

Sports

Battling Murray crashes out as Federer, Nadal fight on

Wozniacki through to second round with win

MELBOURNE: A battling Andy Murray bowed out of the Australian Open at the first hurdle yesterday, but it was business as usual for ruthless Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal who joined Caroline Wozniacki in round two. The Scottish five-time Melbourne Park finalist gave it everything he had and showed glimpses of the form that won him three Grand Slams, but his ailing body let him down during a gutsy 6-4, 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-7 (4/7) defeat to 22nd seed Roberto Bautista Agut.

Murray tearfully revealed before the tournament that he was in constant agony from a hip injury and planned to retire this year. The 31-year-old hopes to end his career at Wimbledon, but has admitted the Australian Open could be his last event, unless he has a late change of heart.

"Amazing. That was incredible, thank you so, so much to everyone that came out tonight," he said after being given a rapturous send-off. While his tournament ended in despair, Swiss master Federer, six years older than Murray, continued his march towards a record seventh Australian Open title.

He swept past Uzbek Denis Istomin 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 said he was in "disbelief" that he was the double defending champion at his age and vowed to give his all to make it three in a row.

"I'm going to try everything possible (to win again) and leave it all on the court," said the world number three. His long-time rival Nadal, who cut short his 2018 season to have surgery on a foot injury, showed no mercy to Australian wildcard James Duckworth in his opening round clash.

The 17-time Grand Slam winner cruised through 6-4, 6-3, 7-5 and said it was an important victory. "Not easy to come back after a lot of months, especially against a player playing super aggressive on every point," said the 2009 Australian champion, who showed

no sign of any injury worries. "The energy I feel in this place is fantastic."

The second seed is bidding to become the first man in the Open era, and only the third in history along with Roy Emerson and Rod Laver, to win each Grand Slam on two or more occasions. Fifth seed Kevin Anderson progressed, as did NextGen Finals champion Stefanos Tsitsipas. But ninth seed John Isner became the first top seed to crash out.

World number three Wozniacki, who made her Grand Slam breakthrough in Melbourne last year, opened her defence with a convincing 6-3, 6-4 win over Belgium's Alison van Uytvanck. It was an emotional win for the Dane who is struggling with rheumatoid arthritis and she was in tears afterwards.

"Last year I had some special memories and just to be able to be back out here on Rod Laver Arena is something extremely special and emotional," she said.

GOOD TEST

Second seed and 2016 champion Angelique Kerber was also impressive, breezing past Slovenia's Polona Hercog 6-2, 6-2. Maria Sharapova, a winner at Melbourne in 2008, signalled her intent with a rare 6-0, 6-0 double bagel demolition of Britain's Harriet Dart.

Playing in her 15th Australian Open, the three-time finalist said she was pleased to go through so easily as she battles back from injuries. "I'm still working through some painful days. But, you know, I felt like I did all the right things today in order to get through that match," said the Russian.

Fifth seeded Sloane Stephens, the 2017 US Open champion who struggled in her warm-up tournaments in Brisbane and Sydney, got back to business with an easy two-set win against fellow American Taylor Townsend.



MELBOURNE: Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki hits a return against Belgium's Alison Van Uytvanck during their women's singles match on day one of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

Eleventh seed Aryna Sabalenka, widely tipped as a potential future champion, also safely negotiated round one on a hot day. But Germany's 14th seed Julia Goerges was knocked out, as was former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko.

Britain's Katie Boulter, meanwhile, created a slice of history by becoming the first woman to win in a third set tiebreak—a new rule introduced to the Open this year, beating Russia's Ekaterina Makarova 6-0, 4-6, 7-6 (10/6). — AFP

Sharapova says passion undimmed as she makes point

MELBOURNE: Maria Sharapova said her passion for tennis remained undimmed yesterday after a serving a 6-0, 6-0 "double bagel" to Britain's Harriet Dart in the Australian Open first round yesterday.

