

Rooney misses FA Cup tie

AFP, London

Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney will miss the FA Cup third-round meeting with Swansea City on Sunday due to a groin injury, manager David Moyes has revealed.

The England striker, 28, has been nursing the problem for the last few weeks and sat out his side's 1-0 victory at Norwich City in the Premier League on December 28.

He returned for Wednesday's 2-1 loss at home to Tottenham Hotspur, but with a League Cup semifinal first leg at Sunderland coming up next week, Moyes has decided to rest him for the visit of Swansea.

"He's got a groin injury and won't be available on Sunday," Moyes told reporters.

Asked if Rooney would be fit to face Sunderland on Tuesday, Moyes said: "He's got a chance."

Rooney's strike partner Robin van Persie is also currently sidelined with a thigh problem, leaving Danny Welbeck and Javier Hernandez as Moyes's only fit senior strikers.

Oswaldo gets 3-match ban

REUTERS

Southampton forward Dani Oswaldo will miss the Premier League club's next three games after the FA found him guilty of violent conduct on Friday.

The Argentine-born Italian was involved in a touchline fracas in stoppage time during the 1-1 draw at Newcastle United last month, having already been substituted.

As well as a three-match ban, Oswaldo was fined 40,000 pounds (\$65,800) for his part in the incident which also saw Newcastle coach Andy Woodman sent to the stands.

Woodman was fined 1,250 pounds and warned about his future conduct after he admitted a charge of improper conduct.

Oswaldo will miss Saturday's third round FA Cup tie against second tier visitors Burnley as well as the league matches at home to West Bromwich Albion and away to Sunderland.

Nadal to meet Monfils in final

AFP, Doha

World number one Rafael Nadal will play Frenchman Gael Monfils in the Qatar Open final after beating surprise package Peter Gojowczyk in the semifinal on Friday.

Nadal's 4-6, 6-2, 6-3 victory confirmed him as the overwhelming favourite to take the title and do something he has never done before, win a tournament in the opening week of the year.

But Nadal may need to be specially wary of Monfils, whose two wins against the legendary Spaniard have both come here in Doha and who has arrived in the final with the mixed blessing of having dropped only 23 games in eight sets -- but with correspondingly far less match practice.

"I never win a title in the first week of the season, and tomorrow I have another opportunity," Nadal said.

"A lot of times I have tried here so it will mean a lot to me to succeed finally. Hopefully tomorrow (Saturday) I will play good and will play my best match here. I know I will try."

City frustrated by Blackburn

AFP, London



Last season's beaten FA Cup finalists Manchester City tasted fresh disappointment in the competition on Saturday when they drew 1-1 at second-tier Blackburn Rovers in the third round.

Stunned by Wigan Athletic in last year's final, City took the lead at Ewood Park through an Alvaro Negredo goal on the stroke of half-time, only for Scott Dann to equalise early in the second period.

City, currently second in the Premier League, also had defender Dedryck Boyata sent off late on for two bookable offences and now face an unwelcome replay against Gary Bowyer's side.

City manager Manuel Pellegrini made seven changes to his starting XI, while former England goalkeeper Paul Robinson returned for Blackburn after spending almost 12 months out due to a blood clot on his lung.

The visitors enjoyed the best of the first half but had to wait until the 45th minute to go ahead, with Negredo volleying home at the back post after Edin Dzeko headed on David Silva's left-wing corner.

City had gone into the game on a run of seven straight wins, but they conceded an equaliser 10 minutes into the second half when Dann pounced after visiting goalkeeper Costel Pantilimon allowed Rudy Gestede's header to bounce off his gloves.

Chris Taylor came close to putting Blackburn in front, while Robinson had to save from Dzeko and substitute Jesus Navas at the other end, before Boyata saw red following an ill-advised swipe at DJ Campbell.

AFP, Milan



The first weekend of the New Year features the biggest game of the season so far in Serie A, as leaders Juventus entertain second-placed Roma in Turin on Sunday.

Juve come into 2014 five points clear of Roma at the summit, and so a win will see them take a big step towards retaining their title.

Antonio Conte's side are in fine form, having won their last nine league games on the bounce since suffering their sole league defeat this season, a 4-2 reverse at Fiorentina in October.

Meanwhile, Roma could still match Juve's 2011-12 achievement of going the entire campaign undefeated.

Under French coach Rudi Garcia, Roma have yet to lose in 17 matches, although since winning their opening 10 games they have managed just two wins and five draws.

