

# KYRGIOS STUNS DJOKOVIC IN ACAPULCO

**ACAPULCO:** Australian bad boy Nick Kyrgios shocked Novak Djokovic in straight sets at the Mexico Open, dealing a major blow to the world number two's hopes of regaining his mantle of invincibility. The 21-year-old Kyrgios overpowered Djokovic with 25 aces in the 7-6 (11/9), 7-5 triumph as the Serb sought to rebuild confidence after his shattering second round defeat at the Australian Open in January. The Australian, letting his tennis skills take centre stage instead of his tantrums, won 81 percent of his first-serve points as he dominated his first ever match with Djokovic.

"It's what I dreamed of as a little kid, playing on these great venues against some of the greatest players in the world," said Kyrgios. "I never have a problem getting up for these matches. I wasn't thinking about winning at any stage," he added. "I knew I had to stay in the moment because I've been in situations where matches have gotten away from me, so I had to stay switched on the whole time. I knew that if I just waited and waited, eventually I'd get my chance." Djokovic fell in the Australian Open to Uzbekistan's Denis Istomin, then did not play again until this week.

After beating Slovakia's Martin Klizan he rallied to defeat Juan Martin del Potro, before losing his quarter-final to Kyrgios. The world No 17 Kyrgios delivered another giant killer performance as he also beat Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer in their first ATP tour level meetings. He is the youngest player to record victories over the tennis Big Five—Djokovic, Federer, Nadal, Andy Murray and Stan Wawrinka—and is now 11-17 against top



**ACAPULCO:** Serbia's Novak Djokovic fails to return a serve from Australia's Nick Kyrgios during a quarterfinal match of the Mexican Tennis Open in Acapulco, Mexico on Thursday March 2, 2017. Kyrgios unleashed a 25-aces barrage to defeat Djokovic 7-6 (9), 7-5 to reach the semifinals of the Mexican Open. —AP

ten players. Kyrgios will be seeking to reach his first final of the season when he faces big-serving American Sam Querrey in the semis.

Nadal bounced back from a break down in both sets to defeat Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka 7-6 (7/2), 6-3 and book his semi-final

spot. The second-seeded Spaniard, a two-time winner in Acapulco, hammered five aces in the battle between the two lefthanders. "He is so quick," Nadal said. "I felt I needed to choose the right shots to do the damage. I was trying to hit the winner too early some-

times and too late other times, so it was tough to get my rhythm." World No 6 Nadal also kept his Acapulco unbeaten streak alive, having won 13 straight matches, and moved to 26-0 in sets in the ATP Tour event.

## Nadal moves on

Nadal advanced to a semi-final meeting with Marin Cilic. Nadal has won three of four career meetings with the Croatian. "I am excited about playing this match," Nadal said. "He is one of the best players in the world." The 30-year-old Nadal clinched Thursday's victory in the ninth game of the second set with an overhead smash at the net after Nishioka's return landed well short. Nadal easily won the opening set tiebreaker by taking the first five points and then two out of the next four. He closed out the first set with a blistering cross-court forehand that froze Nishioka in his tracks. Nishioka was his own worst enemy at times as the 21-year-old qualifier had no aces, committed four double faults and won just 50 percent of his second-serve points.

In the eighth game of the first set, Nishioka was up 40-15 and, despite having three challenges on the board, he failed to review a Nadal forehand that was ruled in but appeared to have sailed wide. Third-seeded Cilic reached the semi-finals without hitting a ball as American Steve Johnson withdrew. Johnson pulled out of his scheduled quarter-final on the hard courts with a right ankle injury he said he sustained in his victory over Ernesto Escobedo on Wednesday. Unseeded Querrey eliminated fourth-seeded Dominic Thiem of Austria 6-1, 7-5 in their quarter-final match. —AFP

## KUWAIT 8TH OPEN TENNIS TOURNAMENT KICKS OFF

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait 8th Open Tennis Tournament 2017 kicked off yesterday under the patronage of President of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Abdallah Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, and will continue until March 14, at the Tennis Center and Yarmouk Sports Club Courts. The first match in the tournament (the U11) was won by Mohammad Al-Failakami. He defeated Shamlan Ali with the score of 9-4. Fahad Al-Daihani beat Mohammad Mutlaq 9-0, while Antonios Al-Samrani defeated Abdelaziz Al-Mahmeed 9-1. Also, Abdelaziz Khalid defeated Jawad Al-Mahmeed 9-7 as, Mohammad Qalli beat Musaed Shaker 9/2.

