



PARIS: Spain's Rafael Nadal serves during a training session on a court at the Roland Garros stadium in Paris yesterday, ahead of the start of the tennis tournament. — AFP

## AT FRENCH OPEN, NADAL COULD FACE 3 WHO BEAT HIM ON CLAY

PARIS: Rafael Nadal's path to a record-extending ninth French Open title could take him through a series of matches against the men who beat him on clay this season. The top-seeded Nadal was drawn yesterday to possibly face No 21 Nicolas Almagro in the fourth round, then No 5 David Ferrer in the quarterfinals. "Those are opponents that know how to play well on clay," Nadal said. "But it's never easy." The other men's quarterfinal matchups could be No 2 Novak Djokovic vs No 8 Milos Raonic, No 3 Stan Wawrinka vs No 7 Andy Murray, and No 4 Roger Federer vs No 6 Tomas Berdych. The possible women's quarterfinals are No 1 Serena Williams vs. No 7 Maria Sharapova in what would be a rematch of last year's final won by Williams, No 2 Li Na vs No 6 Jelena Jankovic, No 3 Agnieszka Radwanska vs No 8 Angelique Kerber, and No 4 Simona Halep vs No 5 Petra Kvitova. Ferrer, who lost to Nadal in the 2013 final at Roland Garros, upset him in the Monte Carlo quarterfinals last month. Almagro ended Nadal's 41-match winning streak in Barcelona by beating him in the quarterfinals there a week later. Those defeats were both in best-of-three-set matches. The French Open, like all Grand Slam tournaments, uses a best-of-five format for men, and Nadal was asked yesterday whether that gives him an advantage on clay. "I give my most every point, every game, every set. Whether it's (best of) three or five, if you want to win, you have to play well," he said.

Nadal has three losses on clay in a season for

the first time since 2004, when he was only 17 and had yet to play a match at the French Open. He was beaten in the Rome final last weekend by Djokovic; they only could meet in the final in Paris. Djokovic has won the pair's last four meetings, but Nadal is 5-0 head-to-head at the French Open, including victories in the 2012 final and 2013 semifinals. Djokovic, a six-time major champion who needs a French Open title to complete a career Grand Slam, and Federer, owner of a record 17 major titles, were drawn to meet in the semifinals. Nadal, who stands third among men with 13 Grand Slam trophies, could meet Australian Open champion Wawrinka in the semifinals.

Nadal is 59-1 for his career at the French Open, with four titles in a row in 2005-08 and again in 2010-13. Williams won the clay-court Grand Slam tournament in 2002, beating her older sister Venus in the final, then waited 11 years before adding a second French Open trophy in 2013. The Williams sisters were drawn yesterday to face each other in the third round, which would be their earliest meeting at a Grand Slam tournament since their very first matchup, in the second round of the 1998 Australian Open. Venus is seeded 29th at the French Open. She's won seven Grand Slam singles titles, 10 fewer than Serena, who holds a 14-10 edge in head-to-head matches. "It never gets easier," Serena said. "She's essentially the love of my life, so it's definitely difficult." — AP

## BUSCH BRANCHES OFF INTO INDYCAR, RUN AT THE 500

INDIANAPOLIS: There will be six former champions on the starting grid for tomorrow's Indianapolis 500 but the spotlight will be on Kurt Busch, a stock-car interloper chasing motor racing history. The 500, Run on the Memorial Day holiday weekend in the US heartland, is a uniquely American event unapologetically billed as "The Greatest Spectacle in Racing" and this year the famed Brickyard is poised to deliver on the high-octane hype.

While the Monaco Grand Prix may be the most glamorous race, the Indy is the most heart-stopping with 33 cars cheered on by nearly 300,000 spectators and charging at hair-raising speeds around an oval that could hold Churchill Downs, Yankee Stadium, the Rose Bowl, the Roman Colosseum and still have room to spare. Tomorrow, the Brickyard will serve as the first leg in a dizzying motor-racing doubleheader that will see Busch take on two of the most treacherous circuits in the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and Charlotte Motor Speedway. The 2004 NASCAR Cup champion's day will begin with a 500-mile dash at the Indy followed by a flight to Charlotte for a 600-mile stint behind the wheel in NASCAR's Coca-Cola 600.

Only four drivers have attempted the treacherous high-speed endurance test and Tony Stewart is the only one to complete the 1,100-mile Memorial Day double having finished sixth at the Indy and third in Charlotte in 2001. "It's not like I'm putting my career or my credentials on the line to prove anything," said Busch, who qualified a respectable 12th on the grid and is the first driver to attempt the double since Robby Gordon in 2004. "This is a moment to moment to check off something on my bucket list but also challenge myself to see where I

can end up in this open wheel rank at one of the most difficult races in the world."

