

What they said

I welcome the decision to keep our borders strong and keep Australians safe.

Australian PM
SCOTT MORRISON

I thank the Court for their prompt attention to these issues and the patience of all involved as we have worked to resolve this issue. It's now time to get on with the Australian Open and get back to enjoying tennis over the summer. I spoke to Djokovic and told him we cannot wait to see him.

Serbian President
ALEKSANDAR VUCIC

Today's decision ... marks the end of a deeply regrettable series of events. Ultimately, decisions of legal authorities regarding matters of public health must be respected. Irrespective of how this point has been reached, Novak is one of our sport's greatest champions and his absence from the Australian Open is a loss for the game. ATP continues to strongly recommend vaccination to all players.

ATP TOUR

It is not great for the tournament because it is better when all of the top players are playing in the event. Novak is someone I have known since we were 12 years old, he is someone who I respect and have competed against. I don't like he is in this situation and I don't like he has been in detention. The situation has not been good all round for anyone. It feels everything here happened extremely last minute and that's why it became such a mess.

Former world No. 1
ANDY MURRAY

I think that the court decision is scandalous, I am disappointed, I think it demonstrated how the rule of law is functioning or better to say not functioning in some other countries.

Serbian PM
ANA BRNABIC

I'm surprised and I'm shocked. I'm a little bit exhausted as well because we have been hearing about this for a week. I give Novak a lot of credit for trying but at the same time he knew there might be the possibility that with the rules you have to be vaccinated.

Seven-time major winner
MATS WILANDER



World No. 1 Novak Djokovic (2nd from L) walks in to board a flight at the Melbourne Airport after the federal court in Melbourne upheld an Australian government decision to cancel his visa to play in the Australian Open on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

DJOKOVIC ABSENCE clears way for Nadal, Medvedev

AFP, MELBOURNE

Rafael Nadal's bid to win a record 21st Grand Slam when the Australian Open begins Monday has been given a huge boost by the absence of fellow history-chaser Novak Djokovic.

The 20-time Grand Slam winners had been drawn to meet in the semi-final, a prospect torpedoed when the unvaccinated Djokovic lost his last-gasp bid to avoid deportation on the eve of the tournament.

The 34-year-old top seed, who has won eight of the last 11 editions of the Melbourne major, had been scheduled to play Monday night as he sought to retain his title.

An "extremely disappointed" Djokovic said he would comply with a unanimous Federal Court decision to uphold his visa cancellation over fears he could stoke anti-vaccine sentiment.

"I cannot stay in Australia and participate in the Australian Open," he said on the eve of a tournament that he has dominated for a decade.

"I hope that we can all now focus on the game and tournament I love."

An AFP reporter captured images of Djokovic at Melbourne's Tullamarine airport late Sunday, as the humbled star boarded a flight for Dubai.

The world number one's humiliation means he will not have the chance to lift

the Norman Brookes Challenge Cup for a 10th time and make men's tennis history. Instead he is leaving Australia.

With Roger Federer injured and absent, Nadal and world number two Daniil Medvedev are the main beneficiaries of Djokovic's enforced 11th-hour withdrawal.

But others, including Olympic champion Alexander Zverev and young Greek world number four Stefanos Tsitsipas, will eye a golden opportunity to win a maiden Slam.

"The Australian Open is much more important than any player," said Nadal on Saturday, taking a swipe at Djokovic.

"Australian Open will be a great Australian Open with or without him."

It is now 13 years since the 35-year-old Nadal, who begins his campaign against American Marcos Giron on Monday, won his lone title in Melbourne, despite four further trips to the final.

Nadal battled a foot injury for much of last year, ending his season in August, then contracted Covid in December, saying it left him "very sick".

But the 13-time French Open champion swept through the field to win a warm-up event at Melbourne Park, suggesting he is suffering no long-term effects.

Russia's Medvedev, who faces Switzerland's Henri Laaksonen in the first round on Tuesday, conquered Djokovic in

the US Open final in September to win his maiden major and end the Serbian's bid to win a calendar Grand Slam.

He heads the bottom half of the draw and would not have met Djokovic until the final in any case.

"Even if Novak is in the draw, I can only see him in the final," said Medvedev, who has cut a confident figure.

"I need to win six matches before this. It would not change much my preparation."

Germany's Tokyo gold medalist Zverev is another who will fancy his chances in a draw that suddenly looks open.

"There are still a lot of guys that have the potential to make this tournament really interesting," he said. "I think it's going to be a fun one to watch."

Andy Murray, runner-up in the Australian Open five times, returns on a wildcard for the first time since an emotional 2019 "farewell" appearance after undergoing hip surgery that enabled him to make a remarkable comeback.

