

Sports

'Respect, nothing else': Kyrgios sets the tone for Nadal Wimbledon blockbuster

'I get along with people. Some people I don't get along with'

LONDON: Nick Kyrgios set the tone Tuesday for a Wimbledon blockbuster with bitter rival Rafael Nadal by stating: "We have mutual respect — but that's about it." Kyrgios opened his Wimbledon campaign with a 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 7-6 (12/10), 0-6, 6-1 win over fellow Australian Jordan Thompson. However, all attention was on his second round duel with Nadal after the two-time champion defeated Japanese qualifier Yuichi Sugita 6-3, 6-1, 6-3.

"Not sure that me and Rafa could go down to the Dog and Fox and have a beer together. I don't know him at all. I know him as a tennis player," said Kyrgios. "I get along with people. Some people I don't get along with. "We have a mutual respect — but that's about it, I think." Nadal and Kyrgios have been involved in a bitter war of words this year since the Australian defeated the 18-time major champion in a stormy clash in Acapulco. It was the Australian's third win over Nadal in six meetings.

Nadal accused his opponent of "lacking respect" after serving underarm, while Kyrgios described the Spaniard as "super salty" and being his "polar opposite". Kyrgios then became involved in a slanging match with Toni Nadal, the world number two's uncle and former coach, who lambasted the Australian for his on-court behavior. Toni Nadal suggested it was the action of a man who lacks education. "Bro, I did 12 years at school you idiot — I'm very educated. I understand you're upset that I beat your family," Kyrgios hit back in an interview. However, Nadal refused to add fuel to the fire on Tuesday ahead of today's clash.

"Being honest I'm too old for all this stuff. What I said I said. That's all. I'm not a guy who will be in a fight with anybody," he said. "I will keep doing things I love. After

tomorrow I will be back in this amazing place." Nadal later added: "My thoughts are very clear. I play against a top talent player, very dangerous player when he wants to play tennis.

"Normally against the best players, he wants to play tennis. When that happens, he's a very dangerous opponent." Kyrgios admitted he was excited about the chance to prove himself against Nadal. "I can't wait. As soon as the draw came out, I was super happy that I saw him in my section. "When you're a kid, you want to play the best players in the world on I think it's the best court in the world. "This is something that I can't take for granted. There's no guarantee I'm going to be here again in this position. "Could have an injury or something like that. I'm going to grasp with both hands, go out there, give it my best shot." Kyrgios, who famously stunned Nadal as a 144-ranked wildcard on his Wimbledon tournament debut in 2014, put in a typically raucous and charismatic display on Court Three on Tuesday.

In a match where he fired 23 aces and 63 winners, the 24-year-old argued with the umpire, slumped over the net and played dead. He also shaped to imitate a forward defensive cricket shot and celebrated a point by running around madly in a circle. After dropping the second set, he needed a medical timeout for a leg injury before attempting — and failing — to finish the third set with an underarm serve. He eventually took the set on an eighth set point before conceding an 18-minute fourth set in which he collected just five points. However, two breaks in a more composed decider settled the tie and set the stage for one of the most anticipated matches of the tournament. — AFP



LONDON: A combination of pictures created on July 3, 2019 shows Spain's Rafael Nadal (L) during his first round match on the second day of the 2019 Wimbledon Championships tennis tournament on July 2, 2019 and Australia's Nick Kyrgios (R) during his first round match on July 2, 2019 both at the All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London. — AFP

Future is now: Bernal being tipped for Tour greatness

BRUSSELS: Fast-emerging Colombian all-rounder Egan Bernal can take centre stage at the 2019 Tour de France in the absence of his injured Team Ineos leader Chris Froome with even the race organizers backing the 22-year-old for a tilt at the title.

Bernal joined Sky, now Ineos, in 2018 and on the back of an immediate win at the Tour of California was drafted into last year's Tour de France, where he vowed to learn everything he could from four-time winner Froome. Impressed with his astonishing progress, Ineos made Bernal team leader for May's Giro d'Italia but a fall ruled him out, and when Froome himself suffered a dreadful fall in June, Bernal's stock took a sharp rise.

