

25 Reputations burnished, others buffeted at 'best World Cup ever'

26 Justin Smoak homers twice as Blue Jays crush Red Sox

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Kerber stuns Serena in Wimbledon final

Weary Nadal bows out of Wimbledon with pride



LONDON: Germany's Angelique Kerber (L) holds the winner's trophy, the Venus Rosewater Dish, after her women's singles final victory over US player Serena Williams on the twelfth day of the 2018 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, yesterday. Kerber won the match 6-3, 6-3.—AFP

LONDON: Angelique Kerber became the first German woman to win Wimbledon for 22 years as the 11th seed shattered Serena Williams' bid for Grand Slam history with a shock 6-3, 6-3 victory in yesterday's final.

Kerber avenged her defeat against Williams in the 2016 Wimbledon title match, overwhelming the seven-time champion with a stunning 65-minute upset on Centre Court. "I knew I had to play my best tennis against a champion like Serena," Kerber said.

"It was my second chance to play in the final. I think I'm the next one after Steffi who won. That's amazing." Williams had hoped to equal Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles by winning her first major prize since becoming a mother in September.

The 36-year-old, who last won a Grand Slam at the 2017 Australian Open, went into the final as the title favourite, even though she was playing only the fourth tournament of her post-pregnancy comeback.

But instead world number 10 Kerber sprang a huge surprise, making her Germany's first female champion at the All England Club since Steffi Graf in 1996. "It's obviously disappointing but I am just getting started," said an emotional Williams after losing in the Wimbledon final for the first time since 2008. "For all you mums out there I was playing for you. I really tried." Graf helped Kerber get her game on track earlier in the her career, so it was

an especially sweet moment for the 30-year-old to follow in her footsteps at Wimbledon.

Kerber had endured a significant slump last year after winning her previous major titles at the Australian and US Opens in 2016. But, back to her best on the grass at Wimbledon, she needed only 11 winners and one ace to deny an oddly nervous Serena, who contributed to her own downfall with a whopping 24 unforced errors, compared to only five from Kerber.

In the first Wimbledon final for 41 years to feature two women 30 or older, Serena was cheered on by her friend the Duchess of Sussex, golf legend Tiger Woods and Formula One ace Lewis Hamilton. Left needing several life-saving operations to deal with the threat of blood clots after Olympia's birth, Williams was unable to walk for six weeks and even now is still haunted by harrowing flashbacks to that period.

Winning Wimbledon with Olympia at the tournament with her was supposed to be the crowning glory of her return to the top. But, foreshadowing the pain to come, Serena's 30th Grand Slam final got off to a rocky start as she dropped her serve with four unforced errors in the opening game.

Play had started two hours late due to the conclusion of Novak Djokovic's win over Rafael Nadal in the men's semi-finals, and it was Serena who looked more

affected by the delay. She briefly hit back, breaking to love in the fourth game, but then produced another error-strewn effort, including two double faults, to gift a 4-3 lead to Kerber.

Although Williams was on a 20-match winning run at Wimbledon and had lost only one set en route to the final, she was completely out of sorts, spraying wild groundstrokes wide and again.

On break point, the left-hander landed the knockout blow with a fierce forehand winner down the line that left Williams grasping in vain to reach it.

When Williams made another mistake to lose the next game, she gestured to her coaching team with a look of despair. Her agony only increased with a woeful volley that flew long to put Kerber within two points of the title. Moments later, Serena's misery was complete as a tame return left Kerber wiping away tears of joy.

Earlier, Rafael Nadal said he was proud and had nothing to reproach himself for after losing a top-quality Wimbledon semi-final to great rival Novak Djokovic yesterday. The two-day, five-hour-15-minute match of breathtaking shotplay and tiny margins between two giants of modern tennis ended 6-4 3-6 7-6(9) 3-6 10-8 in Djokovic's favour.

"Nothing to complain. I think I played a great match. I have not much more inside me. I give it my best," the 32-

year-old Spanish world number one said. "I think I did a great work. It is difficult to come back after injuries for a long time and have these kind of results, so I am proud of myself." Nadal, who won the French Open for the 11th time last month, spent much of 2016 out of action with a wrist injury. He has won the Wimbledon title twice but last reached the final in 2011 and has since struggled at the All England Club with a series of losses to lower-ranked players. It was his 52nd match against Djokovic, 31, a rivalry dating back to 2006. Serb Djokovic leads the head-to-head 27-25. "I can say he deserve (the win), because he deserve it. In my opinion, he deserve it. I deserve it, too. Both of us deserve it," Nadal said wearily.

"As I say the other day against Del Potro, anyone could win. Today I say the same. The other day was for me, today was for him. That's it." Argentine Juan Martin del Potro stretched Nadal to five sets in the quarter-finals. "These kind of matches between probably two great players, playing so well both of us, anything could happen. That's it. Today was for him. Well done," Nadal said.