The veteran five-time Grand Slam winner, who has struggled with injury since returning from a doping ban in 2017, showed glimpses of her old ruthless self to dispatch Dart in just 63 minutes.

Dart left the court in tears but Sharapova was unapologetic when asked if she empathised with the young qualifier. "There is no time for that, I'm sorry to say," she said. "(Not) when you're playing the first round of a Grand Slam."

The 31-year-old Russian arrived at Melbourne Park as the 30th seed but said she still had the desire to succeed at a tournament she has won once, in 2008, and made the final a further three times. "There is nothing like going out and playing a match, especially in a Grand Slam, the feelings, the nerves, anticipation of a first round," she said. Sharapova, who won her first major at just 17, added that she was feeling positive after "tough times" in her career and was not ready to make way for a new generation.

'NOT IMMORTAL'

"The youngsters are coming up and they'll eventually take our place but not just yet, we want a little more time," she said. "I still really have the passion for this. I enjoy seeing the effort that I'm able to put in, and I think that hard work will always ultimately come to the surface."

The former world number one said Andy Murray's announcement that this year's tournament Down Under would be his last had underlined her determination to make the most of her time in the spotlight.

"You realise that you're not immortal, you're never



MELBOURNE: Russia's Maria Sharapova serves against Britain's Harriet Dart during their women's singles match on day one of the Australian Open tennis tournament in Melbourne yesterday. — AFP

going to play this forever, even though we've done it as long as we can think of," she said. However, she conceded her thoughts at times had turned to life after tennis. "At one point, life goes on and there's a lot of things to look forward to," she said. "You have family, children, other business ventures. To me, that doesn't make me sad, that makes me excited."

Sharapova was far from perfect against Dart, committing three double faults and eight unforced errors, but was never threatened by the 22-year-old Londoner. Dart made a hesitant start against her childhood idol.

Sharapova pounced on the Briton's weak second serve to repeatedly break her opponent, bringing up

the first set bagel after 31 minutes. The second set followed the same pattern, with Dart finally put out of her misery trying to save match point when she hit a return wide despite having an open court before her.

"Despite my opponent not having the best day, you still have to get the job done," Sharapova said. Sharapova has served up double bagels at least five times on tour, including two in a row at the 2013 Australian Open against fellow Russian Olga Puchkova and Misaki Doi of Japan in the first two rounds of the tournament. She was on the wrong side of the ledger when American Lindsay Davenport beat her 6-0, 6-0 at Indian Wells in 2005. — AFP

Halep faces tricky test against Kanepi in Melbourne opener

MELBOURNE: Simona Halep begins her Australian Open campaign against Kaia Kanepi today in a rematch of their US Open meeting which the world number one lost in raights sets. The Romanian has struggled for form and fitness since that first-round defeat at Flushing Meadows last year and comes into the year's first Grand Slam short of preparation after a back injury ended her 2018 season prematurely.

Defeat to local hope Ashleigh Barty in the opening round of the Sydney International last week means Halep has played only one match ahead of a potentially tricky test against world number 71 Kanepi.

The top seed has recovered fully from a herniated disk that she aggravated at the China Open in September, but said that she was feeling a bit behind the curve. "I'm motivated. But it's a little bit different because last year I had about 10, 15 matches before Melbourne; now I have one, which I lost," said Halep, who reached the final at Melbourne Park last year.

"I took the risk staying home a little bit longer. I rested because I felt like I'm exhausted after those tournaments and also the year that I had." Kanepi will be out to prove that her victory over the French Open champion was no fluke but the 33-year-old could be short of match practice herself, having not featured since reaching the fourth round in New York after aggravating an existing injury. Serena Williams, who resumes her quest for a record-equaling 24th Grand Slam title, plays unseeded German Tatjana Maria at Rod Laver Arena in the second match today. Top seed Novak Djokovic, who made a spectacular return to form last year and won the last two Grand Slams, takes on American Mitchell Krueger in the evening session. — Reuters

