

Sublime Sharapova

AFP, Melbourne

Australian Open
The Grand Slam of Asia/Pacific

Flawless Maria Sharapova set a new Australian Open record Sunday in losing just five games en route to the quarterfinals, where she was joined by Agnieszka Radwanska and Li Na.

The second seed has been in impeccable form and she thrashed unseeded Belgian Kirsten Flipkens 6-1, 6-0 to set up a meeting with 19th seed Ekaterina Makarova, who beat fifth seed Angelique Kerber 7-5, 6-4.

Polish fourth seed Radwanska also powered into the last eight, winning her 13th match in a row without dropping a set by thumping Serbian former world number one Ana Ivanovic 6-2, 6-4.

She now meets Li on Tuesday for a place in the semi-finals after the Chinese world number six battled past Germany's Julia Goerges 7-6 (8/6), 6-1.

Sharapova, the 2008 champion, has only dropped five games in four matches so far in her bid for a second Australian title, the fewest games conceded to make the quarters in Melbourne in the Open era.

Monica Seles (1991 and 1993) and Steffi Graf (1989) previously held the record at eight games.

But Sharapova narrowly missed the all-Grand Slam mark held by Mary Pierce, who dropped only four games in making

the last eight at the French Open in 1994.

The second seed, who needs to reach the final to have a chance of returning to world number one, had beaten Flipkens in both of their previous matches.

She held serve and then, helped by some loose Flipkens shots, got the break for 2-1. Flipkens had two break point chances in the next game but failed to convert as Sharapova held.

The four-time Grand Slam winner was starting to get the measure of her opponent on a hot Melbourne day and raced to the set when Flipkens sent a forehand long.

It was more of the same in the second set as the Belgian lost confidence with the Russian racing through it in just 25 minutes.

Sharapova now plays Makarova in a repeat of their last-eight clash in 2012, when she won and went on to make the final, losing to world number one Victoria Azarenka.

Makarova is looking for revenge.

Defeat was a major disappointment for Kerber, who remains the only player in the current top 10 not to have made a Grand Slam final.

Radwanska, who won warm-up tournaments in Auckland and Sydney, made short work of Ivanovic, proving too powerful and consistent and now meets Li, who is bidding to make a second Melbourne final in three years.

Aussie-Lankan fourth ODI abandoned

AFP, Sydney

The fourth one-day international between Australia and Sri Lanka was abandoned after rain halted play on Sunday with the tourists chasing 223 runs to take the series.

Sri Lanka needed 209 more runs off 46.4 overs with all their wickets in tact when the umpires took the players off the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Skipper Mahela Jayawardene was on four and Tillakaratne Dilshan nine.

Australia scored 222 for nine off their 50 overs after winning the toss.

"The outfield is still quite wet so unfortunately..." said a disappointed Australian skipper Michael Clarke.

Opener David Warner top scored with 60 off 73 balls but ninth man Mitchell Starc starred for the hosts knocking 52 off 37 to help Australia post a decent total.

Sri Lanka have routed Australia in the last two games to seize a 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

The final leg will be played in Hobart on Wednesday.

"We've got a chance to level the series," Clarke said.

One more go

FROM PAGE 16

the international level) when I had the opportunity. It seems that there is a lot more rotating of players than when I was in my prime. I am still playing good enough to represent Australia, I think. But I do believe that my opportunity is passed.

"Having said that, I am considering going back to four-day cricket and having a quick shot at trying to make the Ashes team," said Hodge at the end of the match yesterday. He also believed that he was hard done by the selectors and that he should have received more opportunity.

The player was dropped from Australia's Test side after playing five matches, despite an average of 58.42. He played one more Test during a tour of West Indies in 2008 as a replacement, taking his total tally to six Tests.

Cagers tame

FROM PAGE 16

most vocal and theatrical. He complained about almost every decision and said that this virtual title-decider was staged the day before the final day to avoid attention, and that the two Bangladeshi referees among the three officiating were highly partial. Butt's opposite number Wasif Ali also felt that the refereeing was not up to the mark, but it was in no way partial as the officials were all international panel referees.

