

VALDES HITS OUT AT UNITED

Victor Valdes has hit out at Manchester United after a debut win for Standard Liege, suggesting that he suffered eight months "working alone" at Old Trafford. The former Barcelona goalkeeper completed a loan move to the Belgian club last week and managed to keep a clean sheet on his debut on Saturday with a 2-0 win away to Leuven. But the former Spain international wasted no time in taking a swipe at his parent club, taking to social media to indicate that he was happy with a first win with Standard, but he also criticised United for making him spend eight months "working alone". "Happy for first Win for Standard! and for play after 8 months working alone,"



It may be a new year, but there is still no end in sight to Novak Djokovic's domination. He took his sweet time, but eventually dispatched Andy Murray in straight sets in Melbourne to win his sixth Australian Open crown yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

'I want to go home'

AFP, Melbourne



Andy Murray declared "I just want to get home" and headed straight for the airport on Sunday as he raced to be reunited with his pregnant wife after his Australian Open final defeat.

Murray, who has been on baby alert all tournament with his wife, Kim Sears, due to give birth within weeks, said he was getting the next flight home after his loss to world number one Novak Djokovic.

"I'm proud that I got into this position, you know. Just quite looking forward to getting home now," Murray said in a quickfire press conference before rushing for his plane.

The British world number two had pledged to quit the tournament if his wife went into labour, and he was also close to pulling out when his father-in-law Nigel Sears collapsed at Rod Laver Arena last week.

"It was a tough, tough couple of days. Thankfully, he's fine now. Yeah, I just want to get home," said London-based Murray.

He added: "I've been held on flights for, it feels like five days. I've been held on almost every single flight, so the first one out of

here, I'm leaving. It's at 1:00, I think."

Earlier Murray had tears in his eyes and a faltering voice as he paid tribute to his wife after he was well beaten 6-1, 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) -- his fifth defeat in the Melbourne final.

"You've been a legend for the last two weeks. Thank you so much for all of your support and I'll be on the next plane home," the Scot said at the on-court awards ceremony.

He later explained it had been a difficult tournament as he was beset by distractions, but which also, however, seemed to take the sting out of his latest Grand Slam disappointment.

With the defeat, Murray became only the second man in the post-1968 Open era -- after Ivan Lendl, his former coach -- to lose five finals at the same Grand Slam tournament.

"Regardless of today's result, it's been hard. Had I lost in the third or fourth round it still would have been difficult with everything that's happened," Murray said.

"She's been amazing. Handled everything unbelievably well. Yeah, I have to thank her for allowing me to play and stay here with everything that was going on. But, yeah, it was tough."

TWEETS

How good is Djokovic? In January he has already beaten Nadal, Federer and Murray while losing just one set combined.

Congrats Djokovic on tying Roy Emerson with 6 Australian Open titles! The standard you've set is incredible. I'm inspired.

Incredible level Australian Open final again. Djokovic is like a punch bag that punches back!

Novak Djokovic is PSG and all the other players are the rest of Ligue 1.

Emperor down under claims sixth

AFP, Melbourne



World number one Novak Djokovic hammered a misfiring Andy Murray in straight sets to win a record-equalling sixth Australian Open title and strengthen his grip on men's tennis on Sunday.

The Serbian world number one swept to a 6-1, 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) victory in two hours, 53 minutes to hand Murray his fifth defeat in the Melbourne Park final.

Djokovic equalled the tally of Australia's Roy Emerson, who won the tournament six times between 1961 and 1967, an achievement that has gone unmatched in the 49 years since.

It was also Djokovic's 11th Grand Slam title, and he moved into equal fifth place with Rod Laver and Bjorn Borg behind 17-time leader Roger Federer.

Djokovic paid tribute to his vanquished rival, telling the crowd at the presentation: "Tough luck tonight Andy, you are a great champion, you're a great friend, a great person."

"He's very professional and committed to this sport, so I am sure in the future he is going to have more opportunities to play for this trophy."

Djokovic underlined his status as the dominant force in Melbourne, after downing Jo-Wilfried Tsonga to win his first major title in 2008 and beating Rafael Nadal in an epic final in 2012, along with his four wins over Murray in 2011, 2013, 2015 and now 2016.

Djokovic also extended his Grand Slam winning streak to 21 matches, and he has not lost a match at the majors since he was defeated by Stan Wawrinka in last year's French Open final at Roland Garros.

While Djokovic was further enhancing his reputation, Murray has the unwanted statistic of becoming only the second man in the post-1968 Open Era to lose five Grand Slam finals at any one major.

Ivan Lendl, Murray's former coach, lost five finals at the US Open in 1982-1984 and 1988-1989, before winning at Flushing Meadows in 1985-1987.

