

SHARAPOVA V LISICKI
Pick of the
semifinals

AFP, London

Big-hitting duo Maria Sharapova and Sabine Lisicki set-up a mouth-watering Wimbledon semifinal on Tuesday with the Russian golden girl impressively hammering home her title credentials.

Fifth seed Sharapova, the 2004 champion, and now the overwhelming favourite following the fourth round defeats of Serena and Venus Williams, brushed aside Slovakia's Dominika Cibulkova 6-1, 6-1.

Lisicki, the first German woman to make the semifinals since Steffi Graf in 1999, and only the second wildcard to reach the last four, saw off French ninth seed Marion Bartoli 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-1.

Thursday's other semifinal will see Czech eighth seed Petra Kvitova face fourth seed Victoria Azarenka of Belarus who she beat in the third round here last year.

Kvitova secured a second successive semifinal spot with a 6-3, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 win over Bulgarian 32nd seed Tsvetana Pironkova, who put out Venus Williams on Monday.

Azarenka reached her first Grand Slam semifinal after coming up short in four previous quarterfinals by defeating Austria's Tamira Paszek 6-3, 6-1 in a match played on two different courts.



FED EX?: Former world No.1 Roger Federer of Switzerland is in despair during his Wimbledon quarterfinal loss to Jo-Wilfred Tsonga of France at the All England Tennis Club in London yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Fed fails again

Tsonga meets Djokovic
in semifinals

AFP, London



France's Jo-Wilfried Tsonga bludgeoned Roger Federer to an historic defeat to reach the Wimbledon semifinals Wednesday, as the Swiss star suffered his first ever Grand Slam loss after being two sets up.

The sensational 3-6, 6-7 (3/7), 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 result condemned six-time champion Federer to his second successive quarterfinal defeat at the All England Club.

It will also create more doubts over the 29-year-old's ability to add to his 16 Grand Slams -- the last of which came at the 2010 Australian Open -- and cast a shadow over his bid to match Pete Sampras's record of seven Wimbledon titles.

For 26-year-old Tsonga, it will be his first Wimbledon semifinal spot where he will tackle world number two Novak Djokovic for a place in Sunday's final.

"It was amazing. I played unbelievable. It's never easy to come back against Roger. I'm so happy, it's crazy," said Tsonga, whose best Grand Slam performance was runners-up spot at the 2008 Australian Open. "Against Djokovic I will have to come out and do the same again."

Earlier, Djokovic dug deep to reach the last four with a gritty 6-2, 3-6, 6-3, 7-5 victory over Australian qualifier Bernard Tomic. The Serbian second seed was well below his best for long periods in a tense clash on Court One, but the world number two showed all his battling qualities to finally subdue his teenage opponent.

Australian Open champion Djokovic arrived at Wimbledon last week with questions over his frame of mind as he prepared for his first tournament since his remarkable 43-match winning run was brought to an end by Federer at the French Open.

But the 24-year-old, who lost in the semifinals here in 2007 and 2010, will take over from Rafael Nadal as world number one if he can reach his first final here.

Trophies will avoid axe De Gea joins MU

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Andre Villas-Boas admits he will need to deliver immediate success to avoid becoming the latest victim of demanding Blues owner Roman Abramovich.

Even though Villas-Boas's predecessor Carlo Ancelotti won Chelsea's first ever Premier League and FA Cup double in 2010, the Italian was axed by Abramovich for finishing empty-handed last season.

Abramovich has repeatedly shown no mercy with under-performing managers and has already gone through seven bosses in the eight years since he bought Chelsea.

Villas-Boas has first-hand experience of the way Abramovich works as he was part of Jose Mourinho's backroom staff when his fellow Portuguese was sacked by the Russian in 2007.

The 33-year-old, who was officially unveiled as Chelsea coach on Wednesday, is well aware that only regaining the Premier

League title from Manchester United, and ideally winning the club's first Champions League crown as well, will guarantee that he stays for the duration of his three-year contract.

