

Sports

Return to number one at 36 was even beyond my dreams: Federer

One of the most stunning late-career runs witnessed in any sport

LONDON: If someone had told Roger Federer 13 months ago that reclaiming the world number one ranking would require three more grand slam titles and three Masters 1000s, even he might have declared it mission impossible.

Fast forward a year and a bit, however, and the 36-year-old is back at the summit—the oldest man to make it since the ATP rankings came into being in 1973. One of the most stunning late-career runs witnessed in any sport has seen Federer put together a sustained spell of brilliance few believed was possible when he missed half of the 2016 season with knee and back problems.

On Friday a 4-6 6-1 6-1 victory over Dutchman Robin Haase in the quarter-finals of the ABN AMRO tournament in Rotterdam guaranteed that the Swiss would rise to number one for the fourth time in his career.

Fourteen years after he first achieved it, this one felt extra special, said the 20-times grand slam champion. "Well it's a deep sense of satisfaction," Federer told a selected few reporters on a conference call hours after his milestone victory.

"A lot of work went into it, coming back from the injury obviously. Just having had the year that I've had, winning three slams, that's what it took to get the ranking. "I think I've shown resilience. I have a great team around me and we took a lot of good decisions in the last three years. I always planned for longevity and I never gave up that I could get back to winning ways, without ever dreaming of world number again to be honest, that was too far."

Federer took a wildcard for Rotterdam, knowing that a run to the semi-finals would knock Rafa Nadal off the top and become the oldest player, man or woman, to be world number one. Haase looked as

though he had not read the script when he took the first set but Federer was never going to let the opportunity pass him by—saying afterwards that it had been the perfect scenario to complete a fairytale comeback.

"I think it was great that I had to play for it this week," he said. "I just didn't just get it by Rafa losing somewhere or dropping points or me sitting on the sidelines like in 2012 when I was on holiday and got the ranking two weeks after Wimbledon.

"This way to play a match where you know that you are going to be world number one if you win it, in front of a crowd, is a great feeling." Incredibly Federer first became world number one in 2004 when he beat Juan Carlos Ferrero in the semi-final of the Australian Open before going on to take the title.

On that occasion he stayed there for 237 weeks. "The goal (this time) was to be world number one for a week, that's plenty for me," he said. "If it's more, great, I'll take it. If I play well, good things will happen. "It's the ultimate achievement in our sport to get the number one ranking, it just doesn't come easy."

While Federer's vast army of fans took to social media to laud a player who continues to defy time, the man himself was just happy to be part of good day for Swiss sport. "I was just watching the Olympics, got distracted in a good way, because Switzerland won three medals today," he said. "Was watching the highlights and that helped me, it distracted me, gave me a great motivation." Asked to compare the 22-year-old Federer to the 36-year-old model, he said the older version had the edge. "I hope I will win—the 36-year-old me!" he said. "We hit harder now, you have less time." — Reuters

“ Well it's a deep sense of satisfaction ”



ROTTERDAM: Switzerland's Roger Federer celebrates after victory over Netherlands Robin Haase in their quarter-final singles tennis match for the ABN AMRO World Tennis Tournament in Rotterdam on Friday. — AFP

Watson thrives on Hollywood vibe

LOS ANGELES: Bubba Watson's bid for a third US PGA Tour title at Riviera Country Club isn't the only thing occupying his time this week. Watson raised eyebrows before the Genesis Open started when he said he'd withdraw if an unfavorable tee time might cause him to miss the NBA All-Star celebrity game, across town at Staples Center on Friday evening.

In the end, he didn't need to worry. Watson teed off at 7:43 a.m. and produced a second-round 70 that left him three shots off the clubhouse lead of Patrick Cantlay with plenty of time to spare. "Hoping my car doesn't break down so we get there," Watson said. "So I can say I played or sat on the bench. "It's just the atmosphere," he added. "Saying I sat on the bench at Staples Center, seeing some of the greats, some of the people that I love and have friendships with, it will be a blast."

The NBA's All-Star festivities aren't the only extra-curricular attractions taking up Watson's time in star-studded Los Angeles. He said he "may or may not have" taped a show with US comedy icon Jay Leno. He visited

comedian and chat show host Ellen DeGeneres and watched a taping of TV sitcom "The Big Bang Theory".

