

Federer, Nadal stay on track

AFP, Melbourne



Roger Federer ground out a tough three-set win to make the Australian Open third round for an incredible 20th straight year Wednesday, with long-time rival Rafael Nadal and women's defending champion Caroline Wozniacki also safely through.

But it was curtains for South African Kevin Anderson, who slumped out to young American Frances Tiafoe and became the highest seed, at five, to be sent packing so far.

On an overcast day at Melbourne Park, second seed Angelique Kerber, the 2016 winner, and former US Open champion Sloane Stephens joined the big guns in progressing, but the women's side also saw a top 10 player crash.

Ninth seed Kiki Bertens, who raced through the rankings last year after winning three titles, was whipped in three sets by Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova.

Federer might be 37 but he's not showing his age, with British qualifier Dan Evans the latest to fall under his spell as he works towards a third successive Australian crown and 21st major victory.

He defeated Evans at Wimbledon last year with the loss of just eight games, but it was a much harder assignment this time, winning 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 on Rod Laver Arena.

"I think if I could have pulled away earlier in the match it might have been easier," said

the third seed. "I think he played very well, it was hard to pull away to his credit."

The Swiss star's Australian achievements so far put him on a par with other six-time winners Novak Djokovic and Roy Emerson - although the Australian great's victories all came before the Open era.

He next plays American Taylor Fritz.

Seventeen-time Slam winner Nadal had an easier route to round three, outclassing local hope Matthew Ebden 6-3, 6-2, 6-2.

The Spaniard is bidding for his own slice of history by becoming the first man in the Open era, and only the third in history along with Emerson and Rod Laver, to win each Grand Slam on two or more occasions.

"I played a solid match, I was happy with the way I served. I did a few things very well," said Nadal, who next plays Australian Alex de Minaur. "It is an honour to play here. Was a great atmosphere."

Anderson, beaten by Novak Djokovic in the Wimbledon final last year, was sent home by Tiafoe 4-6, 6-4, 6-4, 7-5.

The fifth seed struggled with an elbow injury early in the clash and couldn't cope with the 20-year-old's power and finesse.

Dane Wozniacki, who is battling rheumatoid arthritis, steamrolled Sweden's Johanna Larsson 6-1, 6-3 as she bids to become the first woman to defend the title since Victoria Azarenka in 2013.

It set up a potential glamour clash next with Maria Sharapova.



Rafael Nadal celebrates his victory against Matthew Ebden while (Inset) Roger Federer pumps his fist after defeating Daniel Evans during their Australian Open men's singles matches in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Crying for financial aid

SPORTS REPORTER

In a rare incident in the country's sport fraternity, nine days after being sworn in the sports minister sat down with the higher-ups of the national sports federations and associations to discuss their problems and prospects.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel called on 53 national federations and associations to exchange views on existing problems, prospects and what to do in the future, with most presidents and general secretaries speaking on the matter at the National Sports Council (NSC) conference room yesterday.

The organisers briefed the state minister and NSC chairman on the problems, with financial crises dominating discussion. They demanded better financial allotment for each federation, long-term training programmes, sustainable planning, a fleshed-out sports calendar, equipment, gymnasiums, foreign coaches, space for offices, venues for tournaments, an annual general meeting of the NSC and removal of tax or rebates on sponsorship money among many other things.

"Those of us who are sitting here can change society. The existing youth is highly engaged with the internet and we can change this if we can portray sports in a positive way. For this, we need emphasis on round-the-year training," said



State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel speaks during a view-exchange meeting with presidents and general secretaries of 53 national federations and associations yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

DEMANDS FROM NATIONAL FEDERATIONS	OPINION OF STATE MINISTER FOR YOUTH AND SPORTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Increase sports budget● Emphasise round-the-year training● Strengthen monitoring on federation activities● Remove tax on sponsorship money	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Holding of elections of federations currently run by ad-hoc committees● Onus on organisers to monitor their activities● Pledges to give highest effort to increase the sports budget

Bangladesh Volleyball Federation president Atiqul Islam, urging the sports minister to give up hopes of winning medals on the back of only 90 days of training.

"If Tk 800 crore out of 900 crore is spent behind construction, then how will sports develop? We want a sports budget of Tk 5,000 crore," said Bangladesh Handball Federation

president Nurul Fazle Bulbul. "Many presidents are not here at the meeting, so we don't need ornamental presidents in federations; we want the government to appoint dedicated presidents."

Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation general secretary Habibur Rahman said: "We need short, mid and long-term planning to take sports ahead.

Although the organisers are cordial to sports, there is not enough monitoring."

Bangladesh Badminton Federation president Abdul Karim said: "The country's leading federations are getting external funding but small federations don't have such opportunities; they need more help from the government."

"It is not the end of our discussion, it is just a start. I have taken notes of the points you raised you raised as we want to implement our election pledges by setting up workplans soon. We will sit again," said Russel in his closing speech.

"If you don't have love towards sport, you should not have the right to be involved in sport. I want to urge the presidents and general secretaries to be more responsible as you all bear the responsibility. Sport will not progress with a big budget if you don't have love for sport," added Russel. "I will try to increase the sports budget as the Finance Minister and the Prime Minister are sport-loving persons."

"When I was the chairman on the parliamentary standing committee, I placed a long-term training proposal but that was not implemented. Now, I will implement that long-term training plan," said Russel, who was also unhappy that 21 federations and associations were being run by ad-hoc committees.

SHORT CORNER

K-Sports get rights to Bangamata Gold Cup

K-Sports, the country's premium sport marketing agent, has earned all the rights to the Bangamata U-19 Women's International Gold Cup Football tournament, which is scheduled to get underway in the latter part of April.

The Bangladesh Football Federation and K-Sports signed a deal in this regard, with BFF president Kazi Salahuddin and K-Sports CEO Fahad Karim signing on behalf of their respective organisations at the BFF House yesterday.

-- SPORTS REPORTER

Zia finishes in 36th place

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman finished 36th in the 17th Delhi International Open Grandmaster Chess Tournament after losing to Russian GM Predke Alexandr in the final and 10th round in New Delhi yesterday.

Zia, who was in joint-third position after eight round, secured 6.5 points along with 21 other players and finished 36th out of 322 players. FM Fahad Rahman, who beat Indian FM Harshal Shahi in the 10th round, became

63rd despite also having 6.5 points.

FM Mehdi Hasan Parag and Tahsin Tajwar Zia finished 185th and 195th respectively after losing to Russia's Pavlov Mark and India's Akshay Anand respectively. Both secured 4.5 points from 10 matches.

Meanwhile, Georgian GM Pantsulaia Levan emerged as the champion with eight points through the tiebreaking system. Seven players had shared the top spot after the final round.

-- SPORTS REPORTER

FIFA, AFC in contact over detained Bahraini player

FIFA says it has been in regular contact with the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) over the Bahraini soccer player arrested in Thailand in November over a prison sentence in his homeland.

The Australian soccer players' union this week called on the AFC to intervene to help secure the release of Hakeem Al Araibi, who plays in Australia but was arrested in November in Bangkok on an Interpol notice issued at Bahrain's request.

-- REUTERS



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Action from the 29th National women's handball competition which was inaugurated yesterday at the Shahid M. Mansur Ali National Stadium.

Hernandez signing 'unrealistic'

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich's sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic says Atletico Madrid defender Lucas Hernandez is unlikely to join the German champions this January as they look to replace their ageing squad with younger talent.

Bayern, who trail Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund by six points, kick-off the second half of the German league season at Hoffenheim on Friday and have targeted Hernandez to beef up their defence in the future.

"We have had talks, which will continue, but whether he comes this winter is unrealistic," Salihamidzic told Wednesday's edition of magazine Sport Bild, with the transfer window to close in Germany at 1700 GMT on January 31.

Hernandez, who won the World Cup with France last summer, has a market value of around 60 million euros (\$68.3m).



Newcastle United striker Mato Joselu (R) celebrates after scoring the third goal against Blackburn Rovers during their FA Cup third round replay at Ewood Park on Tuesday. Newcastle won the game 4-2 in extra-time.

PHOTO: AFP

Magpies survive Rovers scare

AFP, London



Newcastle survived an FA Cup scare at Blackburn as they blew a two-goal lead before hitting back to win 4-2 after extra time in Tuesday's third-round replay.

Rafael Benitez sent out an under-strength line-up featuring eight changes from Newcastle's 2-1 defeat at Chelsea in the Premier League on Saturday.

The stand-ins made a fast start when Sean Longstaff scored his first goal for Newcastle.

The 21-year-old found the net inside the first minute with a deflected strike from outside the penalty area.

Callum Roberts, handed his first Newcastle appearance since January 2015, doubled their lead in the 22nd minute with his first goal for the club.

But Blackburn pulled a goal back 12 minutes before half-time through former Newcastle forward Adam Armstrong.

And Republic of Ireland international Darragh Lenihan equalised for Blackburn with a header in first-half stoppage time.

It took extra time to settle the tie, with Blackburn's Bradley Dack missing a golden chance before Joselu pounced to slot home in the 105th minute after Rovers goalkeeper David Raya spilled Fabian Schar's drive.

Ayoze Perez completed Newcastle's escape act moments later when he cut in from the right and fired home.

Yet injuries to defenders Ciaran Clark and Jamaal Lascelles will cast a shadow over the win for Benitez.

Newcastle, who haven't won the FA Cup since 1955, host fellow Premier League club Watford in the fourth round.