

Sports

World team storms back to cut Europe's lead at Laver Cup

Anderson's first singles win over Djokovic in a decade

CHICAGO: Kevin Anderson avenged a Wimbledon finals loss to Novak Djokovic as Team World dominated the night session Saturday to climb back into contention at the 2018 Laver Cup.

Anderson's surprise win, combined with a doubles victory by World's Jack Sock and Nick Kyrgios over Grigor Dimitrov and David Goffin, slashed Europe's overall lead to 7-5 heading into Sunday's third and final day of the exhibition tournament. Earlier Saturday, Roger Federer and Alexander Zverev powered Europe into a commanding 7-1 lead by winning their singles matches to set a daunting task for the underdog World team in Chicago.

South Africa's Anderson got the fight back started by upsetting reigning Wimbledon and US Open champ Djokovic 7-6, 5-7, 10-6 to earn two points for Team World at the United Center arena.

"We've had some really close matches that haven't gone our way and I really wanted to put us back in there," said Anderson. "It's not easy playing one of the best players of all time, but what an amazing atmosphere. It's just fantastic, for so many reasons. I felt I played a great match - beating Novak on any stage is great and here in Chicago makes it extra special."

Under the scoring system for the Laver Cup, victories on day two are worth two points each, with victories on day three rising to three points.

Defending champion Europe needs 13 points to take the title, which is being held for the second time. Djokovic, who was making his Laver Cup singles debut, partnered with Roger Federer in doubles on Friday night where they lost to Anderson and Sock.

Heading into Saturday's match, 14-time grand slam winner Djokovic held a 6-1 career advantage, including a 6-2, 6-2, 7-6 (7/3) win over Anderson in July at Wimbledon. This was Anderson's first singles win over Djokovic in a decade. On Saturday, they played the fourth 10 point tiebreaker of the tournament and it was the first win for Team World. Under the format being used for the tournament, a tiebreak is used instead of a decisive third set. Anderson closed it out when the Serb fired a forehand into the net and the South African was mobbed by his teammates. "Kevin was so well prepared for this, we needed this bad," said World captain John McEnroe. "It was absolutely awesome."

FEDERER ON FIRE

World number two Roger Federer was barely ruffled as he cruised to a 6-3, 6-2 win over Kyrgios. "I felt good from the beginning of the match and that's not usual," said Federer. "Usually you need matches to get going and play your best in the third round or quarters of a tournament." Earlier, Zverev saved a match point to defeat John Isner in day two's opening singles rubber.

Zverev, 21, dug deep to hold off the big-serving Isner to win 3-6, 7-6 (8/6), 10-7. After dominating Friday's opening day, winning three out of the four matches, Europe's progress looked to be checked after Isner grabbed the first set against Zverev.

But rising German star Zverev showed great determination in saving a match point at 6-5 down in the second-set tie-break to level the contest. Zverev then raced into the lead in the tiebreak before closing out for the win. — AFP



CHICAGO: Team World Jack Sock of the United States and Team World Nick Kyrgios of Australia return a shot against Team Europe David Goffin of Belgium and Team Europe Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria during their Men's Doubles match on day two of the 2018 Laver Cup at the United Center on Saturday in Chicago, Illinois. — AFP

Tiger Woods takes three-shot lead at Tour Championship

ATLANTA: Tiger Woods is one round away from ending his five-year victory drought after storming into a three-shot lead on day three of the Tour Championship here Saturday. Woods, 42 looked in a class of his own as he carded a five-under-par 65 to leave himself on 12 under for the tournament at Atlanta's East Lake Golf Club.

After an opening birdie on the par-four first, Woods went surging clear of the field with a run of five straight birdies from the third hole. The run came with a mix of superb iron play and rock-solid putting, including a 21-foot birdie putt on the fourth.

There was also a moment of magic from the former world number one on the seventh, when he drilled a 172-yard approach shot to five feet and then tapped in for birdie. He was denied a bigger lead after bogeys on the ninth and 16th holes.

"I got off to a nice start and made some nice putts. Good Lord," Woods said afterwards. "I left myself in good spots, too, so I was able to take a run at some of the putts. Other than number three, every putt was uphill, so it was nice. I felt like I could free-wheel it, and they went in."

A Woods victory would be an 80th PGA Tour triumph and take him to within two wins of Sam Snead's all-time 82 Tour victories. "I would love to be able to win this event," he said. "I've got a three-shot lead. I've got a bunch of guys behind me that have been playing well and are playing well, and we'll see what happens tomorrow."

With one round remaining, Woods leads by three from Rory McIlroy and Justin Rose on nine under. "Simple math says that if I play a clean card, the guys behind me have to shoot 67 to force it into extra," Woods added.

"So, that helps. I don't have to shoot 63 or 64 and hope I get help. That's a big difference. "This is a spot I'd much rather be in than certainly four or five back." And having won 106 tournaments around the globe, Woods was quizzed if there was any further room for a 107th victory prize.

"I am sure there would be room somewhere in the house if I happened to go on and win this event," he said. Woods' last victory came 1,875 days ago in August 2013 when he captured the WGC-Bridgestone Invitational.

The 14-time Major winner is a two-time former Tour Championship winner and enjoys a remarkable record of winning 54 of 57 PGA Tour events when holding the 54-hole lead. The 42-year-old returned to golf this season after missing most of the previous two years with a debilitating back injury.

However Woods has progressed steadily during his comeback season, leading the British Open during the final round in July before finishing second at last month's PGA Championship. He fired a 62 earlier this month and has also done enough to force himself into the USA team for next week's Ryder Cup.

Behind Woods, McIlroy is lurking menacingly after carding a four-under-par 66. Overnight leader Rose remains in the hunt but will look to improve on Sunday after a two-under-par 68. Kyle Stanley and Spain's Jon Rahm are a further three shots back on six under, six strokes behind Woods. Paul Casey, Tony Finau and Billy Horschel are seven off the lead on five under. — AFP

Pliskova pummels tearful Osaka to win Tokyo crown

TOKYO: Former world number one Karolina Pliskova stunned Japanese tennis sensation Naomi Osaka in straight sets to capture the Pan Pacific Open yesterday. The fourth seed took just 63 minutes to complete a clinical 6-4, 6-4 victory over the newly crowned US Open champion in Tokyo, bringing Osaka's 10-match winning streak to a shuddering halt.

"I'm just happy it didn't go to three sets," said the Czech, who had been taken the distance in her previous three matches. "My serve is my biggest weapon and it was key today," added Pliskova after scooping an 11th career title. "Naomi was maybe a little bit tired, you could see that. But the future is bright for her and congrats to her for an incredible few weeks." The players had split their previous two meetings, but Osaka started the final as favourite after her historic New York triumph.

And the third seed began in menacing fashion, thumping an ace down the middle on the first point and holding her first two service games to love. But Pliskova slowly turned the screws and broke for 3-2 with a fizzing backhand which her opponent swished well wide.

The world number eight was soon a set to the good after unleashing another brutal drive. Osaka was caught flat-footed and dumped it into the net. Osaka, the runner-up in Tokyo two years ago, climbed to seventh in the rankings after becoming Japan's first grand slam singles champion but she looked lost for ideas against Pliskova.

'SO STRESSED OUT!'

The 20-year-old buried her head in a towel during the changeover and things barely improved in the second set, Osaka whacking her racquet against her sneakers in anger at her wastefulness.

Joshua ready for Wilder but promoter wants no more delay

LONDON: Britain's Anthony Joshua believes his long-awaited clash with fellow world heavyweight champion Deontay Wilder will take place as it would be "silly not to". But promoter Eddie Hearn has warned a deal must be agreed quickly if the American is to be Joshua's next opponent. Joshua successfully defended his International Boxing Federation, World Boxing Association and World Boxing Organisation belts with brutal a seventh-round stoppage of Alexander Povetkin at London's Wembley Stadium on Saturday.

He is already booked in to box again at Wembley on April 13, but the question of an opponent has still to be resolved. Joshua has repeatedly stressed he wants to fight fellow undefeated champion Wilder, who holds the World Boxing Council version of the heavyweight title, next. "We have to fight, it would be silly not to" Joshua told reporters after inflicting the first stoppage-loss of Povetkin's professional career. Wilder, however, is next due to face Britain's former world heavyweight champion Tyson Fury on December 1. Talks between the Joshua and Wilder camps have stalled and Hearn is worried a fight that will be worth far more than the "peanuts" of an initially offered \$50 million could be derailed. If Fury beats Wilder, the American's re-match clause would likely be activated, delaying both boxers from facing Joshua, the London 2012 Olympic champion who now has a professional record of 22 wins from 22 fights, with 21 knockouts.

'TIME-WASTERS'

"Being British, we'd like Fury to win, but for April, Wilder must win if that's going to happen," said Hearn.



TOKYO: Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic kisses her trophy after beating Japan's Naomi Osaka in their women's singles final at the Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament in Tokyo yesterday. — AFP

As the strain began to show, a dejected Osaka called for coach Sascha Bajin and groaned: "I feel so stressed out!" Sensing blood, Pliskova broke for 5-4 after a poor Osaka drop shot gifted her an easy put-away. Moments later she delivered the coup de grace with a sixth ace which Osaka barely wafted her racquet at.

"I didn't want to try to overpower her because she just has more power than me," said Pliskova. "I just wanted to be patient and wait for my chances." For Pliskova, it was a first tournament victory since Stuttgart in April-and the

first since wedding long-time partner Michal Hrdlicka in the summer. "The first one this year was before the wedding," smiled the Czech, who reached the top spot in women's tennis in July 2017. "I'm just happy that I also have a title as a married woman."

A tearful Osaka could barely bring herself to speak at the trophy presentation. "I've literally never felt more tired in my entire life," she told reporters, confessing that she needed some time off. "The chances of me playing in the next tournament are very low." — AFP

"We're not willing to wait until December to see. A deal must be done in advance of that, subject to him winning. "But now, after 80,000 (the estimated crowd at Wembley) and the worldwide exposure and after the finish (against Povetkin) that offer (made previously, by the Wilder camp) will look like absolute peanuts when this fight is made."

"That is the biggest fight in boxing: Wilder-Fury is a really good fight to see who's the second best heavyweight in the world. Joshua-Wladimir Klitschko was the biggest fight in British boxing history, and Joshua-Wilder would eclipse that. We want that now."

Hearn insisted: "We're not waiting for time-wasters; we understand if they lose we'll have to find another opponent, but if you win, we're not waiting until December. "These aren't negotiations that will take 24 hours, and Joshua's career is not being slowed down. If they don't want to do that, we'll fight someone else." Fury has previously said on social media that Joshua will never fight him but Hearn wittingly added: "Tyson Fury is the least entertaining fighter I've ever seen. He's never been in a good fight, apart from against Steve Cunningham (in 2013), when he got knocked down."

'BURDEN'

Meanwhile the 28-year-old Joshua said he too had no intention of being messed about by Wilder. "If Wilder's not serious, there's other people out there; when he's ready, we're ready." Joshua added: "Good luck to them both (Wilder and Fury) — boxing needs it."

"I've had the burden of the heavyweight division on my back for some years, because it was all about me fighting Wilder, Fury, Klitschko, Dillian (Whyte), Povetkin. That's all they were interested in-me fighting them all. "So I'm happy those two are fighting. April 13 is booked, so whichever heavyweight is serious, we can look at making a deal. I have no interest in who wins; I'm not fussed." Joshua was rocked by Povetkin, the 2004 Olympic champion, in the first round. But he insisted the 39-year-old Russian had not broken his nose.

"These guys the last thing they lose is their power, but it was a good way to wake up," Joshua said. As for what lay behind his own public appeal, Joshua added: "The appeal is losing-who is going to be the man to beat me? Sometimes you have to go in there and really earn your



LONDON: Britain's Anthony Joshua (R) throws a punch to knock Russia's Alexander Povetkin against the ropes during their boxing world Heavyweight title fight at Wembley Stadium in north west London on Saturday. — AFP

money. "Povetkin was a tough challenger for sure, but I knew how to break him down. "I wasn't looking for the knockout but the instinct told he was hurt. I knew how to tidy up and I knew it was time to get out of there." — AFP