

Sports

Djokovic says he was moved by 'amazing warrior' Murray

ABU DHABI: Novak Djokovic has described his longtime rival Andy Murray as a "warrior" and says he is "inspired" by the former world No.1's journey back from a career-threatening injury. Djokovic watched Murray's recently-released documentary that chronicled the Brit's two-year battle with a hip issue that required multiple surgeries and was moved by what he saw.

Just 11 months ago, a tearful Murray told reporters at the Australian Open that he might never be able to play tennis again but the 32-year-old has since undergone a hip resurfacing operation that saved his career. He returned to singles action in Cincinnati in August, and remarkably lifted his first trophy in two and a half years in Antwerp in October.

While his preseason preparations have been hampered by a groin injury sustained late in the year, Murray is planning on contesting next month's Australian Open - something that seemed highly unlikely when he bid farewell to the tournament in Melbourne last January.

"I've seen his documentary about four, five days and it was tough to watch to be honest, as a tennis player, and as someone that knows him for a long time," said Djokovic, who is exactly one week younger than Murray, and has competed against him since they were 12 years old.

"To see what he has been through, I think it was a great insight into his last couple of years and the struggles he had, mental, emotional, physical. "Just amazing warrior that he is in life

really, to be able not to give up after everything that has happened and all the recovery and preparations and trying to heal and play a couple of matches in the whole season and still after everything he's been through in his career and having family at home, not give up on that and have support of the close ones, it's really impressive and inspiring."

Addressing the press in Abu Dhabi, where he is contesting the Mubadala World Tennis Championship exhibition this weekend, Djokovic will face the winner of the clash between Stefanos Tsitsipas and Andrey Rublev in his opener on Friday.

The 21-year-old Tsitsipas, who owns two wins in four meetings with Djokovic, is coming off of a huge finish to his 2019 season, having clinched the ATP Finals title in London last month. Tsitsipas told reporters in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday that he hopes to break the stranglehold of the 'Big Three' (Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer) on the Grand Slams and the top positions of the rankings, and Djokovic feels the Greek youngster, and his contemporaries, are getting dangerously close to achieving that.

"I think it's a logical and a natural cycle. Roger, Rafa and I were saying that it's going to happen that we're going to be replaced in the top three spots and the new guys are going to start winning Slams," said the Serbian 16-time major champion.

"We're trying to prolong that kind of



ANTWERP: File photograph taken on October 20, 2019, Britain's Andy Murray reacts as he plays against Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka during their men's singles tennis final match for The European Open ATP Antwerp, in Antwerp. —AFP

change in men's tennis, but it's inevitable that it's going to happen and each year they are coming closer and closer. Dominic Thiem played finals of Roland Garros back-to-back. Tsitsipas now won the year-end championships, Alexander Zverev won London the year before. They're definitely out there chal-

lenging the best players in the world and they want to be the best players in the world and they will be, they will become eventually.

"They are already established top-five, top-10 players and our task is that doesn't happen very soon but it seems like it's coming closer and closer." —AFP

Nadal not focused on Federer's Grand Slam record

ABU DHABI: Rafael Nadal insists he is not focused on chasing Roger Federer's record Grand Slam haul, but admits it would be "amazing" if he manages to eclipse the Swiss star's tally of 20 majors won.

Nadal's heroics in 2019 saw him capture a 12th Roland Garros and fourth US Open and the Spaniard is now just one Slam shy of Federer's men's all-time record. At 33, Nadal became the oldest year-end No.1 when he secured that position last month, following a tremendous season that saw him scoop four titles on tour, along with the Davis Cup crown for Spain.

"Happy to achieve these things, but I would love to have five years less," Nadal joked with reporters in Abu Dhabi yesterday ahead of his 10th appearance at the Mubadala World Tennis Championship exhibition.

"It has been a little bit of a magic year because it had been a good start, but then I went through a couple of very hard months in terms of injuries. "Then I came back and I came back well. I started to play at a very high level again. I enjoyed a lot of great moments on court, very emotional ones, Roland Garros, Rome, then New York, that final was amazing, and then of course ending the season with that Davis Cup title on home soil, so an unforgettable experience to finish that way."

Nadal's Davis Cup participation meant he had to finish his 2019 season later than usual - on November 24 - and the Mallorcan says he just started hitting again a week and a half ago in preparation for 2020.

He will get a taste of where his level is at when he takes



Rafael Nadal

on either Karen Khachanov or Chung Hyeon in the Emirati capital today, before resuming his pre-season training back home ahead of the Australian summer.

Asked if usurping Federer is a main target for him moving forward, the top-ranked Nadal said: "I can't say yes because honestly I just work on my diary basis. I have to do my things the best way possible and then to just give myself chances to keep being competitive at the highest level possible.

"So if that happens, great, if not, I just gave my best all my career to be in the position that I am today. And obviously of course, increase the number of 20, or tying 20 would be something amazing, but I cannot complain at all.

"I'm super happy the way I am having my tennis career, I gave my best all the time and I'm proud about the way I worked and the way I enjoyed the tennis during all these years. "So I just really believe and hope that I can keep having the chance to keep going and keep having fun and keep giving myself chances to compete at the highest level." —AFP

ITF cuts live scoring data at low-level events

LONDON: The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has said it will phase out the collection of live scoring data at all World Tennis Tour (WTT) events offering prize money of up to \$15,000 as part of its fight against corruption in the sport's lower levels.

The governing body has also announced an investment of \$8 million "to create a comprehensive integrity infrastructure". The move follows a recommendation in December last year by an International Review Panel (IRP) commissioned to address betting-related and other integrity issues.

"Our commitment to protecting the integrity of the World Tennis Tour is paramount," ITF President David Haggerty said in a statement on the governing body's website <https://www.itftennis.com/en/news-and-media/articles/itf-and-tennis-integrity-supervisory-board-agree-integrity-investment> on Wednesday.

"The scale of this project is unprecedented. We are confident that it will deliver real benefits for all participants and will contribute to the trend of reducing corruption risk seen in 2019." The ITF also announced several other measures, including the introduction of accreditation for WTT events, video recording, increased security and better channels for the reporting of integrity concerns.

Jenny Price, Chair of the Tennis Integrity Supervisory Board, said the IRP's recommendation to remove live scoring data had been a priority over the past year. "Detailed work on implementation of the recommendation has made it clear how important it will be to ensure that official data is not simply replaced by unofficial data," she added. —Reuters