"Played great. Semi-finals, after a while without being there. Winning some great matches, especially in that quarter-finals against Del Potro. Today was another great match." Nadal said he regretted losing an opportunity to win another major title. "But that's it. Nothing else. I go for holidays proud of the things that I'm doing." —Agencies

Hazard and Belgium too good for England in WCup play-off

SAINT PETERSBURG: Belgium achieved their best World Cup finish as goals from Thomas Meunier and Eden Hazard secured a 2-0 victory over England in yesterday's third-place playoff in Saint Petersburg.

Meunier, who missed the semi-final loss to France due to suspension, scored after just four minutes before Hazard grabbed a late second as Belgium eclipsed the side that came fourth at the 1986 edition.

Belgium have now defeated England twice in a fortnight, having waited 82 years to beat them before winning 1-0 in their group stage encounter. Gareth Southgate's men were forced to settle for England's joint best performance at

a World Cup abroad, matching that of the 1990 generation. He made five changes to the team beaten 2-1 by Croatia in the last four, as England fielded their youngest World Cup line-up in history—with an average age of 25 years and 174 days. Phil Jones, Danny Rose, Eric Dier, Fabian Delph and Ruben Loftus-Cheek all came into the side, while Belgium boss Roberto Martinez recalled Meunier and handed a start to Youri Tielemans.

Paris Saint-Germain defender Meunier made a quick impression by firing Belgium in front following an attack started by Romelu Lukaku. The Manchester United forward released Nacer Chadli down the right into space behind the England defence, and his cross was turned home by Meunier who stepped in front of a static Rose. Jordan Pickford readjusted his body superbly to deny Kevin De Bruyne a second time, the Everton goalkeeper clawing away the ball after a sizeable deflection off Kieran Trippier. Eden Hazard sought to exploit the spaces at every opportunity, the Belgium captain linked up intelligently with Tielemans on the edge of the area but was blocked off as he tried to pull the trigger.

England slowly worked their way into the contest as Loftus-Cheek headed straight at

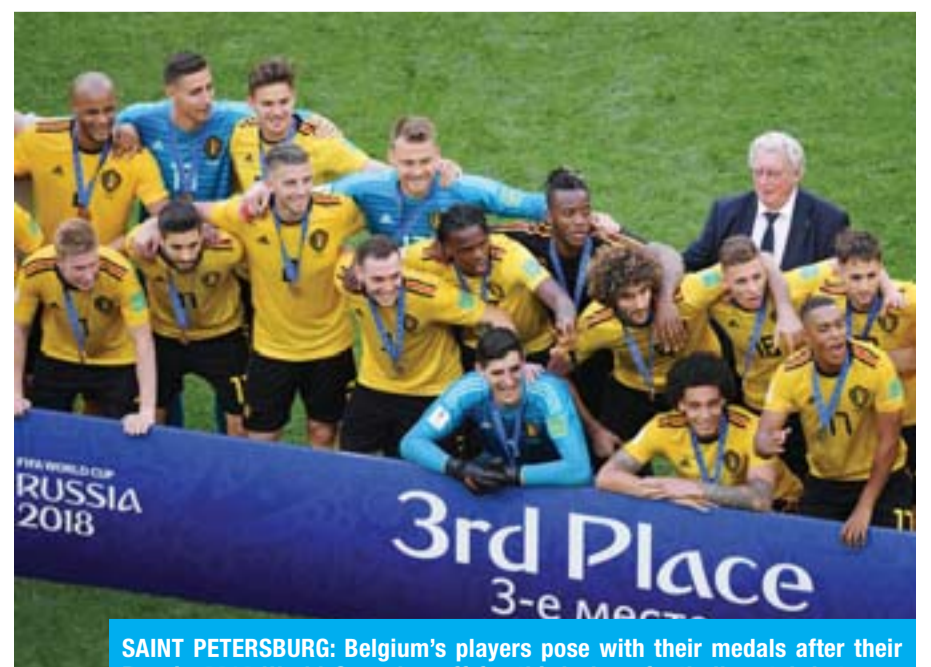
Thibaut Courtois on 15 minutes. Harry Kane blew a terrific chance to add to his six goals in Russia, the favourite for the Golden Boot scuffing harmlessly wide after an inviting lay-off from Raheem Sterling. Toby Alderweireld, one of six Tottenham players on the pitch, then hooked just over after a mishit Tielemans shot dropped to the Belgium defender at a corner.

Belgium lost Chadli to a hamstring injury before half-time, while Southgate introduced Marcus Rashford and Jesse Lingard at the break for Sterling and Rose.

Their pace and directness gave England renewed vigour, with Lingard volleying across goal just out of the reach of a lunging Kane. They received a let-off when Lukaku failed to control a defence-splitting pass from De Bruyne, allowing Pickford to charge off his line to smother.

And it looked as though Dier was going to draw England level when he lifted the ball over Courtois, only for Alderweireld to race back to clear off the line.

With England pushing forward, Meunier nearly produced one of the goals of the tournament, his crisp volley from a Dries Mertens cross drawing an excellent one-handed stop from Pickford.—AFP



SAINT PETERSBURG: Belgium's players pose with their medals after their Russia 2018 World Cup play-off for third place football match between Belgium and England at the Saint Petersburg Stadium in Saint Petersburg yesterday.—AFP