

FANS, RIVALS KEEN FOR HEWITT FAREWELL TO PLAY OUT

MELBOURNE: Lleyton Hewitt embarks on his emotional farewell tournament with rivals and fans hoping for a deep run at the Australian Open in his 20th and final attempt starting tomorrow. The Aussie warhorse, renowned for his all-or-nothing fighting spirit, is pitted against young compatriot James Duckworth in a likely night match on Rod Laver Arena with the threat that every match could be his last. Adding poignancy to his last hurrah is that the 34-year-old has not won his home Grand Slam in two decades, although he came close, losing

the 2005 final to Russian Marat Safin. Record Grand Slam champion Roger Federer said he has always admired Hewitt's work ethic and fighting spirit. "We always got along well. It was sometimes feisty on the court, but it was always respectful," said fellow 34-year-old Federer. "I always admired his work ethic, his on-court fighting spirit, even though it annoyed me sometimes because in the beginning it was more crazy than now." Rising home star Bernard Tomic said all of Australia would be cheering on Hewitt in the first of

hopefully many matches at this year's Australian Open. "We all want Lleyton to win. It's going to be an amazing match," Tomic said. "Then again, James is also Australian. It's a bit strange. But I think James is also looking at this, if he can win this match, he knocks off Lleyton in his last match in his career, it's also a big opportunity for him. "I'm excited. I'm going to be watching it. All of Australia is going to be watching it. It's going to be a very, very exciting match to watch." For his part Hewitt, a former world number one and two-

time Grand Slam-winner, said he would be in a unique situation playing an Australian for only the second time at his home Grand Slam in two decades. "It is a unique situation. It's something that I haven't had to deal with, playing another Aussie on Rod Laver Arena," Hewitt said. "Yeah, it's awkward, but in another way it's fun to go out there with 'Ducks'. I've been helping him the last few years. He's been part of the Davis Cup squad on a number of occasions. He's a great kid. "I'll just try to go out there and put on a good show."

Duckworth is one of Hewitt's proteges in Australia's Davis Cup squad, of which the veteran player is now captain. Duckworth, 23, finds himself in an invidious situation being in a position of possibly ending Hewitt's career and playing the spoiler. "It's not something that I'd like to do. But sort of been put in this position now," Duckworth said. "Yeah, I guess if I win, I'll apologise to him. But, yeah, I'm going to have to sort of put that out of my mind and go out there and try to play my game, give it my best shot." —AFP

HALEP KEEPING AUSSIE EXPECTATIONS IN CHECK

MELBOURNE: World number two Simona Halep said yesterday she is determined to taste Grand Slam glory but is keeping her expectations in check after an injury-marred build-up to the Australian Open.

The Romanian is enjoying her highest ever ranking after a stellar 2015 in which she won titles at Shenzhen, Dubai and Indian Wells, raking in more than US\$4.5 million in prize money.

The ultimate goal is Grand Slam glory, with world number one and 21-time major winner Serena Williams scheduled to meet her in the final if the seedings go to plan.

"I think to win a Grand Slam," she said when asked about her season's focus. "I don't know if it's going to happen this year, but this is my biggest goal. And to have good matches, have good tournaments, and to play everything I want, that I scheduled already."

Halep's chances of landing her first major in Melbourne could be hindered by a nagging achilles injury that forced her out of the lead-up Brisbane International.

She recovered to make the semi-finals

of the Sydney International last week but is not getting her hopes too high of breaking her Grand Slam duck over the next fortnight.

"I come here without expectations. I have only one tournament before this Grand Slam," she said. "Actually I feel good, I feel confident. You never know. I just have to go on court and take my chances every time."

Halep, now coached by Australian Darren Cahill, has failed to get beyond the quarter-finals in five previous attempts at Melbourne Park. Her best Grand Slam showing was reaching the 2014 French Open final.

She gets her tournament underway tomorrow against Chinese qualifier Zhang Shuai with a potential quarter-final looming against veteran eighth seed Venus Williams, who has been playing the Australian Open since 1998.

"I think the tournament is open," Halep said, with most of the women's top 10 having their Grand Slam build-up hampered by either illness or injury. "Everyone has a chance to win this title, I mean from top 10. I think every tournament is open." —AFP



MELBOURNE: Romania's Simona Halep smiles during a press conference, ahead of the Australian Open tennis championships in Melbourne, Australia, yesterday. — AP

DJOKOVIC, SERENA HOT TO TROT ON DAY ONE IN STEAMY MELBOURNE

MELBOURNE: Defending champions Novak Djokovic and Serena Williams will be hoping to get the Australian Open off to a sizzling start when they play back-to-back on Rod Laver Arena today. The weather also looks set to do its part in keeping temperatures high from the off at Melbourne Park with peaks of 37 Celsius (98.6 Fahrenheit) forecast for the opening day of the year's first grand slam.

