

## Sports

# Federer and Nadal stay on track as Sharapova sets up Wozniacki clash

## Consistent Kerber blasts into Aussie Open third round

MELBOURNE: Roger Federer ground out a tough three-set win to make the Australian Open third round for an incredible 20th straight year yesterday, with long-time rival Rafael Nadal also safely through in his drive towards an 18th Grand Slam title.

Women's defending champion Caroline Wozniacki also progressed to set up a mouth-watering clash next with in-form former world number one Maria Sharapova. But it was curtains for South African Kevin Anderson, who slumped out to young American Frances Tiafoe and became the highest seed, at five, to be sent packing so far.

On an overcast day at Melbourne Park, second seed Angelique Kerber, the 2016 winner, and former US Open champion Sloane Stephens joined the big guns in round three, but the women's side also saw a top 10 player crash.

Ninth seed Kiki Bertens, who raced through the rankings last year after winning three titles, was whipped in three sets by Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova. Federer might be 37 but he's not showing his age, with British qualifier Dan Evans the latest to fall under his spell as he works towards a third successive Australian crown and 21st major victory.

He defeated Evans at Wimbledon last year with the loss of just eight games, but it was a much harder assignment this time, winning 7-6 (7/5), 7-6 (7/3), 6-3 on Rod Laver Arena. "I think if I could have pulled away earlier in the match it might have been easier," said the third seed. "I think he played very well, it was hard to pull away to his credit."

The Swiss star's Australian achievements so far put him on a par with other six-time winners Novak Djokovic and Roy Emerson-although the Australian great's victories all came before the Open era.

He next plays American Taylor Fritz. If he goes on to

win the tournament, he will become the first man ever to claim seven or more titles at two Grand Slams, having already won eight Wimbledon.

Nadal had an easier route to round three, outclassing local hope Matthew Ebden 6-3, 6-2, 6-2. The Spaniard is bidding for his own slice of history by becoming the first man in the Open era, and only the third in history along with Emerson and Rod Laver, to win each Grand Slam on two or more occasions.

"I played a solid match, I was happy with the way I served. I did a few things very well," said Nadal, who next plays Australian Alex de Minaur. "It is an honour to play here. Was a great atmosphere."

Anderson, beaten by Novak Djokovic in the Wimbledon final last year, was sent home by Tiafoe 4-6, 6-4, 6-4, 7-5. The fifth seed struggled with an elbow injury early in the clash and couldn't cope with the 20-year-old's power and finesse.

### COLLISION COURSE

Sixth seed Marin Cilic, who lost in the final to Federer last year, had no such dramas, grinding past American Mackenzie McDonald in four sets and next plays Spanish 26th seed Fernando Verdasco.

Dane Wozniacki, who is battling rheumatoid arthritis, steamrolled Sweden's Johanna Larsson 6-1, 6-3 as she bids to become the first woman to defend the title since Victoria Azarenka in 2013.

It set up a tough clash with five-time Grand Slam champion Sharapova, who blitzed past Sweden's Rebecca Peterson 6-2, 6-1. The Russian is in scintillating form and has dropped just three games in her opening two matches.

"I'm really happy with the way I performed," said Sharapova, adding that she was looking forward to the Wozniacki showdown. "It's a tough third round but I



MELBOURNE: Russia's Maria Sharapova serves to Sweden's Rebecca Peterson during their women's singles match on day three of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. —AFP

have set up the challenge and I'm ready to go out there and take it."

Meanwhile, three-time Grand Slam champion Kerber dominated Brazilian qualifier Beatriz Haddad Maia 6-2, 6-3 to stay on a collision course with

Stephens in the quarter-finals. Stephens, who endured a horror run at Melbourne Park since reaching the semi-final in 2013, exiting in the first round in 2015, 2016 and 2018, swatted aside former doubles partner Tímea Babos 6-3, 6-1. —AFP

## Murray can still come back, says hip-hop star Bryan

MELBOURNE: American doubles legend Bob Bryan gave Andy Murray a ray of hope yesterday, saying he believes the former world number one could make a comeback after major hip surgery.

"I personally think he can do it," said Bryan, who was talking after enjoying a winning comeback in his first Grand Slam doubles since undergoing his own hip replacement surgery last summer.

Murray bowed out of the Australian Open on Monday for potentially the last time after saying his hip pain was too much to bear. Earlier he had declared he would call it a day on his storied career after Wimbledon, if he got that far.

"Look, I'm happy to be back," said the 40-year-old Bryan. "I got a metal hip. There was no guarantees I was going to make it back. Going in to get a metal hip implant, there's no one that's come back from that in tennis. I'm happy it's feeling good."

Bryan said Murray, 31, had explored every conceivable avenue trying to find a solution to his chronic hip pain. "I just represent an option for him," he said. "That

guy does everything you can possibly do as far as training and rehab.

"He's talked to a million specialists. But I'm really the only guy to be playing on tour with a metal hip." An emotional Murray opened up about the personal agony of his battered right hip after losing an epic Australian Open five-setter to Roberto Bautista Agut two days earlier. The three-time Grand Slam champion said he hates even simple things like walking his dogs because the pain is so bad.

### FULL METAL PACKET

Murray faces a heart-wrenching dilemma-battle through the pain for an emotional farewell at Wimbledon or undergo major surgery in the next week or so knowing it may mean he can never play tennis again. Bryan gave his view of what Murray might expect under the scalpel and rehab. "It's called a hip resurfacing with an artificial implant," explained Bryan. "It's a full replacement. Has the bar that goes all the way down the femur. I was on crutches a couple days later. I was at the US Open (in September) three weeks after surgery with a cane. We started our training December 5 hitting some balls pretty hard, playing some sets," he revealed.