"What you expect at this club is to be successful straightaway. It is the same at any top club, you have to win every week," he said.

"There is no running away from that. I will be surprised if I am kept on the job I don't win.

"It is something that is expected for me. I have to be successful. Who expects to stay at Chelsea if you don't win anything?"

"The expectations for the club, we know what they are, they are for the maximum success.

"The managers that have sat in this chair for the last seven years have been challenged to win trophies. I am no different. We didn't come here just to pass time because the city is good."

After failing to conclude a

deal for Guus Hiddink, Abramovich took the bold decision to appoint Villas-Boas, who has only been a top-flight manager for two years.

But reports suggest former Chelsea caretaker boss Hiddink could still return as a technical director and Villas-Boas would have no problem working with the someone in that role.

"We are in the process of restructuring the club. I have no problem to work with a technical director. The main thing is not to put someone there to disrupt the manager, it is to help the club," he said.

"I don't see why any manager shouldn't be in control of transfers. This is a club that everybody wants to play for, we have to make wise decisions when we move. There are no players imposed."

Villas-Boas has enjoyed a meteoric rise since leaving his role as Mourinho's opposition scout at Inter Milan in 2009 to take up his first manager's job with Portuguese

club Academica de Coimbra.

He saved Academica from relegation and then led a treble-winning campaign at Porto last season, including becoming the youngest coach to win a European trophy as Porto beat Braga in the Europa League final.

Villas-Boas, who confirmed the appointment of former Chelsea star and West Brom boss Roberto Di Matteo as his assistant, will be the youngest manager in the Premier League this season.

He is the same age as the likes of Chelsea stars Frank Lampard and Didier Drogba and not much older than Blues captain John Terry.

Asked how he will command respect from a group of players who have never been shy of making their opinions known, Villas-Boas insisted he will be able to deal with the star-studded dressing room.

AFP, Manchester



David de Gea has joined Manchester United on a five-year contract after the English champions confirmed they had reached agreement with Spanish side Atletico Madrid for the transfer of the goalkeeper on Wednesday.

The 20-year-old passed a medical this week, having become a European Championship winner with Spain Under-21s last weekend.

He now has the responsibility of succeeding Edwin van der Sar as United's new number one following the veteran Dutchman's retirement last month.

Although no fee was disclosed, reports suggest United may have paid as much as £18 million (\$28.9m) for de Gea, pushing manager Sir Alex Ferguson's pre-season spending to about £50 million after Phil Jones and Ashley Young both arrived at Old Trafford earlier this month.

"I feel very proud and I can't wait to start playing here," said de Gea in an interview with MUTV, United's in-house television station.

"When a club the size of Manchester

United comes in for you it obviously makes you very, very happy.

"I saw their interest as an extra motivation to work even harder to show off my ability.

"It's a great privilege to be part of a club like United and I'm keen to do my best and show what I can do."

Germany's Manuel Neuer, who impressed against United in the Champions League, was also talked of as a potential successor to van der Sar before opting to join Bayern Munich from Schalke 04.

Given Anders Lindgaard joined United in December, Tomasz Kuszczak may now be allowed to leave the Red Devils even though the Polish goalkeeper was on the bench for the Champions League final defeat by Barcelona at Wembley last month.

Meanwhile, de Gea's arrival may not signal the end of United's pre-season spending, with a midfielder possibly on his way to Old Trafford following the retirement of Paul Scholes.

Tottenham's Luka Modric and Alexis Sanchez of Udinese have both been linked with moves to United, who won a record 19th English championship last season, as has Inter Milan star Wesley Sneijder.

Sanchez going to Barca?

AFP, Rome

Udinese are close to reaching an agreement with Barcelona over the sale of the Italian club's Chilean forward Alexis Sanchez according to Gino Pozzo, the son of Udinese owner Giampaolo Pozzo.