Islanders jump on Lightning early in win

BROOKLYN: The New York Islanders scored three times in the first five minutes, the fourth line scored twice, and Thomas Greiss made 38 saves in a 5-1 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning in Brooklyn, N.Y., on Sunday. Brock Nelson, Cal Clutterbuck, Devon Toews, Casey Cizikas and Josh Bailey scored for the Islanders, who won for the 11th time in 14 games, moved to 17-7-4 against the Eastern Conference and became the first Metropolitan Division team to beat Tampa Bay in 13 games this season. Greiss earned his 13th win, Matt Martin had two assists, and line-mates Cizikas and Clutterbuck added assists as the Islanders broke a stretch of playing in five straight one-goal contests. The Islanders are 6-0-0 in the second game of back-to-backs. Ryan McDonagh scored Tampa Bay's goal, and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 23 saves. The Lightning had their three-game winning streak end and are 21-3-1 in their last 25.

HURRICANES 6, PREDATORS 3

Sebastian Aho scored a hat trick as Carolina thumped visiting Nashville, snapping the Predators' seven-game point streak. The result gave first-year Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour a win in his first game at the helm of the Hurricanes against Nashville coach Peter Laviolette, who was behind the Hurricanes' bench when Brind'Amour was captain of the 2006 Stanley Cup championship team. Saku

Maenalanen, Justin Williams and Lucas Wallmark also scored for the Hurricanes, who've won seven of their last eight games. Filip Forsberg scored twice and Colton Sissons had a goal for Nashville. Roman Josi had two assists.

JETS 4, DUCKS 3 (OT)

Bryan Little scored with 11 seconds left in overtime to lift Winnipeg over visiting Anaheim. Blake Wheeler, Patrik Laine and Ben Chiarot also scored for the Jets, and Connor Hellebuyck made 28 saves. The Ducks lost their 11th straight game (0-7-4). They have led in six of the past eight losses, including three times by multiple goals. Carter Rowney assisted on all three goals for the Ducks, as Brian Gibbons, Rickard Rakell and Andrew Cogliano scored.

FLAMES 7, COYOTES 1

Mark Giordano collected two goals and one assist to move into the top 10 on the franchise's all-time points list in host Calgary's rout of Arizona. In his 800th career game, Giordano moved ahead of Jim Peplinski on Calgary's all-time point list with his 425th. Goalie Mike Smith made 22 saves for the Western Conference-leading Flames, who are riding a five-game winning streak and snapped Arizona's three-game winning streak. Matthew Tkachuk scored twice and Johnny Gaudreau and Sean Monahan both netted one goal and one assist for the Flames, while Jordan Osterle scored Arizona's only goal. Coyotes goalie Adin Hill, who grew up in Calgary, made 19 saves.

BLUE JACKETS 7, RANGERS 5

Cam Atkinson scored the tiebreaking goal with six minutes left in the second period, Nick Foligno scored twice and Columbus held on against visiting New York. Atkinson snapped a 2-2 tie when he scored his 26th goal on a deflection of defenseman Zach Werenski's shot from the right point. It was one of three goals in the second period



COLUMBUS: Nick Foligno #71 of the Columbus Blue Jackets celebrates after beating Alexander Georgiev #40 of the New York Rangers for a goal during the second period on Sunday at Nationwide Arena in Columbus, Ohio. Columbus defeated New York 7-5. — AFP

for the Blue Jackets, who improved to 11-3-1 in their last 15 games and 8-3-1 in their last 12 games against the Rangers. Mats Zuccarello scored twice for the Rangers, who lost for the sixth time in seven games.

CANUCKS 5, PANTHERS 1

Ben Hutton's goal at 7:20 of the third period sparked

Vancouver over visiting Florida. Hutton gave the Canucks a 2-1 lead as he one-limed Troy Stecher's long rebound past Florida goaltender Roberto Luongo. The Canucks then added three more goals en route to their first win in four games. Loui Eriksson led the Canucks with a goal and two assists. The Panthers, who got their goal from Frank Valtrano, bore their sixth straight loss. — Reuters