

Sharapova out!

AFP, Melbourne



Maria Sharapova crashed out of the Australian Open in another seismic shock Monday as Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Victoria Azarenka saw off challenges to keep their title bids intact.

A day after Serena Williams's exit, Dominika Cibulkova kept the upsets rolling as she ousted injury-compromised Sharapova 3-6, 6-4, 6-1, blowing the women's draw even further open.

The main expected beneficiary, two-time defending champion Azarenka, is in position to take full advantage after she flattened old foe Sloane Stephens 6-3, 6-2 to reach the quarterfinals.

The Belarusian world number two will face either Agnieszka Radwanska or Garbine Muguruza in the quarterfinals, with Cibulkova heading into a clash with Romania's Simona Halep.

Men's top seed Nadal weathered a sustained assault from Japan's Kei Nishikori 7-6 (7/3), 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) to face Grigor

QUARTERFINALS LINE-UPS

MEN

Novak Djokovic v Stanislas Wawrinka
David Ferrer v Tomas Berdych
Rafael Nadal v Grigor Dimitrov
Andy Murray v Roger Federer

WOMEN

Ana Ivanovic v Eugenie Bouchard
Li Na v Flavia Pennetta
Simona Halep v Dominika Cibulkova
Victoria Azarenka v Agnieszka Radwanska

Dimitrov in the Bulgarian's first Grand Slam quarterfinal.

The 13-time Grand Slam-winner chided the umpire after he was called for a time violation, for taking longer than the allowed 20 seconds between points, at a critical moment in the third set.

Wimbledon champion Andy Murray needed five match points and four sets -- and angrily demolished a racquet along the way -- before beating 'lucky loser' Stephane Robert.

Murray cruised through the first two sets but he missed match points, and then dropped his first set of the tournament, before finishing it off 6-1, 6-2, 6-7 (6/8), 6-2.

Federer, meanwhile, was a convincing winner against Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, racing through 6-3, 7-5, 6-4 to set up a quarterfinal against Murray.

There was some consolation for Sharapova when her boyfriend Dimitrov, 22, won 6-3, 3-6, 6-2, 6-4 against Roberto Bautista Agut of Spain.

But overall it was a dismal day for the statuesque Russian, cutting short what has been a difficult return from months out with a right shoulder injury.

Sharapova blamed her tough workouts against Karin Knapp and Alize Cornet after a left hip injury flared against Cibulkova, who was motivated enough to take advantage.

Sharapova was too strong for Cibulkova in the first set but errors crept in in the second and after the Slovak levelled at a set each, she left the court for a medical timeout.

And Sharapova, rated as the world's highest paid female athlete, succumbed tamely in the third set as she conceded three breaks to keep her search for a fifth major title on hold.

Romania's Halep beat former women's number one Jelena Jankovic 6-4, 2-6, 6-0.



Dominika Cibulkova of Slovakia celebrates her victory over Maria Sharapova of Russia in their women's singles match at the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Champagne bids for FIFA presidency

AFP, London

Former FIFA deputy general secretary Jerome Champagne on Monday launched his bid to succeed Sepp Blatter as president of the organisation that runs the global game.

The 55-year-old Frenchman, who worked closely with Blatter between 2002 and 2005, announced his campaign to become football's most powerful man at a press conference in central London.

"I'm here to announce and launch my candidacy for the FIFA presidency in the elections in 2015," he told reporters.

Blatter, 77, is approaching the end of his fourth term in office and is yet to announce whether or not he will stand again in next year's election in Zurich.

Current UEFA president Michel Platini said late last year that he will announce whether or not he will stand for the post either during or after the World Cup in Brazil, which starts on June 12.

Torres faces spell on the sidelines

REUTERS, London

Fernando Torres faces a "few weeks" out of action after suffering a knee ligament injury in Chelsea's 3-1 win over Manchester United on Sunday, manager Jose Mourinho said.

Torres came on as a late substitute for Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o, whose three goals ensured Chelsea maintained their strong Premier League title challenge.

"We will be without Fernando Torres for a few weeks with something in his lateral ligaments," Mourinho told reporters.

He added that Senegal striker Demba Ba would now come into contention despite not featuring for Chelsea since their League Cup defeat by Sunderland on December 17.

"It's time for Demba. It's a pity because Torres is in a good moment," Mourinho said.

"Demba had a fantastic week, it was very difficult for me to leave him out of selection because he worked very, very well."

Betis appoint Calderon

AFP, Madrid

Gabriel Humberto Calderon has been appointed the new manager of La Liga's bottom side Real Betis after the club announced the sacking of Juan Carlos Garrido on Sunday.

The 53-year-old Argentine played for Betis between 1983 and 1987 and arrives having most recently taken charge of the Bahrain national team.

"Humberto Calderon is the new coach of Real Betis Balompie," said a statement on the club's website.