"Negotiations with Barca are advancing. We're going to find a solution," Pozzo said on Wednesday.

"In any case, Sanchez's position is not an ultimatum," added Pozzo, in reference to Sanchez's comments. The 22-year-old winger or attacking midfielder is currently preparing to compete in the Copa America in Argentina with the Chilean national side.

He has reportedly told journalists that if he cannot join Spanish champions Barcelona, he would prefer to stay at Udinese, who qualified for the qualifying rounds of the Champions League last season.

Barca's Venezuela-born Spanish forward Jeffren could be used as a make-weight in the deal and Pozzo said: "We still need to talk to the player."

Rijkaard set for Saudi job

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia are set to name Dutchman Frank Rijkaard as national team coach with the aim of qualifying the Gulf side for the 2014 World Cup finals in Brazil, a Saudi football federation source told AFP.

The post had been due to go to Brazilian coach Ricardo Gomes, but the deal fell through at the last moment over a disagreement on the starting date.

"The contract with Rijkaard is 99 per cent done," the federation source told AFP. "But after what happened with Ricardo, the Saudi federation will not make an official announcement until everything has been agreed."

Press reports said that Rijkaard had been offered a three-year contract and would take charge in time to prepare the team for the Asian World Cup qualifiers.

The reports also said that the deal with Ricardo fell through because he had wanted to start at a later date to respect the terms of his current contract with Brazilian side Vasco de Gama.

Villas-Boas warns Wenger

AFP, London



Chelsea manager Andre Villas-Boas has warned Arsenal coach Arsene Wenger that the Blues will continue to splash the cash in pursuit of the Premier League title.

Wenger has accused Chelsea of "financial doping" in the past in frustration at their policy of spending vast sums on signing players, even though the money to fund the deals comes from billionaire owner Roman Abramovich rather than the club's own income.

Chelsea paid a British record £50 million (\$80m) to sign Fernando Torres from Liverpool in January and Wenger believes that kind of wild spending distorts the transfer market and makes for an unfair Premier League title race.

However, Villas-Boas has already been linked with a host of big-money signings since taking charge at Stamford Bridge and says he will have no qualms about splashing out on world-class players.

"We are able to move on the market in one way and Arsenal are able to move in another way. They are able to find amazing young talents. It is almost two different cultures," Villas-Boas said.

"It is becoming the culture that Chelsea moves in the market in one way and Arsenal moves in another. We just have to respect how people go about their business.

"For us in the end it is just to be in top spot in the Premier League when the fixtures finish. To

do it one way or the other doesn't matter.

"I respect what he does and if he doesn't respect what we do, then there is nothing wrong with that. It is just his opinion. It is two different ways of treating the market."

Chelsea are believed to have had a £20 million bid for midfielder Luka Modric rejected by Tottenham, while Villas-Boas has also been linked with £40 million-rated Brazil forward Neymar and his former Porto striker Falcao, who has a £25 million buy-out clause in his contract.

While Villas-Boas is certain to move in the transfer market, the 33-year-old insists there is no rush to make new signings and he plans to assess his squad first when they return for pre-season training on July 6.

"I don't agree this team falls short of quality, most of these players have won a lot in their careers and they still have the hunger," he said.

"I am more than happy with the actual squad. It is nothing new that when a manager comes radical changes are expected, but bearing in mind the success the squad has had in the past six years, we have to think carefully and make wise decisions. We have plenty of time to judge the market."

To enjoy a successful spell at Chelsea, Villas-Boas will have to get the better of Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson, whose 25-year reign at Old Trafford is a stark contrast to Villas-Boas's two years of managerial experience.

Villas-Boas, who admitted his decision to join Chelsea after just a year at Porto had been against the wishes of his family.



SPORTS POLL

Do you think Sanath Jayasuriya should've been picked?

Yes 78.1%

No 21.19%

TOTAL VOTES: 233

WEEKLY QUESTION

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