In the first match of the day, Nepal swept aside Bhutan by 94-42 points.

The match had a slightly amateurish feel to it, because of the temporary tarpaulin dugouts and the bumpy and comparatively smaller pitch.

"The stadium is being renovated with a project of Tk 5.12 crore and this problem will be solved after the completion of works. The spectators are polite and nothing bad happened yet," said District Football Association member and BFF member Illias Hossain.

With the draw, Abahani are in the third position with 17 points from eight matches, two behind of leaders Sheikh Russel KC and one clear of second-placed Sheikh Jamal Dhannondi Club.

Muktijoddha

stuck glued at the fourth position with 14 points from eight matches.

POINTS TABLE (after 1st leg)

Teams	Played	W	D	L	GD	Points
Sk. Russel KC	8	6	1	1	10	19
Sk. Jamal DC	8	5	3	0	8	18
Abahani	8	5	2	1	9	17
Muktijoddha	8	4	2	2	5	14
Mohammedan SC	8	4	1	3	1	13
Team BJMC	8	3	2	3	1	11
Brothers Union	8	1	1	6	-9	4
Soccer Club	8	1	0	7	-9	3

AFRICAN NATIONS CUP

Dismal opening day

Football

REUTERS, Johannesburg

Unseasonably cold temperatures, hours of driving rain, uninspiring football and no goals marked a truly dismal opening day at the African Nations Cup on Saturday.

The eagerly-awaited 29th continental tournament, which has grown from humble beginnings in 1957 to an event of global interest, began with a 0-0 draw in a poor game between hosts South Africa hosts and debutants Cape Verde Islands.

The opener at Soccer City was followed by a better match between Morocco and Angola at the same stadium but that also finished goalless.

The only people who appeared genuinely satisfied with the first day, which most would rather quickly forget, were Cape Verde coach Lucio Antunes and his squad.

He was delighted they finished the match with a real belief that they can get good enough results against Morocco and Angola in their remaining Group A matches to avoid an immediate return to their island country at the other end of the continent.

"For me, it was mission accomplished," said Antunes. "The team was excellent, we did the job we came to do and met our objectives and now we can concentrate on our next match against Morocco."

"I am happy, the players are happy and the technical staff are happy. We

dignified our country today. It is a small country of 500,000 people, but we made them proud today."

South Africa coach Gordon Igesund had a totally different perspective after a turgid, error-strewn game played in cold, wintry conditions with rain sweeping around the stadium.

However, the conditions did nothing to reduce the relentless drone of the vuvuzela, the plastic horn that provides an unforgiving, noisy backdrop to matches in South Africa.

"Not too many players came to the party in the first half, and we weren't much better in the second," Igesund told a news conference after what was a poor spectacle for an opening match watched live on TV by millions of people around the world.

"Some of the players seemed to freeze when the whistle went they looked nervous. Perhaps for some of them the occasion was a bit too big," he added.

"We now have to go for it in our next two games against Angola and Morocco. Of course we wanted to win and get a goal and get all three points, but credit to Cape Verde. They are a good, well organised team."

"A lot of their players play in Europe, they defended well, slowed the game right down in the second half and got the point they came looking for."

They also came closest to winning, almost taking the lead after 13 minutes when Luis Soares, better known as Platini, was guilty of a shocking miss

his more famous namesake, former France great Michel Platini, would have converted with ease.

The chance came when Babanco played Platini into space about 15 metres from goal but, with only one home goalkeeper Itumeleng Khune to beat, Platini screwed his left-foot shot horribly wide.

The only other clear-cut chance came in the second half when Khune scrambled a header from Heldon away for a corner.

The occasion was in stark contrast to the way South Africa started the World Cup here 2-1/2 years ago.

The opening match then also ended in a draw, with the hosts finishing 1-1 with Mexico, but that game featured a stunning opening strike from Siphiwe Tshabalala who never remotely looked like even creating a chance on Saturday, never mind scoring.