"The coach, who arrived in Seville this evening, has already signed a contract for the rest of the season and an extra season should the club stay up."

Garrido was sacked after winning just twice in 10 games in charge during his two-month long spell in charge.

It is the second time this season that Betis have sacked their coach.

Barca, Atletico slip-up

AFP, Madrid



Atletico Madrid missed the chance to move top of La Liga after being held 1-1 at home to Sevilla on Sunday.

Earlier, Lionel Messi's first league start of 2014 couldn't inspire Barcelona to victory as they could only manage a 1-1 draw away to Levante.

That meant a win would take Atletico two points clear at the top and they appeared on route to victory when David Villa opened the scoring on 18 minutes.

However, the visitors were awarded a controversial penalty when Juanfran pulled Carlos Bacca's jersey 17 minutes from time and Ivan Rakitic coolly converted from the spot.

A point for both the leaders means they now lead third-placed Real Madrid by just one point.

Buoyed by Barcelona's result earlier in the evening, Atletico started brightly and nearly took the lead in spectacular fashion when Diego Costa fired into the side-netting from fully 35 yards.

However, it took just 18 minutes for Diego Simeone's team to make the breakthrough as Diego Godin headed

RESULTS

Getafe 2 (Marica 28, Pedro Leon 52) Real Sociedad 2 (Agirretxe 4, 16)
Villarreal 2 (Uche 3, Bruno 87-pen) Almeria 0
Levante 1 (Vyntra 10) Barcelona 1 (Pique 19)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Villa 18) Sevilla 1 (Rakitic 73-pen)

Gabi's corner back into the heart of the area, where Villa found space to fire home his first goal since November.

Sevilla reacted well to going behind and came close to levelling before the break as Coke's in-swinging effort flew just past the post.

Unai Emery's men continued to press after the break but hadn't been able to create a clear-cut opportunity until Juanfran was adjudged to have pulled Bacca to the ground as they jostled at the back post. Rakitic slotted home his ninth goal of the season.

And despite the visitors being reduced to 10 men in the final minute as Alberto Moreno saw red for a late challenge on Raul Garcia, Atletico couldn't find the goal they needed to take them to the summit.

Barcelona were also frustrated at Levante as Joaquin Caparros's men gained some measure of revenge for being beaten 7-0 by the Catalans ear-

lier this season.

Loukas Vyntra got the hosts off to the best possible start as he headed low past Victor Valdes from Andreas Ivanschitz's cross after 10 minutes.

The lead only lasted nine minutes as the visitors levelled in similar circumstances when Pique climbed highest to head home Xavi's corner.

Thereafter, though, Barca struggled to create opportunities against Levante's back five in the first period, with Xavi's drive from the edge of the box that drifted wide their best effort from open play.

Gerardo Martino's men were more precise in their build-up play after the break. However, even when they did find a way through Levante's mass ranks of defence, goalkeeper Keylor Navas came to his side's rescue as he made fine saves from Cesc Fabregas, Messi and Cristian Tello.

Navas had to be at his best to deny Messi registering his first league goal since September on the hour mark after he had been played in by a neat one-two with Fabregas, before Juanfran blocked Xavi's follow-up effort on the line.

Juanfran again put his body on the line to turn another goal-bound effort from Messi behind moments later.

Flying start for Seedorf

AFP, Milan



AC Milan coach Clarence Seedorf claimed the Serie A giants have rediscovered the joy of playing football despite requiring a late Mario Balotelli spot-kick to secure a precious 1-0 win over Verona on Sunday.

Seedorf has been heralded as Milan's potential saviour since former coach Massimiliano Allegri was sacked after a 4-3 defeat to Sassuolo last week left the Rossoneri 30 points behind leaders Juventus.

For his first game at the helm of the side for whom he made 300 appearances in 10 golden years (2002-2012), Seedorf sent out an ultra-offensive 4-2-3-1 formation with Robinho, Kaka and Japan's Keisuke Honda playing behind Balotelli.

But despite creating a host of chances against Andrea Mandorlini's high-flying visitors, Milan had to rely on Balotelli's 82nd-minute penalty to secure what was only their sixth win in 20 games.

"We dedicate this win to the new coach," Balotelli told Sky Sport Italia. "Because the first game in charge of a team is always difficult.

"The coach asked us to play as four strikers and to press from the start. It worked well... we had a lot of possession and when you see more of the ball it's a lot better."

Seedorf was pleased with the Rossoneri's performance on what was effectively the first real day of his fledgling coaching career.

"Milan have rediscovered the joy of playing football," said the 37-year-old Dutchman, who only gave up his playing career with Brazilian side Botafogo last week.

Milan's aim over the remaining 18 league games is to clinch a top three place in the Champions League, although with Juventus, Roma and Napoli flying high and Fiorentina showing promise that task looks very difficult.

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