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BEIJING: Andy Murray of Britain kisses his trophy after defeating Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria in the men's singles final match at the China Open tennis tournament in Beijing, yesterday. (Inset) Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland poses with her trophy after beating Johanna Konta of Britain during the women's singles final of the China Open tennis tournament in Beijing yesterday. — AP / AFP

MURRAY, RADWANSKA CLAIM TITLES AT CHINA OPEN

BEIJING: Andy Murray claimed the title at the China Open yesterday, taking a step toward unseating world number one Novak Djokovic, as Agnieszka Radwanska won her second Beijing crown. Both romped to victory in straight sets on a chilly night in the Chinese capital, neither of them having dropped a set in the tournament. Murray's 6-4, 7-6 (7/2) win over unseeded Grigor Dimitrov is his fifth title of the year and 40th of his career, while third-ranked Radwanska sealed her win 6-4, 6-2 over Briton Johanna Konta with an ace. The Scot's victory moves him 1,000 points closer to long-reigning world number one Djokovic, with the chance of taking the top spot by year-end and capping off a career-best season.

Murray broke Dimitrov's serve in the opening game of the match, putting the 15th-ranked Bulgarian on the defensive as he made 21 unforced errors in the opening set.

In the second, both held their serve through the first four games until Murray broke Dimitrov at 3-2. It looked like the Scot would serve for the championship but Dimitrov—who beat Rafael Nadal en route to the final—won the next 11

points, breaking Murray to love.

Pushed to a tiebreak, the three-time Grand Slam champion immediately seized back control, storming through the decider to claim his first title in the Chinese capital.

Dimitrov had received a free pass through the semi-finals after Canadian Milos Raonic pulled out with an ankle injury, but was left overwhelmed by the Scot.

"I just didn't feel that I had another gear," Dimitrov told reporters after the match. "Andy's fighting pretty much every single point. You know you're not going to get anything for free."

With his 40th win, Murray is the 16th player in the open era to win at least 40 titles and the fourth active player to accomplish the feat, joining Djokovic, Nadal and Roger Federer.

THE MAGICIAN

Radwanska's victory was the 20th of her career but there was more on the line for Konta, 25, who was making a bid in the Chinese capital for what would have been her second

and biggest title. Despite the loss, by reaching the Beijing final Konta has amassed enough points to break into the top 10 — the first British woman to do so since Jo Durie in 1984. When the new leaderboards are released Monday it will be the first time since computerised rankings were introduced that a British man (Murray) and woman are ranked in the top 10 at the same time. Konta claimed two top 10 scalps en route to the final, sixth-ranked Karoline Pliskova and number eight Madison Keys, but Radwanska managed to unsettle her on Sunday.

The Briton, usually a solid baseliner, repeatedly pushed to the net as she tried to shift the match momentum in her favour, but it was a risky strategy that cost her 29 unforced errors.

"Against a player like Agnieszka, who is basically a human wall, you definitely do try to look to get the upper hand in any way possible," Konta told reporters after the match.

After dropping her serve twice in each set, Konta made a bid to even the scoreline in the second, pushing Radwanska to two break points in the sixth game.

But the Pole-nicknamed "The Magician" for her ability to conjure up shots-blasted a forehand down the line to save her service game. "Whenever I felt I could have got a little bit of a foothold in the match, she took it away from me," Konta said. The world number three served for the title, firing her only ace of the match straight down the line for her third Premier Mandatory title, one rung down from a Grand Slam.

"I think that was a perfect timing," Radwanska said of the ace. It was the second time the pair have met after Radwanska beat the Briton in a two-hour, three-set battle in Cincinnati in August. They may meet again in Singapore at the end of the month for the WTA Finals. Radwanska has already qualified for the eight-player season finale, which follows a round-robin format, while the Briton is still chasing points to guarantee her maiden appearance.

Konta is in eighth position but could be nudged out by Wuhan Open finalist Dominika Cibulkova, who is just 10 points behind her in the so-called Race to Singapore.

The Briton is playing in Hong Kong next week, hoping to rack up enough qualification points. — AFP

KYRGIOS BEATS GOFFIN TO TAKE JAPAN OPEN

TOKYO: Australian power-hitter Nick Kyrgios fired an incredible 25 aces yesterday to win the Japan Open, pounding Belgium's David Goffin 4-6, 6-3, 7-5.

Kyrgios rocketed serves clocking in at more than 220 kilometres (136 miles) per hour in quick succession, giving Goffin little time to regain his rhythm. Goffin used his quick footwork and long rallies to put pressure on his opponent, but Kyrgios' fearsome serves in the end overwhelmed the world's number 14.

The Australian, ranked 15 in the world, also showed off some sharp ground strokes and saved 11 of 12 break points to lift the trophy in two hours. "I think my serves are what got me out of trouble," Kyrgios said. "David makes you feel like the court is small. It was a tough match." Goffin managed to take the upper hand early in the match by hitting deep, angled returns to make his opponent run while winning long rallies with some clever footwork.

But Kyrgios fired off superb serves from the start, escalating his big-serve offensives in the second set, landing 11 aces, followed by 10 more in the third. He also took risks to blast out sizzling shots even after faulting on first serves.

"His (Goffin's) strength was returning.

So I had to step up my serves a little bit especially in the second set," Kyrgios said, adding that he also managed to improve his returns as the match progressed. Goffin said he attempted to play rallies and wait for Kyrgios to make mistakes, but faced an unending shower of cannon-like serves. "In the first set, he was not serving like he did in the second and third. I was on the ball in the first set," Goffin said.

"I think, during the match, he had to serve well because I was doing rallies better," he said.

"He served 215 (kilometres per hour) on the line with a lot of precision.

Even if you choose the right side, it's tough to return," Goffin added. Kyrgios grabbed his third trophy of the season, after many of his big-name rivals pulled out of the Tokyo tournament due to injuries. Defending champion and US Open winner Stan Wawrinka withdrew from the event due to back trouble, while home favourite Kei Nishikori, winner in 2014 and 2012, was unable to finish his second-round match Wednesday because of muscle strain.

Injuries also forced Argentina's Juan Martin Del Potro, Japan Open winner in 2013, to skip the tournament after receiving an invitation as a wildcard. — AFP



TOKYO: Australia's Nick Kyrgios returns a shot against Belgium's David Goffin during the men's singles final at the ATP Japan Open tennis tournament in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP