, who became the 11th bowler and third Pakistani behind Wasim Akram (502) and Waqar Younis (416) to reach the mark.

"It will take two to three days to clear the

## Lanka batsmen to blame

AFP, Colombo

**ICC Cricket World Cup 2011**  
Sri Lankan skipper Kumar Sangakkara said the loss of Mahela Jayawardene and opener Tillakaratne Dilshan at a crucial stage of the match

against Pakistan was a key factor in his team's defeat.

Pakistan held their nerve to record a narrow 11-run win over the fancied home team in Colombo, leaving a sell-out crowd of 35,000 at R Premadasa Stadium bitterly disappointed.

Sri Lanka, chasing a target of 278 runs to win the match were cruising at 76-0 before losing four wickets in the space of 20 runs, with Pakistan skipper Shahid Afridi taking two and paceman Shoaib Akhtar one.

"Afridi bowled well," said Sangakkara. "But Shoaib [Akhtar] getting Mahela and Afridi getting Dilshan was critical. That gave them the momentum and unfortunately that turned the match in their favour."

Jayawardene, who made a polished century in Sri Lanka's convincing 210-run win against Canada in their opening match, scored just two, while Dilshan departed after making 41.

Afridi finished with 4-34, also reaching the milestone of 300 ODI wickets during

the match, while Akhtar grabbed 2-42.

Sri Lanka had bowled with discipline at the end of the Pakistan innings to restrict them to 277-7 after Misbahul Haq (83 not out) and Younis Khan (72) put them on track for a 300-plus total.

"It's pretty disappointing to be 10 runs short at the end, but I think we did pretty well to restrict them to 277 and the start we got, the foundation was good enough for us to kick on but losing four wickets changed things," said Sangakkara.

Sangakkara (49) and Chamara Silva (57), coming back to the team after missing the first match because of the death of his sister, raised hopes of an unlikely win but in the end Sri Lanka fell short.

"I think Chamara was a bit slow at the start, but then when he got set I think he scored very freely," said the Sri Lankan captain.

Sangakkara praised his spin attack, saying (Rangana) Herath and (Muttiah) Muralidaran were "outstanding" and the quick bowlers came back well.

Sangakkara was at a loss to explain why Sri Lanka had never beaten Pakistan in seven matches in World Cups.

"I wish I had the answer and that's something we were looking at and to change that, but we couldn't," he said.

## Big Show bruises BNS

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photographer were blocked by the security guards and were not allowed to take any photograph of the damaged turf.

"You better take photograph from the NSC building or wait for a couple of days after the cleansing work finishes," said NSC secretary Shafiq Anwar when asked why the area was restricted to journalists and photographers.

"When a big venue like BNS is allotted, you should understand that there is recommendation from high authority and there is nothing we can do about it," was the reply of NSC director (sports) Haili Quaima who added that he was yet to get any such damage report from the BNS administration.

However, NSC director (development and planning) Abdur Rahman said he had heard about the damages to the turf and would ask for compensation to the BCB as per the agreement after having the damage assessed by the experts.

The cultural event left the football pitch damaged as well which will leave the Bangladesh Football Federation struggling to prepare the ground for the March 9 match against Kuwait.

"I went to stadium today to see the extent of damage," said BFF ground committee chairman Fazlur Rahman Babul.

"It will take two to three days to clear the

dust, pieces of glass and nails from the pitch which means we will get six to seven days before the match to prepare the ground. A lot of holes were made inside the pitch and left most of the southern part grassless. I don't think we will be able to make the pitch prepared for the match."

Babul added that the match may even be abandoned and the BFF may face penalty if the match referee was not satisfied with the condition of the ground.

It must be mentioned here that BFF had informed the BNS about their international fixture about a month ago.

In a bid to discourage organistaions from hiring the BNS for cultural programmes, the fare of the BNS was raised to Tk 20 lakh during the caretaker government. But it could not deter the hosting of events as the venue was hired by channel i for hosting a music competition named Khudhe Ganraj last year.

"It is not the BNS only, but all the sports venues are given allotments for hosting cultural programmes which hamper our sporting schedules," veteran athlete and organiser Quamrunnahar Dana said. "Like the International Trade fair, the cultural affairs ministry can build a special-purpose venue for hosting cultural events which will be helpful for both sides."



PHOTO: AFP

Russia's Vera Zvonareva is elated after winning the Qatar Open in Doha on Saturday. She beat Dane Caroline Wozniacki 6-4, 6-4 to lift the title.