"It's Hollywood," Watson said. "Do stuff! Let's have some fun and enjoy life." All the activity hasn't seemed to hurt Watson's on-course performance. He leapt up the leaderboard on Friday with a run of five birdies in six holes in the middle of his round before a couple of late miscues slowed his progress. "It was just a good stretch of holes," said Watson, who teed off on 10 and bogeyed the 15th before rolling in an eight-footer for birdie at the par-three 16th.

"Eighteen I birdied yesterday, birdied it today. And number one somehow I made another seven-footer for a birdie. "Then made a nice recovery out of the rough there on two, which was my 11th hole, made about a 12-, 15-footer. So it's just making the putts at the right time."

"Then I missed a short one that I felt would go one way and it decided to go the other way. That's golf." Watson, 39, is coming off a disappointing 2016-17 season in which he dropped out of the top 100 in the world rankings.

The two-time Masters champion missed the cut at Augusta National last April. But Watson says he's now healthy and ready to contend. Riviera, where he won in 2014 and in 2016 — the most recent of his nine US PGA Tour titles—would seem an ideal spot for him to do so. "Anybody that's won at a place, they love it," Watson said. "You get energized." — AFP

Woods misses cut at Riviera after eight bogeys

CALIFORNIA: A struggling Tiger Woods failed to make the cut at the Genesis Open in California on Friday as he had eight bogeys in a round of five-over-par 76. The disappointing play left the 14-times major champion at six-over 148, four strokes over the projected cut of +2.

"I've just got to play more tournaments," said Woods, making his second start of the PGA Tour season after a year-long absence following back surgery. Britain's Graeme McDowell and American Patrick Cantlay shared the clubhouse lead at seven-under 135.

Northern Ireland's McDowell shot a five-under 66, while Cantlay posted a 69. American Sam Saunders also was at seven-under through 15 holes with countryman Ryan Moore another stroke back after a 68.

Bad light forced play to be abandoned with about 20 players still to finish their second rounds. They will return today to finish. Still troubled by his driving and putting, Woods made only three birdies during his second round and had more bogeys than scores of par.

Despite his problems, the former world number one committed to play in next week's Honda Classic in Florida, marking the first time in three years he has entered tournaments on back-to-back weeks.

"I need some tournament rounds," Woods said of the event near his Florida home. Despite the problems, Woods said he



PACIFIC PALISADES: Tiger Woods plays his shot on the 13th hole during the second round of the Genesis Open at Riviera Country Club on Friday in Pacific Palisades, California. — AFP

believed he was progressing in his comeback. "I haven't played golf in years," he said. "I'm starting to come back and it's going to take a little time. I am progressing, I'm starting to get a feel for tournament golf again. I just need to clean up my rounds."

Woods' troubles began on the front nine and went downhill when he had birdies around a bogey at the fourth hole before three bogeys in four holes from the sixth left him at two-over. A birdie at 10 appeared to give him fresh hope, but it did not last.

"I thought I could pump a drive down there at 11 and get to it with an iron and turn the tide around and play a good solid back nine," Woods said. "But I didn't do it." Three successive bogeys and another at 16 followed, wiping out any hope of salvaging the round.

Poor putting did not help. "Today was the first day I felt bad with a putter this year," Woods said.

"I didn't feel very good when I was warming up about putting." — Reuters

KFH renews partnership with Kuwaiti Olympic champion, Al-Mudhaf

KUWAIT: Kuwait Finance House (KFH) renewed its sponsorship to the Kuwait's national team trap shooter, Khaled Al-Mudhaf during the 2018-2019 season. This comes as part of the bank's social responsibility and efforts to support the youth, particularly those talented people who raise Kuwait's flag in the international forums and championships.

The Olympic champion Khaled Al-Mudhaf received sev-

eral gold medals in different shooting championships at the GCC and Asia levels. He won an Olympic seat and participated in Brazil's Olympic Games.

KFH's sponsorship and strategic partnership with Al-Mudhaf reflects the interest in supporting the national players to participate in prominent international, regional, and local tournaments. Such players attract positive attention to their country through their achievements.

Meanwhile, Al-Mudhaf valued KFH's sponsorship applauding the Bank's outstanding role in achieving the social responsibility.

It is worth noting that KFH had inked a significant strategic agreement to support the youth in collaborating with the Ministry of State for Youth Affairs. This agreement embodies the bank's keenness to recognize those who contribute in raising the Kuwaiti flag high in the international forums and championships, while confirming its instrumental role in the corporate social responsibility.



Al-Mudhaf receiving the partnership agreement from a KFH official.