The two dominant players of last year, Djokovic and Williams are no strangers to the heat of the Australian summer, of course, but sweltering conditions might help expose any flaws in their early season form or fitness.

That looks less likely to be the case with Djokovic, who opens his campaign to match Roy Emerson's record tally of six men's singles titles against South Korea's Chung Hyeon. Coming off a year in which he won 11 tournaments and three of the four majors, the 28-year-old Serbian ironman should safely negotiate his opening match whatever the weather. The condition of Williams, who faces unpredictable Italian Camilla Giorgi in her opener in the second

match on Rod Laver, is more open to question. The American has barely swung a racket since the semi-final defeat to Italy's Roberta Vinci at last September's U.S. Open denied her a shot at the single season grand slam. The 21-times grand slam champion said on Saturday the knee inflammation that has bothered her recently was no longer a problem and she was "at 130 percent" for her first round tie. Whether or not her comments can be taken at face value, writing off Williams for whatever reason is a dangerous business and it would be no surprise at all if she swatted Giorgi aside as she embarks on her bid for a seventh singles title. Her fellow 34-year-old Roger Federer, 17-times a grand slam winner, takes centre stage in the evening session on Rod Laver Arena as he embarks on his quest for a fifth Melbourne Park crown against Georgian Nikoloz Basilashvili. Another former champion, women's fifth seed Maria Sharapova, takes on Japan's Nao Hibino in the prime-time match on Margaret Court Arena but local eyes might be more on Hisense Arena where Australian young gun Nick Kyrgios plays Pablo Carreno Busta. — Reuters



MELBOURNE: Serbia's Novak Djokovic plays a forehand return during a practice session ahead of the 2016 Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP



MICHIGAN: Golden State Warriors guard Klay Thompson (11) towers over Detroit Pistons guard Reggie Jackson during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Saturday, in Auburn Hills, Mich. —AP

PISTONS DENY WARRIORS SHARE OF NBA WIN-LOSS RECORD

AUBURN HILLS: Kentavious Caldwell-Pope held his own against Stephen Curry for most of the night, scoring 20 points as the Detroit Pistons handed the Golden State Warriors their second loss in three games, 113-95 on Saturday. Much of the pregame talk centered around how well Caldwell-Pope might be able to defend Curry. The Golden State star scored 38 points, but Caldwell-Pope gave the Pistons a boost offensively. The Warriors (37-4) reached the midway point of the regular season a win short of the best 41-game start in NBA history. The 1971-72 Los Angeles Lakers and 1995-96 Chicago Bulls started 38-3. Detroit retired Ben Wallace's No. 3 jersey at halftime, and by that time the Pistons led 65-49 on a raucous night at the Palace. Andre Drummond had 14 points and 21 rebounds, and Reggie Jackson scored 20 points for Detroit. The Pistons had six players in double figures, while Golden State had only three. Klay Thompson scored 24 points for the Warriors.

GRIZZLIES 103, KNICKS 95

Memphis beat New York in the first game between the teams since the NBA suspended Grizzlies forward Matt Barnes for two games for his fight with Knicks coach Derek Fisher in October. Barnes finished with two points and nine rebounds in 26 minutes. Despite the buildup to the first game between the sides, there were no incidents between Barnes and Fisher. Marc Gasol had 37 points and eight rebounds to help the Grizzlies to their fourth win in five games. He was 15 for 29 from the field. Kristaps Porzingis led the Knicks with 17 points, while Kyle O'Quinn added 15 points.

KINGS 110, CLIPPERS 103

DeMarcus Cousins had 19 points and 13 rebounds, Omri Casspi added 17 points and the Kings stopped the Clippers' 10-game win streak. Casspi went 5 for 8 from 3-point range. J.J. Redick scored 22 points, hitting five 3-pointers, and reserve Jamal Crawford added 20 points for the Clippers, who were tied with the idle Spurs for longest active win streak in the NBA. Cole Aldrich had 19 points and 10 rebounds in his second start for the Clippers, who never led in the second half. Sacramento's Rudy Gay added 18 points and Darren Collison had 17.