## Mahela alert to Kenya

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Mahela Jayawardene admitted on Sunday that Kenya, who defeated his team in a stunning 2003 World Cup triumph, still have players to cause another shock when the two meet on Tuesday.

Eight years ago, Sri Lanka lost by 53 runs to Kenya in Nairobi as the unheralded Africans went on to reach the semifinals.

Jayawardene is one of three survivors from that game, along with skipper Kumar Sangakkara and spinner Muttiah Muralidaran.

"We know all about the embarrassment of losing to Kenya after that debacle in Nairobi back in 2003 and they have some useful players in their ranks," said Jayawardene, who made just five runs as his team were bowled out for 157.

Sri Lanka go into the Group A match at the R Premadasa stadium on the back of an 11-run defeat to Pakistan on Saturday with former captain Jayawardene urging his team to stay focused.

"Our priority must remain to stay focused on the next game against Kenya on Tuesday night," he said, writing a column in the privately-run Sunday Times newspaper.

"There will be some bigger matches ahead this week as the pace of the tournament picks up. I hope that also means that we build up momentum and get into a good tournament groove."

Disappointed Sri Lankan fans criticised their team after they slipped to a World Cup defeat against Pakistan -- even though they only lost by 11 runs and have every chance of reaching the quarterfinals.

Despite high hopes coming into the match, 1996 champions Sri Lanka fell short of Pakistan's total of 277-7, leaving thousands at a packed R Premadasa stadium in Colombo devastated.

"When you concentrate

## Qatar Open Zvonareva's

### Tennis

AFP, Doha

It was third time lucky for Vera Zvonareva in Doha as she shocked top seeded Caroline Wozniacki to win the WTA Qatar Open here on Saturday.

Zvonareva, the second seed, won 6-4, 6-4 to break her title hoodoo in Qatar where she has lost twice in the finals -- to Maria Sharapova in this event in 2008 and to Venus Williams in the season-ending WTA Championships the same year.

Qatar is making a comeback to the regular WTA circuit after a two-year break.

"It's a special moment for me. I have so many fans here and it's an unbelievable feeling to come to Doha and win this tournament," the Russian said.

"It was a tough match and I had to play aggressive and go for my shots."

Wozniacki, who was gunning for her 14th title and the second inside seven days after her victory over Svetlana Kuznetsova in the final of the Dubai Open last Sunday, failed to come up with the extra bit of energy and

resolve against a hard-running, experienced player like Zvonareva.

The Danish superstar failed to convert the big points, allowing Zvonareva to take control at crucial stages of the match.

Zvonareva began with a bang to set things in motion with a break in the very first game of the match, but Wozniacki hit back to level only for he Russian to break again in the third game to take a 2-1 lead from where she never looked back.

Wozniacki, however, had a golden chance to break Zvonareva's hold on the game when she led 40-0 on the Russian's serve in the eighth game when she was ahead 4-3, but the world number one blew three break points to go down 5-3. Zvonareva then served out the 10th game to win the set.

Wozniacki looked like picking up the pieces in the second set when she secured the first break, in the second game, but Zvonareva bounced back in style by breaking back in the third to go up 2-1.

The Russian then had another break in the fifth to lead 3-2 and then went up 4-2 at which stage Wozniacki appeared to give up, showing her frustration by banging her racquet on the court.

## SL fans fuming

AFP, Colombo

Disappointed Sri Lankan fans criticised their team after they slipped to a World Cup defeat against Pakistan -- even though they only lost by 11 runs and have every chance of reaching the quarterfinals.

"They let us down," media executive Nilantha Rajendra said of Saturday's defeat. "We could have done much better and I felt some players did not play as a team."

But Sunil Perera, a keen follower of the national team, blamed the home fans for having expectations that were too high.

"We have the potential to win the World Cup, but we need to do a lot more," said

Perera. "There is too much hype and many think we had already won even before the tournament opened."

"That is why this defeat is so difficult for so many to stomach."

Sri Lanka, co-hosting the World Cup with India and Bangladesh, now have one win and one defeat. They beat Canada by 210 runs in their first match.

Before the tournament started, a Sri Lankan newspaper took the unusual step of urging Kumar Sangakkara's squad not to win the World Cup -- for the greater good of the nation.



**CROSSWORD** By Eugene Sheffer

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