The 34-year-old Briton will begin his bid against 21st-seeded Nikoloz Basilashvili and the former number one is looking more like his old self.

At the weekend in Sydney the Scot reached his first final since 2019 in a massive boost to his confidence.

'Winning 4-0 is just huge'

REUTERS

Cameron Green led the way as Australia rode roughshod over England's hopes of an Ashes victory by skittling the tourists for 124 in Hobart on Sunday evening to clinch the fifth Test by 146 runs and seal a 4-0 series triumph.

In the ascendant for the first time in the five matches when they were 68 without loss chasing 271 towards the end of the second session, the touring team lost 10 wickets for 78 runs to slump to a 13th defeat in their last 15 Tests in Australia.

"It's pretty crazy, to be at the end of a five-test series with so many positives, winning 4-0, it's just huge, really pumped," Australia captain Pat Cummins said.

England have looked powerless against Australian pace throughout the series and no more so than when facing the pink ball under the lights of Bellerive Oval.

Green started the rout when he dismissed Rory Burns for 26 to break the opening partnership and bring up tea, returning after the break to remove Dawid Malan for 10 in similar style with the batsman chopping on.

Zak Crawley, the other England opener, was the 22-year-old's third victim, caught behind for 36, and when Ben Stokes holed out for five to Nathan Lyon at deep square leg off Mitchell Starc, England had lost four wickets for 24 runs.

Joe Root got his side over the hundred mark but fell for 11 when a Scott Boland delivery skidded low along the surface and into his off stump, leaving the England captain destined to head home still without a Test century in Australia.

"It's been a really tough tour for us, we've



managed good cricket in parts but we just haven't managed to string a whole game together," Root said.

"It's something that we have to learn as a group, we have to learn from these experiences and not make the same mistakes going forward. "Sometimes you've got hold your hands up and respect that a team outplays you."

Boland, in only his third Test, and Cummins shared the next five wickets as England appeared to give up on any hope of even extending the contest into a fourth day.

Earlier, standout England bowler Mark Wood had made the most of seaming conditions for a career best 6-37 to help bowl out the hosts for 155 early in the second session.

The hosts won the Tests in Brisbane, Adelaide and Melbourne to retain the urn, while the fourth match in Sydney was drawn after England batted out the final day.

Travis Head was named Man of the Match in Hobart and Man of the Series after scoring two centuries, including 101 in the first innings of the fifth Test, and 357 runs, despite missing the Sydney match after contracting COVID-19.

Stars warming up for BPL

SPORTS REPORTER

Following the historic Test series in New Zealand, focus has now shifted towards the upcoming Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League T20 competition as the cricketers already started training for their respective franchises at the home of cricket in Mirpur.

There was a festive mood at the National Academy premises where players of all the six franchises gathered during their training session ahead of the cash-rich tournament scheduled to begin on January 21.

However, the growing concerns over the Omicron variant of Covid-19 may force the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to arrange the tournament in closed doors where the players' safety and health protocols will remain as the biggest challenge for the organisers. The board had already announced that there will be no Decision Review System (DRS) technology in the upcoming special edition of the BPL. There are also concerns over the participation of the foreign players in time due to travel restrictions for Covid-19 worldwide.

Meanwhile, members of the Test team who reached Dhaka on Saturday are expected to join

their respective teams within the next few days. Mushfiqur Rahim, who had arrived a couple of days earlier than others, has already joined Khulna Tigers.

Star-studded Dhaka, who roped in the three stalwarts in T20 captain Mahmudullah Riyad, ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal and former captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza -- will face Rahim's Khulna Tigers on the opening day.

Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's Fortune Barishal will take on Chattogram Challengers in the opening game of the tournament.

Tigers' team director Khaled Mahmud, who is the coach of Barishal, informed that things get easier with Shakib in the team.

"I am very excited to work with Fortune Barishal. Things get easier to work when Shakib is in the team. I have worked with Shakib in Dhaka Dynamites for four years, so we have good chemistry together. "If things go well, we have the ability as the team is balanced just as it should be for the T20 format but the rest depends on the field. To be honest, T20 is such a format where you can't say which one is a good or bad team. Those who will play better cricket on the given day will win the game, but I am hopeful," said Mahmud.

Comilla Victorians also look a strong unit with Mustafizur Rahman along with experienced foreign recruits -- Faf du Plessis, Moeen Ali and Sunil Narine in the team. Comilla will face Taskin Ahmed's Sylhet Sunrisers on January 22.



Tamim Iqbal (C) and Mushfiqur Rahim (R) engage in a lighthearted chat with coach Mohammad Salahuddin before a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday ahead of the Bangladesh Premier League, which gets underway on January 21.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED