

Sisters, Novak in qtrs

AFP, Melbourne

Dominant Novak Djokovic swept into the Australian Open last eight Monday as the Williams sisters displayed fighting qualities to stay alive, but the tournament ended for two-time champion Victoria Azarenka.

The Serbian top seed was always in charge against unseeded Gilles Muller from Luxembourg, dictating terms in a testing 6-4, 7-5, 7-5 work-out to reach his eighth consecutive quarterfinal at Melbourne Park.

He will now play big-serving Canadian eighth seed Milos Raonic as he bids for a fifth Australian crown and an eighth Grand Slam title.

Raonic snuffed out the challenge of Spanish 12th seed Feliciano Lopez in five tough sets.

Fellow world number one Serena Williams battled back from a set down in a tense match against Spain's Garbine Muguruza to win 2-6, 6-3, 6-2, staying on track for a 19th Grand Slam title and her sixth at Melbourne.

She will next face last year's finalist

Dominika Cibulkova, the 11th seeded Slovak, who ended the comeback from injury of Azarenka in three tight sets.

Elder sister Venus's late-career renaissance gathered pace as she rolled back the years to thump Polish sixth seed Agnieszka Radwanska 6-3, 2-6, 6-1. She is now 9-0 for the season after winning the Auckland Classic.

It is the 34-year-old seven-time Grand Slam champion's first major quarter since the 2010 US Open, having been diagnosed with the energy-sapping Sjogren's Syndrome in 2011.

Defending champion Stan Wawrinka ensured his passage by winning a thrilling fourth-set tiebreaker to down Spain's tenacious Guillermo Garcia-Lopez 7-6 (7/2), 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (10/8).

He now plays Japanese superstar Kei Nishikori, who was a class above dogged Spanish baseliner David Ferrer, easing through 6-3, 6-3, 6-3.

Former Australian champion Lindsay Davenport's protegee Madison Keys made her first Grand Slam quarterfinal, winning an all-American clash with Madison Brengle 6-2, 6-4.



Serbian top seed Novak Djokovic reaches for the ball during his Australian Open fourth round match against Luxembourg's Gilles Muller in Melbourne yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Riquelme hangs up his boots



AFP, Buenos Aires

Argentine playmaker Juan Roman Riquelme has announced his retirement from football at the age of 36 after a 18-year-long career.

"It's a very important day for me because I have decided to no longer play football," he said in an interview with ESPN television.

"After realising all my dreams with Argentinos (Juniors) and with Boca Juniors, I think this is the right time to stop.

"It's a new life that is opening up in front of me and I do not know what part football will play in it."

Riquelme has indicated that he would be keen to become president of Boca, the club where he spent the bulk of his career, playing 388 times, scoring 89 goals and winning five league titles in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2008 and 2011.

After a glittering early career he moved to Barcelona in a big-money deal in 2002, but failed to make his mark and settle at the Nou Camp, eventually moving to Villarreal where he stayed for four seasons.

He returned to Argentina and Boca in 2007 and stayed with them until 2014 when he switched on a six-month contract to Argentinos, helping the side climb back into the top flight last December.

He played 51 times for his country between 1997 and 2008, scoring 17 goals and was Argentine footballer of the year four times.

"I took a decision which I think was the fairest," he said.

"I just felt I could not pull on the shirt of another club having given my all for Argentinos, Villarreal, Barcelona and with the national team.

"I am very happy with the career that I have had."

Riquelme also paid a glowing tribute to countryman Diego Maradona who he considers to be the "greatest player in the history of football."

"I had the good fortune to play with him and to watch him training," he said.

"When he was on the top of his game there was nothing you could do."

Korea surge past Iraq

AFP, Sydney

South Korea stormed into the Asian Cup final with a clinical 2-0 victory over Iraq on Monday, avenging a painful defeat at the same stage eight years ago.

Goals from Lee Jeong-Hyeop and Kim Young-Gwon did the job for the Koreans, who dominated a wet semifinal in Sydney to move a step closer to ending a title drought dating all the way back to 1960.

They face hosts Australia or the United Arab Emirates this weekend in their first final appearance at Asia's showcase tournament in 27 years.