That run has allowed Juve to pull clear and they are defending an unbeaten home record in Serie A stretching back almost exactly a year and a 2-1 defeat to Sampdoria on January 6, 2013.

Despite that, Roma veteran Francesco Totti insists the Giallorossi have no reason to fear their opponents at the Juventus Stadium.

"We are not interested in the draw, we want to win," said the Roma captain in an interview with Il Messaggero.

"On an individual basis, one against one,

we are better than Juve, but they are better as a team.

"The Rome derby is a unique encounter, but games against Juventus are like a second derby for me. It was like that when I was a fan, seeing as there has always been a footballing hatred between the two."

Totti's comments have not gone down well in Turin, with Juve's Italy defender Giorgio Chiellini hopeful of putting an end to the visitors' unbeaten record.

"Everyone has their own opinion. But we have demonstrated on the pitch in the last two and a half years that we are stronger and we want to show that again on Sunday," he said.

"Roma are enjoying a great season. They deserve credit for an amazing start, but it is not easy to maintain such consistency throughout a whole season."

The match will feature a fascinating battle in midfield, where Arturo Vidal has been Juve's inspiration and Dutchman Kevin Strootman has been outstanding for Roma since signing from PSV Eindhoven.

FIXTURES

(kick-offs 1400 GMT unless stated)

Sunday
Chievo v Cagliari, Fiorentina v Livorno (1700 GMT), Juventus v Roma (1945 GMT)

Monday
Napoli v Sampdoria (1130 GMT), Catania v Bologna, Genoa v Sassuolo, AC Milan v Atalanta, Parma v Torino, Udinese v Verona, Lazio v Inter Milan (1730 GMT)