"They've been talking about him since he won the Tour de L'Avenir two years ago," Tour de France chief Christian Prudhomme told AFP this week. "Then at Paris-Nice in March, Bernal took the yellow jersey and was presented with it by (all time great) Eddy Merckx! "It was a hugely significant moment, and made one think about what might come in the future, and now the future is coming, it's this July."

Prudhomme pointed out that it was 50 years since Merckx won his first Tour, and that he felt maybe Bernal could take up the baton the great Belgian once carried so bravely. "I also noted how marvellously polite he is," Prudhomme said of the 22-year-old. "Of course he's brilliantly talented too, there's no doubt about it. "There is the question of how will he do over three long weeks with the colossal pressure that you can't imagine until you actually have the yellow jersey on your back. I'm not sure how he might feel. "But I can tell you that last year, in the final week he was still there, at just 21 years old, helping Chris Froome at altitudes over 2000m."

Froome disciple

Once considered a pure climber, Bernal has proved he can cut it not only with the burlier riders in a rolling section in a cross-wind, but also in a time-trial, and seems to be able to preserve energy to close out key stages. A coach at his former team Androni Giocattoli, where he turned professional at 19, said of the Colombian: "An Egan Bernal comes along every twenty years". When Sky signed and raced him on the 2018 Tour AFP asked him what he expected from it. "I'm going to learn a lot," he said of joining the lineup that included Froome and Geraint Thomas. "I'm here with a good team, I'm with guys with a lot of experience. "I'm really attached to Froomey and I want to help him, make him proud.

"One day, when he's finished, maybe he'll see that I



Egan Bernal

learned from him and he will feel proud," Bernal said. "That's what I want." On Saturday, Bernal starts on his second major tour where he can become the youngest post-war winner of the Tour, 100 years after the introduction of the yellow jersey and 50 years after Eddy Merckx won his first Tour. He will also be just one of 176 riders from 22 eight-men teams on a fascinating journey that promises to stretch well beyond three weeks around France. — AFP

Smith-Schuster backs London Academy to produce NFL talent

LONDON: Pittsburgh Steelers star JuJu Smith-Schuster believes the NFL's ground-breaking academy in London could turn into a production line for British talent in American Football. Around 150 teenagers travelled to the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on Tuesday to take part in the final try-out for the first intake into the landmark NFL Academy, which is the first of its kind outside the United States and will start in September.

There have been five British-born players who have played roles on Super Bowl-winning teams, including Jay Ajayi with the Philadelphia Eagles just two seasons ago. But none of that group spent their entire childhood or teenage years in the United Kingdom, all benefitting from exposure to the NCAA college football that serves as a breeding ground for future NFL talent.

However, the NFL is becoming increasingly popular in the United Kingdom, with up to four regular-season games per year played in London since 2007. And, speaking in his role as an ambassador of the new Academy, Smith-Schuster sees encouraging signs that Britain has the potential to bring through genuinely homegrown players who can shine in the NFL.

"I see a lot of potential. One guy jumped higher than me in the trials," he told reporters after working with the youngsters during their trials. "There are a lot of guys who are out here who just don't know what they can achieve. "I didn't know how big it was in the UK until I came out here today." The trialists were put through their paces in a series of combine-style drills replicating the evaluation tests college football players are put through before entering the NFL draft. The lucky students, aged 16-18, who are selected for the Barnet and Southgate College-based Academy, will be given pathways to employment and further education, with the most talented potentially landing an opportunity to play college football in the States.

Attention to detail

Smith-Schuster is the Steelers' top wide receiver and in just his second season, he took the NFL by storm with 111 receptions for 1,426 yards and seven touchdowns. The 22-year-old's superb form last season earned a Pro Bowl nomination for the former second round draft pick from the University of Southern California.