Kuwait Tennis Federation Secretary General and Director of the Tournament Abdelredha Al-Ghareeb was happy with the successful kick off and the heavy participation. He thanked all Kuwait's sports clubs who registered their players in the tournament. He said this is a good opportunity for all club players to get in touch with high caliber players. Al-Ghareeb thanked Behbehani Group for its major support of the tournament since its launch in 2002. He also thanked other sponsors including Kuwait Finance Center, Kuwait Airways and Kuwait International Bank.

## PSL FINAL IS MORE THAN A MERE GAME OF CRICKET FOR PAKISTAN

**ISLAMABAD:** The Pakistan Super League final is more than a mere game of cricket. For the Pakistan Cricket Board it's a challenge to showcase that it can once again safely host international teams. With just three days to go before tomorrow's Twenty20 final in Lahore, nobody is entirely sure which eight foreign players will shrug off safety concerns and participate in the tournament's deciding match at the Gaddafi Stadium.

PSL chairman Najam Sethi says that at least four players from each team will be picked from a pool of around 60 foreign cricketers. The two finalists will be determined once the last knockout match - featuring the Karachi Kings and Peshawar Zalmi - is played Friday in the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan cricket's home away from home. Quetta Gladiators, which has already qualified for the final, will be without its contracted foreign players after England's Kevin Pietersen, Luke Wright and Tymal Mills along with South African Rilee Rossouw flew home from Sharjah and declined to play in the Lahore final because of security concerns.

"It matters a lot when you lose all your key players," Sarfraz Ahmed, who is captain of the Quetta team and the Pakistan National T20 team, said after arriving in Karachi on Thursday. Sarfraz didn't reveal which foreign cricketers will now represent Quetta in the final, but said he was confident of recruiting talent from the list of available players. Pakistan has not hosted any of cricket's leading teams since a terrorist attack on Sri Lanka's team bus at Lahore in 2009.

And so the PCB views the PSL final as an opportunity to regain the confidence of foreign teams and bring back international cricket. Officials from other national cricket boards and the International Cricket Council have been invited for tomorrow's final to witness the security first hand. Doubts were raised over Lahore hosting the final when a wave of new terrorist attacks hit Pakistan last month. At least 13 people were killed in Lahore when a bomber targeted police escorting a rally by pharmacists. But the provincial government, federal government and the army extended full support in terms of security for the cricket.

The provincial government has promised at least 7,000 police officers to guard the surroundings of Gaddafi Stadium, and encouraged spectators to travel to the venue well ahead of the final to avoid long delays at security checkpoints. "This final is for all the Pakistanis and I hope after we organize it peacefully international cricket will also return to Pakistan," said Quetta coach



**LAHORE:** Pakistan's paramilitary troops stand guards at an entry gate of Gaddafi stadium ahead of the final cricket match of Pakistan Super League, in Lahore, Pakistan yesterday. —AP

Moin Khan, who was part of Pakistan's 1992 World Cup winning squad. Local cricket fans have ensured high demand for the \$5 tickets for tomorrow's final. Long queues were witnessed in front of local banks in Lahore on Thursday, but fans were told there were no tickets left in that category.

PSL organizers said they put 10,000 tickets on sale for \$5 each, while tickets in other categories were selling for \$38, \$76 and \$114. Cricketer-turned politician Imran Khan is among a few former cricketers who have criticized the decision to hold the PSL final in Lahore. In a Twitter post, he said nobody wanted international cricket to return to Pakistan more than him, "but staging the PSL final in Lahore carries huge risks with no benefit at all." "A match played under a tight security ring around the stadium will exaggerate Pak's security issue." Any security lapses would be a massive setback, he added, saying "we can say goodbye to cricket in Pak for the next decade." —AP