"Look, I'm showing that it can be done in doubles, but no one's ever come back with this surgery on the singles court," cautioned the holder of a record 16 Grand Slam men's doubles titles alongside brother Mike. "I think he's going to have the surgery. He's probably going to just rehab it as best he can. If he sees



MELBOURNE: File photo shows Britain's Andy Murray waves to supporters after his defeat against Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut during their men's singles match on day one of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne on January 14, 2019. —AFP

there's a chance to come back, you know... "I personally think he can do it. But, you know, there's no evidence that it's possible in tennis. I mean, so much wear and tear. But I think he could do it." —AFP

## Tsonga walks down memory lane before facing Djokovic

MELBOURNE: Jo-Wilfried Tsonga says the good memories are flooding back as he prepares to take on Novak Djokovic today in a blockbuster Australian Open second-round clash—a rematch of their 2008 final.

Eleven years on he recalls his breakthrough Grand Slam fondly—ranked 38 he beat ninth seed Andy Murray in the first round and romped past number two Rafael Nadal in straight sets in the semi-final, gaining a huge band of new fans along the way.

Djokovic won the decider for his maiden major title but it doesn't detract from Tsonga's memories. "It was great. The stadium was full. A lot of Serbians of course, but also a lot of French and a lot of Australians," Tsonga recalled.

"That was a good final, so I have good memories. Of course for me, it was disappointing to lose. But anyway, it was good memories." It is surprising that the Frenchman has never won a Grand Slam or even reached another major final, given a career that has gleaned 16 ATP Tour titles, a number five world ranking and more than \$21 million in prize money.

"When you come from nowhere, nobody expects you to play that good and everybody's cheering for you. You're new," he said on the ATP website of the 2008 clash, but added that expectations quickly changed.

"All the people say: 'OK, now you're the best or one of the best', and you have to be the best all the time, which is not easy to deal with, of course."

### 'I'M BACK IN 2008'

Tsonga is on the comeback trail after missing seven months of the 2018 season following left knee surgery and seeing his ranking plummet outside the top 200. "It's not very easy because you have to test your mind. You have to really know if you still want to play and make the effort to come back at the best level," said Tsonga, who defeated Slovakia's Martin Klizan in straight sets in the first round.

Now as he climbs back up the rankings he finds himself back where it all began 11 years ago, and will Thursday play Djokovic for the 22nd time since that first clash on Rod Laver Arena.

He has defeated the Serbian number one on six occasions since, including a revenge win in the 2010 Australian Open quarter-finals. "Today it's like I'm back in 2007, 2008. People expect less from me," Tsonga said.

"It's also something good for me. I work on my side and I try to come back and be better on court and I hope I will be able to do good things again." Djokovic had his own issues in 2018, needing elbow surgery, before winning Wimbledon and the US Open to climb back to number one.

"It's funny. I mean, 11 years after our first Grand Slam final here, it feels like a lot has happened for both of us," said Djokovic after beating American qualifier Mitchell Krueger. "He also struggled with injuries lately. It's good to see him playing well. It's good to see him back." — AFP

## FedEx fails to deliver under Serena's spell

MELBOURNE: Roger Federer might be one of the greatest players ever, but even he was bowled over by Serena Williams when they played mixed-doubles at the recent Hopman Cup. The Swiss star admitted he was flustered when serving to the American 23-time Grand Slam winner, saying she had an "aura". "It was a wonderful atmosphere (playing against Serena), one I'd been looking forward for some time," he said after moving into the Australian Open third round. "I had a bad serve percentage against her ... it must have had something to do with Serena's aura. I'm not kidding. She's a wonderful player. But we won in the end so I was happy about that, too!"

### STAR POWER

Young American Frances Tiafoe stated the obvious when asked what it was like when he had the opportunity to play with Serena Williams at the Hopman Cup. "I mean, off the court, she's so chilled and relaxed. Once she gets on, she hates losing. It's unacceptable," he said of the 23-time Grand Slam champion after making the Australian Open third round. Tiafoe is only 20 years old and said it was nerve-wracking when he first teamed up with perhaps the greatest women's player ever. "I was about as nervous as could be. But I think we grew a pretty good relationship."

### FOOT FAULT

Fifth seed Sloane Stephens showed some nifty footwork winning through to the third round but was less sure of herself when stepping off court after her match. The American walked the wrong way from Rod Laver Arena then had to retrace her steps as the centre court crowd looked on. "I thought I was going the right way and was like 'OK bye, see you tomorrow', and nah, that was the wrong way," said the former US Open winner, who reached the semi-finals at Melbourne Park in 2013. —AFP



Winter Sports Club board

## Winter Games Club looking forward to have new integrated sports skating rinks

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: President of Winter Games Club Fuhaid Al-Ajmi said the board of directors is looking forward to have new integrated sports skating rinks in Bayan in the

coming period so it can be used for training its teams. He said this pioneer move will take the sports to broader horizons as the number of players will increase due to the existence of the rink. Al-Ajmi who spoke on the occasion of the general assembly's renewal of their confidence of his list (the founders) to lead the club for the next four years, and said the club made a major achievement in preparing those who play winter sports of both genders of various ages, adding that the sports teams of the club made many achievements regionally and continentally.

He thanked the general assembly for backing his list that worked on developing the club and its players.

The list includes: Khalid Al-Mutairi - Vice president, Mishal Falaitheh - Secretary, Ahmad Al-Amran - Treasurer, Mubarak Al-Omani - Assistant Secretary, Mohsen Al-Maseb - Assistant treasurer and Abdallah Yaqoub member.