While Britain's aspiring gridiron hopefuls aren't up to his high standards just yet, Smith-Schuster was impressed with the way they responded to his advice. "The biggest thing I took away is these guys, if they listen, the attention to details, they do the technique and they execute it," he said. "I was telling one guy how to adjust his 40 yard dash technique. He did and he was faster. It's just those little details.

"Hopefully one day they have a London team and they trade me here. That would be lit!" Former England rugby union international Christian Wade is already trying to make it in the NFL after signing a contract with the Buffalo Bills in April. He was back in London to help coach and mentor the Academy trialists and he agreed with Smith-Schuster that the outlook is promising. "There's great talent out there and the future is looking bright for everyone," Wade said. "This is a great opportunity for the guys in the UK, having this option now. "They are going to have two, three, four years to start developing the game, just the fundamentals. So they have an easier transition." — AFP

Sheikh Saad Olympic Shooting Academy of Clubs tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The first tournament of Sheikh Saad Olympic Shooting Academy of Clubs will be held from July 5th to 6th, 2019 and will be organized by Kuwait Shooting Sport Club. The tournament will have 10m Air Pistol and Rifle and Olympic Archery for beginners and juniors from the academy.

Secretary General of Kuwait and Arab Shooting Federations Obaid Al-Osaimi said the club pays close attention to beginners and juniors in order to bring up a new generation that is able to continue making achievements in the name of Kuwait. He said the board of directors approved the organization of several tournaments during the summer for new entrants in the academy. These are planned to be held in the main premise or at the club's Jahra and Sabahiya Youth Center branches.

Al-Osaimi said the board of directors is also working hard on making shooters of both genders comfortable to compete in order to reach outstanding international levels, besides bringing in coaches and specialists of the higher caliber in order to bring up a new generation of shooters according to international standards. A ceremony to distribute prizes to winners will be held on Sunday 14th July at the Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Olympic Complex at 7pm.



Obaid Al-Osaimi



Kuwaiti Olympic Committee vows limitless support for athletes

KUWAIT: President of the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee Sheikh Fahad Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah affirmed yesterday that Kuwaiti sports leaders will do everything possible to remove all snags facing the national champions on the international arenas. "The committee will put all resources at the disposal of the athletes, scheduled to partake in the World Beach Games, due in Qatar in October", said Sheikh Fahad

Nasser, as he emerged from a meeting with the two Karate champions, the brothers Salman and Mohammad Al-Musawi. All sports officials ought to shoulder the responsibility of supporting the karate champions, he added, hoping that the two brothers would qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics. Sheikh Fahad Nasser also visited headquarters of the national sports unions on Tuesday.

MLB to open India office in bid to gain a foothold

NEW DELHI: Major League Baseball plans to open an office in New Delhi that will focus on growing the game in cricket-obsessed India through fan engagement and baseball development. Well aware of the technical similarity of throwing, hitting and catching that link cricket and baseball, MLB is ready to showcase America's pastime with a game broadcast on Facebook each week in India through the end of the regular season. "The country has huge potential for us, and we want to make sure that India is an important part of the ever-growing

brand that is MLB," Jim Small, MLB Senior Vice President of International, said in a statement on Tuesday. As part of the initiative MLB said Million Dollar Arm, a contest that began as a reality TV show and was the basis of the 2014 movie of the same name, will run this year with thousands of participants competing to earn a tryout with an MLB team.

The MLB First Pitch grassroots program will also be introduced and give primary school children across New Delhi, Bangalore and Mumbai an opportunity to learn the sport through workshops led by MLB International coaches. Indian Premier League team Delhi Capitals' assistant coach Mohammad Kaif was present at the announcement and said he looked forward to introducing a new generation to baseball.

"Cricket and baseball have quite a few things in common. Growing up playing cricket, we always knew there was a similar sport played in the United States, but never imagined it would come to India one day," said former India cricketer Kaif. —Reuters