Angola and Morocco also failed to find the net in the second match but at least both sides played some attractive technically good football and their game was far more easy on the eye than the opener.

Morocco served notice, especially in the early stages, that they could make an impact while Angola's young side, whose average age is only 24, grew in stature as the game went on.

The Angolans could have grabbed all three points if Manucho and Guilherme Afonso had not both gone for the same diving header and got in each other's way in the 88th minute.

5-hr marathon

FROM PAGE 16

Despite an inferior tiebreak record, the Swiss fought to three set points and sent the match into a fifth set with a titanic 21-shot rally on the third set point to send the Rod Laver Arena crowd into uproar.

Wawrinka edged ahead in the deciding with a break of Djokovic's opening service, only to give it back in another fiercely contested next game.

Games went with service for the next 19 games until Djokovic finally got a look at match point, and claimed victory on his third match point as Wawrinka fought to the bitter end.

David Ferrer will face Nicolas Almagro in an all-Spanish quarterfinal after they took contrasting roads to the last eight on Sunday.

Ferrer, the fourth seed in celebrated countryman Rafael Nadal's absence, wore down Japan's Kei Nishikori in straight sets to reach his third straight quarter-final at the year-opening Grand Slam.

Cricket

AFP, Johannesburg

The Pakistan Test team are due to arrive in Johannesburg on Sunday night to take on world champions South Africa in a three-Test series.

It is Pakistan's first visit to South Africa in six years and their biggest challenge could be to adapt to the pace and bounce of the pitches they will play on against a fast bowling attack generally acknowledged to be the world's best.

They will have a four-day warm-up match against a South African Invitation XI in East London, starting on Friday, but conditions in the coastal city are less pace-friendly than is likely when they play the Test matches in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Centurion.

ITINERARY

Jan 25-28: SA Invitation XI, East London
Feb 1-5: First Test, Johannesburg
Feb 14-18: Second Test, Cape Town
Feb 22-26: Third Test, Centurion
Mar 1: First Twenty20 International, Durban (D/N)
Mar 3: Second Twenty20 International, Centurion
Mar 6: SA Invitation XI (50 overs), Kimberley (D/N)
Mar 10: First one-day international, Bloemfontein
Mar 15: Second one-day international, Centurion (D/N)
Mar 17: Third one-day international, Johannesburg
Mar 21: Fourth one-day international, Durban

SQUAD

Misbahul Haq (captain), Mohammad Hafeez, Nasir Jamshed, Azhar Ali, Umar Gul, Asad Shafiq, Younis Khan, Junaid Khan, Mohammad Irfan, Ehsan Adil, Saeed Ajmal, Abdur Rehman, Haris Sohail, Faisal Iqbal, Taufeeq Umar, Sarfraz Ahmed.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Use an old phone
5 Plastic user's accumulation
9 Yon bloke
12 Resting
13 Neighborhood
14 Expert
15 Shipwreck site
16 Ancient Briton
17 Say it's OK
18 It's right on the map
19 Shell game need

20 Took the bus
21 — canto
23 Mainlander's memento
25 Flower cluster
26 Heckle or Jeckle
32 Baking potato

33 Any of four that chase Pac-Man
34 Aberration
36 Last syllable of a word
37 Ultra-modernist
38 Meadow
39 Dressed
42 State of matter
44 Infamous lyre player
48 Fond du —
49 Abrupt
50 Fed
51 Bonfire residue
52 Soft cheese

53 Dryer collection
54 "How come?"
55 Celeb
56 Therefore

10 On the rocks
11 Apportion (out)
20 90 degrees
22 Overact
24 American emblem
25 Carnival city
26 Throw in
27 Scoundrel
29 Luau bowliful
30 Doctrine
31 Greek H
35 Dairy-section item
36 Overcoat named for a region of Ireland

39 Talon
40 Whip
41 Sore
43 Bocelli showstopper
45 Eastern bigwig
46 Pealed
47 Aware of
49 Letterman's employer

Solution time: 27 mins.

DOWN

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