

Djokovic, Nadal in semis clash

AFP, Paris



World number one Novak Djokovic and seven-time champion Rafael Nadal set-up a French Open semifinal blockbuster on Wednesday after straight-sets wins in their last-eight ties.

Top seed Djokovic reached his 12th consecutive Grand Slam semi-final when he defeated gutsy German Tommy Haas 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 7-5.

Nadal, the second seed, cruised into the last-four with a routine 6-2, 6-3, 6-1 win over Stanislas Wawrinka of Switzerland as he stepped up his bid to become the first man to win the same Grand Slam title eight times.

Friday's clash will be the 35th meeting between the two with Nadal holding a 12-3 lead on clay.

But Djokovic beat the Spaniard in the Monte Carlo Masters final in April in their most recent meeting.

Nadal's win over Wawrinka took his Roland Garros career record to 57-1.

Djokovic, 26, reeled off breaks in the seventh and ninth games that gave him the first set in which Haas won just a single point on the Serb's serve.

Haas held on for a second set tie-break but Djokovic powered through that as well, finishing it off with a trademark, deep, booming forehand.

The German, a former world number two whose career has been decimated by a series of injuries, slipped 2-1 down in the third before he converted his first break point to level at 2-2.

Back came Djokovic, breaking again for a 4-3 lead before Haas saved a match point in the ninth game.

He refused to buckle, breaking Djokovic a further time as he served for the match to level at 5-5.

But the Serb wasn't to be denied taking victory on his second match point.

Nadal broke the Wawrinka's serve in the opening game and then again in the fifth to take the first set 6-2.

The champion then jumped out into a 3-1 lead with another break early in the second set before Wawrinka had a glimmer of hope with a break back to get to 3-3.

But that was as far as it got for the ninth seed as Nadal simply added extra muscle to his pounding groundstrokes, leaving Wawrinka reeling under their weight and precision.



Russia's Maria Sharapova makes a backhand return to Serbia's Jelena Jankovic during their French Open quarterfinal at Roland Garros yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

SHARAPOVA, AZARENKA in last four

AP, Paris



Maria Sharapova shrugged off losing the first six games and swept the last four to reach the French Open semifinals.

The defending champion overcame a miserable start in the quarterfinals Wednesday to beat Jelena Jankovic, 0-6, 6-4, 6-3.

It was the first victory of Sharapova's career after losing an opening set 6-0. Her opponent Friday will be two-time Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka, who reached her first Roland Garros semifinal by beating Maria Kirilenko 7-6 (3), 6-2.

The No. 2-seeded Sharapova earned her first French Open title a year ago to complete a career Grand Slam. She has won 12 matches in a row at Roland Garros, where her 42-9 record is the best among active women.

No. 3 Azarenka is 7-5 against Sharapova. "Obviously it only gets tougher from here," Sharapova said, "but I'm really happy I'm at this stage again."

The warmest weather of the tournament greeted the quarterfinalists, and Jankovic quickly had Sharapova sweating. In the first set the Russian repeatedly missed the lines by narrow margins or clipped the net cord, and the match was 35 minutes old before she won a game - and only then because Jankovic double-faulted on break point.

Jankovic won 27 points in the first set, 20 on unforced errors by her opponent.

"I still felt like I was in the match," Sharapova said. "And I was."

She then began to find her range while hitting even harder than before, while Jankovic did her best to withstand the barrage. In contrast to Sharapova's metronomic shrieking, Jankovic went about her business in silence - until she started muttering to herself as her lead disappeared.

"It was a big fight," Jankovic said. "It was great tennis out there. We battled."

Sharapova earned the first break of the final set to take her first lead at 4-3. Toward the end the rallies became longer, and she won the majority, often by hitting shots at improbable angles.

Twice Sharapova yanked lunging backhand returns cross-court for winners. She finished off another point with a forehand struck so violently her necklace flew into her face.

When Jankovic's final shot sailed wide, Sharapova responded with a slack-jawed smile, as though she couldn't quite believe her comeback. She had dropped a first set 6-0 five other times in her career - and went on to lose each match.

Most of her results this year have been less stressful. She's 35-4, with all but four of those matches decided in straight sets.

Azarenka is 27-2 and enjoying her best run in eight appearances at Roland Garros. She needed 76 minutes to take the grueling first set against Kirilenko, and the Belarusian improved her record this year in tiebreakers to 4-0. The second set went more quickly, with Azarenka losing only six points in four service games.

Mexicans edge Jamaica

AFP, Kingston

Aldo de Nigris scored in the 48th minute to give unbeaten Mexico a 1-0 victory over Jamaica on Tuesday in a North American qualifying match for the 2014 World Cup.

De Nigris, a 29-year-old forward who plays for Monterrey of the Mexican league, headed home a crossing pass from defender Carlos Salcido for the only goal to lift the Mexicans atop the six-team CONCACAF regional qualifying group.

Jamaican goalkeeper Donovan Ricketts denied Manchester United striker Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez in the 62nd minute, and deflected a 1-0-1 effort by the English Premier League star with a right hand in the 84th minute.

But the "Reggae Boyz" could not muster the equalizer off a corner kick in stoppage time and suffered a stinging blow to their hopes of reaching next year's global football showdown in Brazil, remaining last in the group.

The Mexicans won after opening with three draws to move atop the table with six points after four matches, one point ahead of Panama and two in front of Costa Rica, United States and Honduras with Jamaica last, 0-2-2 for two points.

The three top teams among the six nations in the North American round-robin series will qualify for Brazil, while the fourth-place finisher must face New Zealand to decide another berth in next year's global football spectacle.