"We can't speak anymore about pressure," South Korea's coach Uli Stielike told reporters. "We came to Australia as the third-ranked team in Asia and we have achieved all the goals we set. What comes now is extra. We have already taken a big step forward." The German insisted that South Korea's 1-0 win over Australia in the group stage would count for little if, as he predicted, they meet the Socceroos again on Saturday.

"You know what Australia team we played that day," he sniffed. "(Mile) Jedinak injured, (Tim) Cahill on the bench, (Mathew) Leckie on the bench, (Robbie) Kruse on the bench," he added as his phone went off.

"My wife," deadpanned Stielike, before continuing: "We didn't play the best Australia team. For me there is no doubt they will reach the final and we have to be prepared to play the best Australia team."

There was no repeat of Iraq's shock win over South Korea in 2007, when they won a dramatic penalty shoot-out before completing their fairytale run by beating Saudi Arabia to lift the trophy in Jakarta.

South Korea, still to concede in their five matches, simply overpowered the Iraqis, Lee climbing to glance in a free kick from Kim Jin-Su after 20 minutes.

Golden boy Son Heung-Min had already forced goalkeeper Jalal Hassan into a smart save with a long-distance rocket before Lee -- a surprise Asian Cup call-up by Stielike -- netted his second goal of the tournament.

Lee, who scored in the 1-0 win over Australia in the group stages, turned provider five minutes after the break, chesting down a high ball for Kim to smash home from the edge of the box.

Skipper Ki Sung-Yueng stung Hassan's gloves with another howitzer from long range as South Korea continued to swarm forward, the mercurial Son proving a different class as he ghosted effortlessly past Iraq's bedraggled players.

Iraq coach Radhi Shenaishil, looking forlorn in a plastic poncho, barked orders to his troops, but there was little left in the tank after battling fierce rivals Iran to a standstill in the quarterfinals.

Iraq, who prevailed 7-6 on penalties after a helter-skelter 3-3 draw, rarely threatened despite the threat posed by 2007 hero Younis Mahmoud, and the final whistle triggered wild celebrations among the massed ranks of Korean fans in the crowd of 36,000.

"We knew it was going to be tough said," said Shenaishil. "Korea have a quality team with a lot of players in top leagues in the world. For us there were a lot of positives to take from the tournament."

PCB, players in pay dispute

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket authorities and players on Monday said they were working at resolving a potentially destabilising contract row a month away from the World Cup.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) earlier this month announced it would extend existing annual contracts for another three months, apparently wanting to give the next set of long-term contracts on the basis of performances during cricket's premier tournament, which is this year hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

But the players, including skipper Misbahul Haq, have refused to go along with the makeshift arrangement.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a senior player told AFP: "First the board has drafted a short-term contract and secondly the incentives given to the players have been changed, so we are in talks with the board to solve the matter".

A PCB spokesman confirmed the matter was being negotiated and said that it had acted in line with its own rules.

"There were some reservations which we are sure will be resolved in the next couple of days," said the spokesman.

"As per the rules these contracts are extendable by 180 days which is what has been done."

The PCB had added newcomers Sohail Khan, a medium-pacer, and leg spinner Yasir Shah to the existing list of 31 players who were awarded central contracts in A, B and C category on the basis of performance and seniority last year.

Former players and officials have termed the central contract row as "damaging" with the World Cup just three weeks away.

The 11th edition of the 50-over mega event runs from February 14 to March 29.

Pakistan will fly to Australia on February 5 to play two World Cup warm-up matches on February 9 and 11. They start their World Cup campaign with a highly charged match against arch-rivals and defending champions India in Adelaide on February 15.

Edimar plays for Ronaldo

GOAL.COM

Cordoba defender Edimar has called on the Spanish football association (LFP) not to hand Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo any further sanctions following his red card.

The three-time Ballon d'Or winner was dismissed with eight minutes remaining of Saturday's clash in Andalusia after aiming a kick at Edimar.

The referee's report did not describe the incident as "violent conduct", meaning Ronaldo will likely receive just a one-game ban, and Edimar has urged the authorities not to dish out any further punishment.

"I forgive Cristiano Ronaldo. I hold no grudge," Edimar told AS.

"It was not an attempt at aggression. He hit my legs and my mouth, nothing more. What I mean is that those responsible understand that things happen on a football pitch.

"He should receive a normal suspension, nothing more. I don't want to hurt him and I hope that he remains the best player in the world."

Ronaldo apologised for the incident via social media shortly after the match.

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