MATCH STATS

NOVAK DJOKOVIC (1) DEF ANDY MURRAY (2)		
6-1,7-5,7-6(7/3)		
Match Time: 2 hours 53 minutes		
7	Aces	12
3	Double Faults	5
31	Winners	40
41	Unforced Errors	65
5/12	Break point conversions	2/6
123	Points won	99

Novak Djokovic claimed his sixth Australian Open title, equalling the highest haul by native Roy Emerson. This was Murray's fifth defeat in the Australian Open final, making him the second person to lose the final five times in a single major. Interestingly, his former coach Ivan Lendl is the other person, losing five times in the US Open finals. Djokovic has not lost a match at Grand Slam Level since June 7 2015. Djokovic is now level with Rod Laver and Bjorn Borg with 11 Grand Slam titles, six behind all-time leader Roger

Murray had tears in his eyes at the presentation when he thanked his pregnant wife Kim Sears, who is due to give birth to their first child in the coming weeks.

"You've been a legend for the last two weeks. Thank you so much for all of your support and I'll be on the next plane home," he said in a faltering voice.

Djokovic faced a break point in his opening service game but then went on a blazing run, breaking Murray's serve twice to claim opening set in 30 minutes.

It took the Scot until the sixth game to hit his first winner and end a 14-game winning sequence by Djokovic in his meetings with Murray.

Murray survived four break points to hold serve in a marathon 12-minute third game as he tried to stay in the second set against the pressing Serb.

But Djokovic gained another psychological breakthrough with a service break in the seventh game after Murray overhit a forehand to trail 4-3.

Fighting Murray broke back in the following game with his backhand clipping the baseline, which was confirmed by Djokovic's challenge. Murray fought off two break points in a fiercely-contested ninth game in a war of the attrition between the two long-time rivals.

But Djokovic fought back from 0-40 down to break Murray's serve for a fourth time featuring one exhaustive 36-shot rally to lead 6-5 and serve for the second set.

The Serb claimed a two sets to love lead after winning an 80-minute battle for the second set, leaving Murray with it all to do.

Djokovic tightened the noose with another service break in the first game of the final set, with Murray looking at the herculean task taking the final to five sets.

Murray broke back in the sixth game but in the tiebreaker the Scot served two double-faults as Djokovic steamed to five match points, and won on his third match point with an ace.

It was another big statement from Djokovic against his major rivals after beating Rafael Nadal 6-1, 6-2 at Doha and convincingly beating Roger Federer in the Melbourne semi-finals.

Blame players, not LVG: Wazza

AFP, London



Manchester United's players are responsible for their indifferent form this season, and not embattled manager Louis van Gaal, according to captain Wayne Rooney.

Van Gaal's position has come under scrutiny after a return of four wins from 14 games that has seen United sink to fifth place in the Premier League table and fall out of the Champions League.

But Rooney says that he and his team-mates must take their share of responsibility for United's struggles as well.

"It's unfair to say it's down to the manager -- we're on the pitch," he said, in comments published by British newspapers on Sunday.

"So the players have to take a lot of responsibility for performances and results. We have to stand up and take criticism when it's there. We want to win, of course we always want to win, and we're trying."

"Even when you're giving 100 percent, it doesn't always come off and thankfully it did in our last match."

Rooney was speaking after United's 3-1 win at second-tier Derby County in the FA Cup fourth round on Friday, in which he opened the scoring with a fine, curling shot that took his tally to six goals in six games.

The 30-year-old is now just six goals short of Bobby Charlton's United scoring record of 249, which has stood since 1983, and he admits that he is hoping to surpass the milestone before the season is out.

"Of course I'm aware of it," said the striker, who broke Charlton's England goal-scoring record in September.

"Like the England record, when I was getting closer, it kept getting mentioned every week so that will probably start again with every goal."

"But it's great to be mentioned again alongside Bobby's record and hopefully before the end of the season I can go past that and then kick on again."

Mega contingent with little hope

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) is set to send a 521-member contingent to the upcoming South Asian (SA) Games, but it is seemingly attaching little hope despite having conducted nearly six-months' of training for the event, which is scheduled for February 5 to 16 in Guwahati and Shillong in India.

The Bangladesh contingent comprises 370 athletes, 99 team officials along with 52 persons from the BOA, different ministries, the head quarters and team doctors. It is likely to be the third largest contingent in terms of athletes and second largest contingent overall after hosts India, who will have 519 athletes and 176 officials.