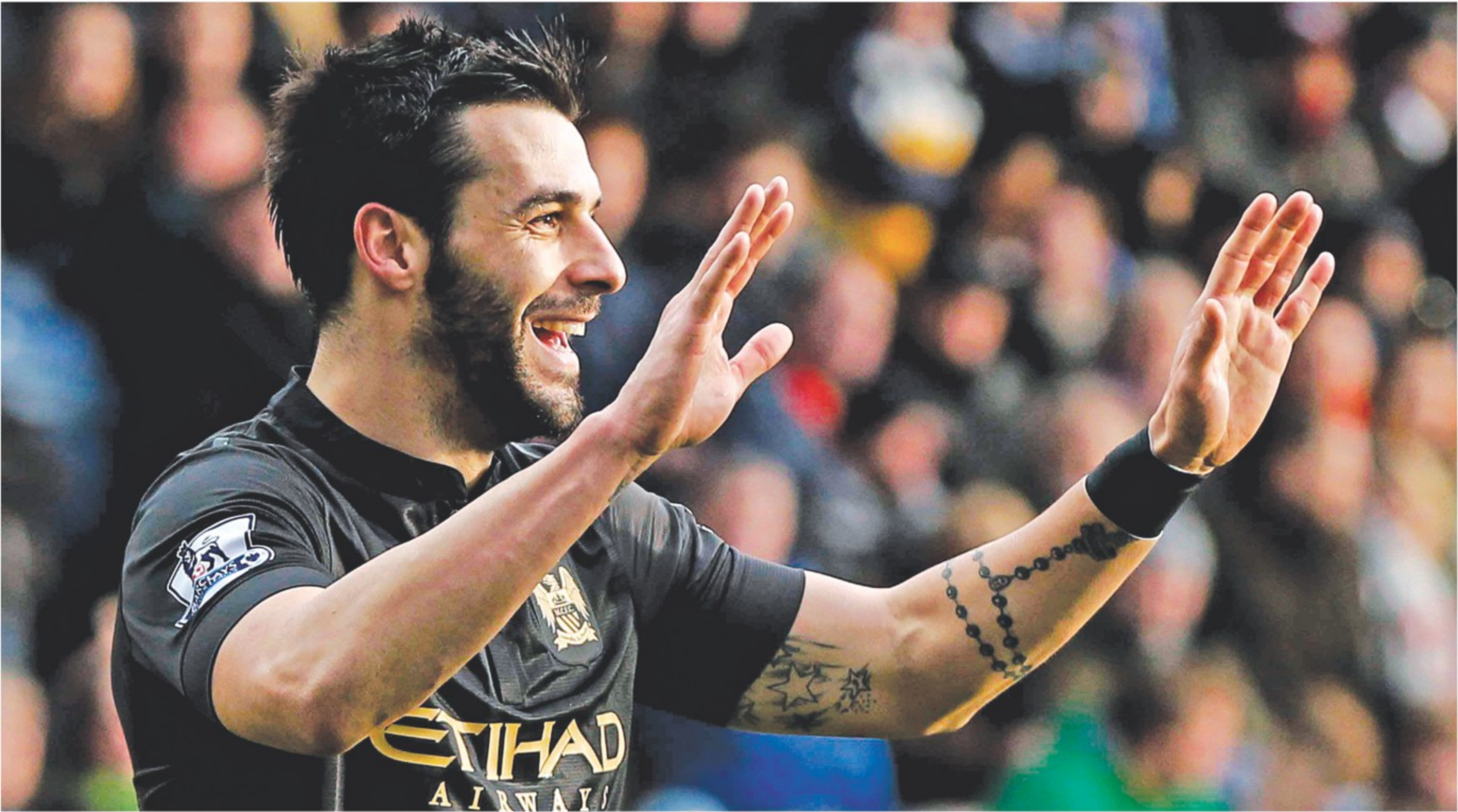


PHOTO: REUTERS

Manchester City striker Alvaro Negredo celebrates his goal against Blackburn Rovers during their FA Cup third round match at Ewood Park yesterday.

Tame draw in Abu Dhabi

AFP, Abu Dhabi



The first Test between Pakistan and Sri Lanka ended in a draw on the fifth and final day in Abu Dhabi on Saturday after

Mohammad Hafeez and Ahmed Shehzad hit half-centuries.

Hafeez finished with 80 not out for his ninth Test half-century, his first in 11 innings, while Ahmed Shehzad notched his maiden fifty on his debut as Pakistan, set 302 runs in a possible of 67 overs, finished on 158-2.

The draw left the three-Test series open, with the second Test starting in Dubai on Wednesday. The third Test will be played in Sharjah from January 16.

The no-result is also a moral victory for the Sri Lankans who were in a danger of losing after conceding a big 179-run lead in the first innings and were 186-4 after the third day, leading by just seven runs with six wickets intact.

Sri Lankan skipper Angelo Mathews hit a career-best 157 not out to pull his team out of danger on the fourth day when they lost only one wicket in the full day's play for 234 runs.

The target always looked beyond Pakistan's reach as their best winning chase in

all Test cricket was 314 against Australia in Karachi in 1994.

Pakistan lost opener Khurram Manzoor early, caught behind off paceman Suranga Lakmal after scoring eight, but Hafeez and Shehzad avoided any further loss and put on 94 in an unbroken second wicket stand.

Hafeez reached his half-century with two fours in one Sachitra Senanayake over. He had been dropped from the Pakistan team for the two-Test series against South Africa, also in Abu Dhabi, in October, after scoring just 113 in 11 innings.

Shehzad also hit spinner Rangana Herath for his seventh four to reach his maiden 50 before he was trapped leg-before by the same bowler soon after tea for 55.

Hafeez hit 11 fours during his sedate knock. Younis Khan was the other unbeaten batsman with 13.

Earlier, Sri Lanka declared their second innings on 480-5 after batting an hour and 30 minutes but their slow batting showed they had saftey on their minds rather than forcing a lead in the three-Test series.

It was the unfinished sixth wicket 156-run stand between Mathews and Prasanna Jayawardene (63 not out) that continued on the fifth day and ended all hopes of a Pakistani win.

SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA: First innings 204 (Mathews 91; Junaid 5-58, Bhatti 3-65)				
PAKISTAN: First innings 383 (Younis 136, Misbah 135; Eranga 3-80, Herath 3-93)				
SRI LANKA: Second innings (overnight 420-5)				
Karunaratne b Junaid	24			
Silva c Akmal b Junaid	81			
Sangakkara c Younis b Bhatti	55			
M Jayawardene c Shafig b Bhatti	0			
Chandimal c Ali b Junaid	89			
Mathews not out	157			
P Jayawardene not out	63			
Extras: (b-4, lb-7)	11			
Total: (For 5 wkts decd in 168.3 overs) 480				
Fall of wickets: 1-47, 2-146, 3-150, 4-186, 5-324				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Junaid	36	3	93	3
Ali	38.3	9	92	0
Bhatti	36	8	146	2
Ajmal	49	10	115	0
Hafeez	9	1	23	0
PAKISTAN: Second innings				
Manzoor c Prasanna b Lakmal	8			
Shehzad lbw b Herath	55			
Hafeez not out	80			
Younis not out	13			
Extras: (b-1, nb-1)	2			
Total: (For 2 wkts in 52 overs)	158			
Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-125				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Lakmal	13	1	43	1
Eranga	11	0	38	0
Herath	21	8	37	1
Mathews	2	0	9	0
Senanayake	5	0	30	0
Result: Match drawn.				