HAWKS 114, NETS 86

Paul Millsap scored 21 points and went past 10,000 for his career, leading Atlanta to a dominant second half. Brooklyn scored the first seven points of the third quarter, tying it at 55. The Hawks pulled away from there, pushing the lead to 84-68 by the end of the period and as many as 33 in the final quarter. Atlanta stopped a two-game losing streak and reached the midpoint of the season at 24-17. A year ago, the Hawks were 33-8 on the way to claiming the top seed in the Eastern

Conference. Millsap, who has scored at least 18 points in 11 straight games, reached the career milestone on a layup in the second quarter. Thaddeus Young led the Nets with 18 points. Only two other Brooklyn players were in double figures.

76ERS 114, TRAIL BLAZERS 89

Jahlil Okafor had 25 points and 10 rebounds to help Philadelphia snap a four-game losing streak. Richaun Holmes added 17 points and Ish Smith and Robert Covington scored 16 apiece for the Sixers, who enjoyed a rare blowout victory. They improved to 5-37 with their most lopsided win of the season. Damian Lillard scored 14 points for the Blazers, who dropped to 18-25 as their three-game winning streak ended. C.J. McCollum finished with 13 points, and Mason Plumlee and Miles Leonard had 12 apiece.

JAZZ 109, LAKERS 82

Rudy Gobert had 18 points, 18 rebounds and five blocked shots, leading Utah to the easy win. The Jazz used a 26-5 spurt in the first quarter, including three baskets by Trey Burke, to run away with the game. The Lakers' last lead came at 7-4. Gobert recorded his first double-double since returning from an MCL injury. Gordon Hayward added 14 points for Utah, and Trey Lyles finished with 17 points and nine rebounds. Lou Williams led the Lakers with 20 points and D'Angelo Russell added 13. Kobe Bryant played 15 minutes and

scored five points. The Lakers have lost six of seven since a season-high three-game win streak.

CELTICS 119, WIZARDS 117

Jae Crowder had a go-ahead layup with 3.9 seconds left off a pass from Marcus Smart, lifting Boston to the road win. Isaiah Thomas scored 32 points for the Celtics, who earned their third consecutive victory. They had dropped their last three road games. Crowder added 22 points for Boston, which had five players in double figures and trailed by as many as 11 before halftime. John Wall scored a season-high 36 points for Washington, but missed a potential tying runner at the buzzer. He also had 13 assists and seven steals in 44 minutes. Washington was missing Bradley Beal, who sat out the second of back-to-back games.

BUCKS 105, HORNETS 92

Khris Middleton scored 24 points on 11-of-16 shooting, leading Milwaukee to the road win. Greg Monroe had 19 points and 10 rebounds for Milwaukee, and Giannis Antetokounmpo finished with 14 points and 11 boards. Jabari Parker scored 15 points. Milwaukee shot 54.2 percent (39 for 72) from the field in its fourth win in six games. The Bucks also had a 46-35 rebounding edge. Charlotte has lost nine of 10. Jeremy Lin led the Hornets with 15 points on 6-of-13 shooting. —AP

NBA Results/Standings

LA Clippers 103, Sacramento 110; Washington 117, Boston 119; Atlanta 114, Brooklyn 86; Detroit 113, Golden State 95; Philadelphia 114, Portland 89; Utah 109, LA Lakers 82; Memphis 103, New York 95; Charlotte 92, Milwaukee 105.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference				
Atlantic Division				Northwest Division				
	W	L	PCT	GB				
Toronto	25	15	.625	—	Oklahoma City	29	12 .707	—
Boston	22	19	.537	3.5	Utah	18	22 .450	10.5
New York	20	22	.476	6	Portland	18	25 .419	12
Brooklyn	11	30	.268	14.5	Denver	15	25 .375	13.5
Philadelphia	5	37	.119	21	Minnesota	12	29 .293	17
Central Division				Pacific Division				
Cleveland	28	10	.737	—	Golden State	37	4 .902	—
Chicago	23	16	.590	5.5	LA Clippers	26	14 .650	10.5
Indiana	22	18	.550	7	Sacramento	17	23 .425	19.5
Detroit	22	18	.550	7	Phoenix	13	28 .317	24
Milwaukee	18	25	.419	12.5	LA Lakers	9	33 .214	28.5
Southeast Division				Southwest Division				
Atlanta	24	17	.585	—	San Antonio	35	6 .854	—
Miami	23	17	.575	0.5	Dallas	23	18 .561	12
Orlando	20	19	.513	3	Memphis	23	19 .548	12.5
Washington	19	20	.487	4	Houston	21	20 .512	14
Charlotte	18	22	.450	5.5	New Orleans	13	26 .333	21