"We won 18 gold, 24 silver and 55 bronze medals in the 11th Dhaka SA Games, but this time there are no events like cricket, golf and karate, which earned seven gold medals for us in the last edition. There has been no lack of training and we are hopeful that athletes will produce good results in disciplines such as shooting, weightlifting, boxing, taekwondo and archery," said BOA secretary general Syed Shahed Reza at an official press conference yesterday.

The BOA secretary general, however, did not elaborate on the reason for sending such a mega contingent and he also could not portray any optimistic picture as to whether Bangladesh can repeat the Dhaka SA Games feat.

The officials of shooting, archery and athletics did not sound much confident either as they see Indian athletes as main obstacles in earning gold medals.

"We have good possibility in 10m Air Rifle (shooting) but we have to fight against the Indian shooters who compete in Olympics. If we can beat them, we can even win medals in Olympics," said shooting federation's general secretary Intekhabul Hamid.

Bangladesh will be participating in 22 disciplines except for triathlon while some 2672 athletes from eight countries will be vying for 228 gold medals, as many silver and 308 bronze medals in the 12-day SA Games.

Weightlifter Hamidul Islam, the first SA Games gold medallist, will carry the national flag in the opening ceremony in the Guwahati part while gold medallist boxer Abdur Rahim will bear the national flag in the second ceremony in Shillong.

"Results are outcome of a long training process. We had 13 months of training ahead of the Dhaka SA Games, but this time we have got little time to prepare. There was no lack of interest from the respective federations and we are hoping for some good results from shooting, archery, weightlifting kabaddi, wushu, kho kho and wrestling," said BOA's deputy secretary Ashikur Rahman Miku, who is also the chef de mission of the Bangladesh contingent and head of BOA training and development committee.

Extra Cover launched

SPORTS REPORTER

Cometh the Ekushey Book Fair, cometh new books. The Bangla Academy will be abuzz with book-worms from today, which will mark the launching of the month-long book fair. And if you are a sports fanatic then Extra Cover, a book focusing on Bangladesh's cricketing endeavours, could be something refreshing for you.

The writer of the book is Aghore Mondol, someone whose association with the country's sports goes back no less than 20 odd years. A career-journalist Aghore has carefully focused on every crucial moment of Bangladesh's cricketing journey and has also highlighted some salient aspects of world cricket based on his own witnessed accounts.

Extra Cover, published by Trinalata Publication, was unveiled at a simple ceremony at a local hotel yesterday with Bangladesh's first three captains of different formats -- Gazi Ashraf Hossain, Naimur Rahman and Shahriar Nafees in attendance.



Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba embarks on his signature 'dab' celebration after scoring a goal against Chievo at the Bentegodi Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Juve's 12th straight win

AFP, Milan



Alvaro Morata hit his second brace of the week as champions Juventus cruised to a 4-0 win at Chievo to equal a club record of 12 consecutive victories and top Serie A for the first time this season.

Morata was given a rare start by Massimiliano Allegri in the Italian Cup semi-final in midweek and hit the net twice in a 3-0 first leg rout of Inter Milan.

It earned the Spaniard a rare start alongside 12-goal striker Paulo Dybala, and Morata seized the day to put the visitors 2-0 up by half-time.

Brazilian left-back Alex Sandro added a third on the hour and Paul Pogba hit Juve's fourth just six minutes later.

Juventus, who struggled at the start of the campaign, took a one-point lead over Napoli, who play Empoli at home later Sunday.

Fiorentina and Inter Milan are seven points adrift of Juventus in third and fourth places respectively ahead of away games at Genoa and AC Milan later.

RESULTS		
Chievo	0 - 4	Juventus
		Morata 6, 40, Sandro 61, Pogba 67
Carpi	1 - 1	Palermo
Mancosu 74-pen		Gilardino 24
Atalanta	1 - 1	Sassuolo
Denis 32		Berardi 27
Roma	3 - 1	Frosinone
Nainngolan 18,		Ciofani 24

Kader makes U-turn

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Jamal DC president Manzur Kader has opted to stay as the president of the club after the club's board of directors and its football committee jointly rejected his resignation letter yesterday.

"We had a joint meeting which did not accept the resignation letter of the president because he is a devoted person and has taken the club to this level. The meeting also found no lack of effort on his part," said football committee chairman Ashraf Uddin Ahmed Chnuu, adding that Kader would leave for Singapore today for treatment as well as business.

PFLC approves BCL table

SPORTS REPORTER

The Professional Football League Committee of Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday approved the points table of the Bangladesh Championship League (BCL), thereby promoting Uttar Baridhara Club and Arambagh KS to the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) for next season.

The meeting also decided to hold the BCL with eight teams from next season even though relegated Wari Club have appealed to keep them in second-tier.