Jacques Villeneuve has won just about everything there is to win in an open-wheel race car, including the 1997 Formula One drivers crown and the 1995 Indy 500, but it has been nearly two decades since the Canadian blitzed his way onto Victory Lane and he returns to the Brickyard searching for a bit of Indy magic. Villeneuve will be joined on the starting grid by Colombian F1 alumni and 2000 Indy 500 winner Juan Pablo Montoya, defending champion Tony Kanaan and three-time winner Helio Castroneves, the latter who is bidding to become part of the Brickyard's most exclusive club - four-time winners of the Indianapolis 500.

Membership is made up of the three giants of American motor sport - A.J. Foyt, Al Unser and Rick Mears - and would welcome its first new member since 1991 if Castroneves can find his way to Victory Lane tomorrow and chug on the traditional of quart of cold milk that goes to the winner. "Just thinking about it, joining the club only three guys, it's a dream," said Castroneves. Last year four women featured on the 500 starting grid but there will be a noticeable lack of girl power tomorrow when the green flag drops.

Danica Patrick, the only woman to win an IndyCar race and lead a lap at the 500, has long departed for NASCAR while Switzerland's Simona de Silvestro is testing with Sauber and poised to make the jump to Formula One. Others like Brazil's Ana Beatriz, Britain's Katherine Legge and Venezuelan Milka Dunno have simply fallen by the wayside leaving Pippa Mann to carry the woman's standard. —Reuters

## NBA: CUBAN COMMENTS ON BIGOTRY STIR DEBATE

LOS ANGELES: With the NBA in turmoil over racially charged remarks by Donald Sterling, Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban was finding Thursday just how tricky even discussion of bigotry can be. Cuban's interview with Inc magazine in which he acknowledged his own "prejudices and bigotries" went viral on Thursday, sparking debate on social media even as the NBA pursues efforts to expel Los Angeles Clippers owner Sterling from its ranks.

Speaking to Inc on Wednesday at the GrowCo convention hosted by the magazine in Nashville, Tennessee, Cuban said the United States has "really come a long way in putting any type of bigotry behind us, regardless of who it's toward". But he acknowledged that he still falls prey to stereotyping. "If I see a black kid in a hoodie and it's late at night, I'm walking to the other side of the street. And if on that side of the street, there's a guy that has tattoos all over his face-white guy, bald head, tattoos everywhere I'm walking back to the other side of the street," Cuban said. "I know that I'm not perfect," he added. "While we all have our prejudices and bigotries, we have to learn that it's an issue that we have to control, that it's part of my responsibility as an entrepreneur to try to solve it, not just to kick the problem down the road."

### 'I stand by the words'

Cuban said Thursday he stuck by his comments, although upon reflection he apologized for using the example of a black youth wearing a hooded sweatshirt, which recalled the 2012 shooting of Trayvon Martin in Florida. The unarmed 17-year-old, wearing such a sweatshirt, was killed by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer who said he acted in self-defense, and was acquitted by a jury in a 2013 tri-

al. The racially charged case transfixed the United States, and Zimmerman's act was condemned by LeBron James and his fellow Miami Heat players in a photograph in which they posed together in hoodies. "In hindsight, I should have used different examples," Cuban said on Twitter on Thursday. "I didn't consider the Trayvon Martin family, and I apologize to them for that. "Beyond apologizing to the Martin family, I stand by the words and substance of the interview," Cuban said.

Cuban's comments come at a particularly sensitive time for the NBA, which on Monday released a summary of the charges it plans to use to force the embattled Sterling and his wife, Shelly, to part with the club they have owned since 1981. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver has already banned Donald Sterling for life from league activities and fined him \$2.5 million over remarks to a woman friend chastising her for associating with black people in public and bringing black friends to Clippers games. In the weeks since the audio clip of Sterling talking to V Stiviano was released on gossip website TMZ, the scandal has hung over the Clippers and the league, with players around the NBA demanding Sterling's departure.

Silver set a hearing on the matter for June 3, when both parties will be able to provide evidence to support their cases. He has given Sterling until next Tuesday to respond to the charges, which include damaging the league by making racist comments against African Americans. When the Sterling scandal broke, Cuban condemned Sterling's comments as "abhorrent" and "obviously racist." Even so, he initially cautioned that to ban Sterling from the league would be a "very slippery slope" although he has since pledged his support to Silver. — AFP