"El Tricolor" has played an extra match. They made the trip to Kingston two weeks earlier than first planned because they will play later this month in the FIFA Confederations Cup, forcing the Jamaica match to be moved ahead.

England post 287

AFP, Nottingham



Jos Buttler made an unbeaten 47 off just 16 balls to propel England to a total of 287 for six against New Zealand in the third and final one-day international at Trent Bridge on Wednesday.

England, bidding to avoid a white-wash having already lost the series at 2-0 down, saw Ian Bell top score with 82 before he gave his wicket away.

At 210 for five in the 46th over, it seemed England would fall short of a competitive total.

But a stand of 62 between Eoin Morgan (49) and Buttler gave England's bowlers a score to defend under the floodlights in this day/night fixture.

Buttler needed a six off the last ball to surpass Sri Lanka great Sanath Jayasuriya's 17-ball record for the fastest ODI fifty, set against Pakistan in Singapore in 1996.

But instead he could only manage two off Tim Southee.

Nevertheless 22-year-old Somerset wicket-keeper Buttler's innings featured six fours and three sixes.

Left-hander Morgan was no slouch either, his runs coming off 48 balls with three sixes and two fours.

England, sent into bat, soon lost captain Alastair Cook when he was lbw for nought to left-arm seamer Mitchell McClenaghan.

Fellow opener Bell was in com-

mand when he tamely mistimed a drive off McClenaghan low to mid-off.

Bell squatted down at the crease in disbelief before eventually walking off after a 96-ball innings featuring a six and six fours.

Ravi Bopara, one of four changes to the side beaten by 86 runs at Southampton on Sunday, made a scratchy 28, at less than a run-a-ball, before he holed out off part-time spin-

ner Kane Williamson to leave England 210 for five.

Buttler, off only his third ball, struck Kyle Mills high over long-on.

Next ball Buttler produced a trademark scoop shot for four over short fine leg and the ball after that deposited Mills between the two fielders at mid-wicket and square leg.

There was more to come, with the fourth ball of the over reverse-scooped over short third man for yet another Buttler boundary.

Buttler missed the fifth ball but the sixth was smashed back over Mills's head as 22 runs came off the 48th over, the most expensive of the innings.

McClenaghan, whose first eight overs yielded a return of three for 23, saw 31 taken off his final two.

England scored 74 runs off their last four overs in what was both sides' final match before the start of the one-day Champions Trophy tournament in the UK.

New Zealand

99 for 4 after 17 overs

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Lewandowski wants a summer move

REUTERS, Berlin



Borussia Dortmund's Robert Lewandowski wants to leave the Champions League runners-up and join his chosen club in the close season, the Poland striker was quoted as saying on Wednesday.

"We have been in agreement with the (new) club for some time now," he told Sport Bild magazine. "I have informed the people in charge (at Dortmund) and I assume that all will now be cleared up and I can join the club of my wish this summer."

"This would be the best thing for all sides," said the 25-year-old, who grabbed headlines by scoring four goals against Real Madrid in the Champions League semi-final first leg.

Lewandowski, second-top scorer in the Bundesliga last season and widely expected to join European and German champions Bayern Munich, has refused to sign an extension to his current contract that runs out in 2014.

Bayern coach Jupp Heynckes said after their 2-1 Champions League win over Dortmund at Wembley stadium last month that a deal for the striker was only a matter of time.

The forward, who won consecutive Bundesliga titles with Dortmund in 2011 and 2012 as well as last year's German Cup, joined the Bundesliga side in 2010 from Polish club Lech Poznan.

Martinez at Everton

AFP, London

Roberto Martinez will take over from David Moyes as Everton manager on a four-year contract, the Premier League club confirmed on Wednesday.

The 39-year-old Spaniard quickly emerged as the front-runner for the role after Moyes was appointed as the successor to Alex Ferguson at Manchester United on May 9 and he was subsequently given permission to leave Wigan Athletic by chairman Dave Whelan.

"Everton Football Club is today delighted to confirm the appointment of Roberto Martinez as its next manager," Everton said in a statement on their website.

"The 39-year-old Spaniard joins from Wigan Athletic and has signed a four-year contract at Goodison Park."

'Ronaldo thought he knew it all'

REUTERS, Madrid



Self-proclaimed 'Special One' Jose Mourinho had only one problem with Cristiano Ronaldo when he coached him at Real Madrid -- he thought the world's most expensive player was a bit of a know-it-all.

Ronaldo joined Real from Manchester United for around 90 million euros (\$118 million) in 2009 and took his goalscoring exploits to new heights under Mourinho, who left Real Madrid to rejoin Chelsea as manager earlier this week.

Asked in an interview with Spanish television show Punto Pelota why his relationship with Ronaldo had broken down towards the end of last season, Mourinho said the player had not taken criticism well.

"I had only one problem with him, very simple, very basic, which was when a

coach criticises a player from a tactical viewpoint trying to improve what in my view could have been improved," he added.

"And at that moment he didn't take it very well because maybe he thinks he knows everything and the coach cannot help him to develop more.

"Cristiano has had three fantastic seasons with me, I don't know if they were the best of his career because he had some fantastic moments with Manchester United.

"I think we created a fantastic situation for him tactically in which he could express all his potential and turn that into records and goals."

Real's failure to win major silverware last season and reports of division in the dressing room have prompted speculation Ronaldo, whose contract runs until June 2015, may be seeking a move away from the Spanish capital.



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo looks on during a training session for Portugal on Wednesday. Real's departing coach Jose Mourinho accused Ronaldo of 'knowing it all'.

PHOTO: AFP