Schumacher still critical

AFP, Grenoble

Michael Schumacher remains in a "critical but stable" condition, his spokeswoman said Saturday, as French investigators hoped a helmet-mounted camera he was wearing at the moment of his ski accident could answer a raft of questions.

A spokeswoman for the retired Formula One champion denied some reports that his family had been reluctant to hand over the camera -- taken by authorities on Friday -- because of privacy reasons.

"Michael's helmet camera was voluntarily given to the investigating authorities by the family," said spokeswoman Sabine Kehm in a statement. "That this should have been done against the wishes of the family is untrue."

It had been known since Tuesday that the seven-time world racing champion hit his head on a rock so hard that his helmet was split in two.

It was not known whether the camera filmed the champion's descent down the slope or whether the images have been damaged by the impact on the rock.

FA charges Rodgers

AFP, London



Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers was charged by the Football Association on Friday for allegedly questioning the integrity of referee Lee Mason in his side's 2-1 defeat against Manchester City.

Rodgers asked whether it was correct to have an official from Greater Manchester in charge of the game after a series of decisions went against his team at Eastlands on December 26.

As a result Rodgers has been landed with an FA charge to which he has until 1800GMT on Wednesday to respond.

"Liverpool manager Brendan Rodgers has been charged by The FA over post-match media comments he made following his side's game against Manchester City on 26 December 2013," the FA said in a statement.

"It is alleged the comments by Rodgers called into question the integrity of the match referee, and/or implied that the match referee was motivated by bias; and/or brought the game into disrepute; and/or amounted to a failure to act in the best interests of the game."

Rodgers was particularly angry at the decision to disallow a Raheem Sterling goal for offside, despite the player being at least two yards behind the last defender.

"I thought they were horrendous in terms of performance," he said of the officials at the time.

"I thought it was throughout the evening. Hopefully we don't have another Greater Manchester referee again on a Liverpool-Manchester game."

"I was surprised we are playing in Manchester and have a referee from Greater Manchester.

"I am sure we won't get (for) Liverpool-Man City someone from the Wirral."

The day after the game Rodgers insisted he was trying to make a valid point and did not intend to slight Mason.

"In terms of geography, I certainly wasn't questioning the integrity of referees," he said.

"It was more than logical (as a comment) in terms of having a referee from that part of the world refereeing a game in Manchester."

Casillas welcomes baby boy

AFP, Madrid

Real Madrid and Spain goalkeeper Iker Casillas on Friday welcomed the birth of his first child, a baby boy called Martin, with his partner, the television reporter Sara Carbonero.

"I want to share with you the most important and moving moment of my life: the birth of my son," said Casillas, captain of Spain's World Cup and double-Euro-winning national team.

Martin, who weighed 3.85 kilos (8.5 pounds), and his mother "are perfectly well and are now resting", he added, in a statement sent to fans.

Casillas, 32, won the hearts of Spaniards when he kissed Carbonero, 29, live on air as she interviewed him after Spain's victory over the Netherlands in the 2010 World Cup final.

Serena clinches season opener

AFP, Brisbane

World number one Serena Williams won the season-opening Brisbane International tennis tournament when she beat second seed Victoria Azarenka on Saturday.

Williams won a close first set then edged Azarenka in the second to win a tense final 6-4, 7-5 in 98 minutes.

The defending champion just shaded Azarenka throughout, with her powerful serve proving the main difference between the world's top two players.

Williams broke Azarenka once in the first set. Although she lost her serve twice in the second, she broke Azarenka three times to seal victory.

The win was Williams' 14th over Azarenka in 17 meetings, and stamps her as the player to beat for the Australian Open later this month.

Williams, who also beat world number four Maria Sharapova in the semi-finals, did not drop a set on the way to the final.

The American lost only four matches in 2011 on her way to winning 11 titles, including two Grand Slams. She regained her number one ranking eight weeks into 2013 in a year that also included a winning streak of 34 consecutive matches.