

## Sports

# Djokovic dispatches Fratangelo to book Kohlschreiber clash

## Kyrgios falls at first hurdle at Indian Wells

**INDIAN WELLS:** World number one Novak Djokovic shook off a nervy start to dispatch US qualifier Bjorn Fratangelo in straight sets Saturday to reach the third round of the ATP Indian Wells Masters. Djokovic, playing his first match since winning a record seventh Australian Open title in January, was less than sharp in conceding an early break to his 128th-ranked rival.

He broke back as Fratangelo served for the set to knot it at 5-5, and then raced to a 4-1 lead in the tiebreaker. Djokovic had to dig deep, however, when Fratangelo battled back to lead the tiebreaker 5-4. After a double fault and a forehand error from the 25-year-old American, Djokovic suddenly had a set point, and once he'd pocketed the set, the second went all his way. "To be honest, I was a bit nervous in the beginning," admitted Djokovic, who is going for a record sixth Indian Wells title. Djokovic, currently tied with Roger Federer on five wins in the California desert, can also tie world number two Rafael Nadal's record of 33 Masters 1000 titles.

"I haven't competed for over five weeks. I was a bit rusty in the first set. I was kind of waiting for him to do something with the ball rather than doing it myself. "I was lucky to get the first set. After that, things went better for me," added Djokovic, who loped over to share a word with US great Pete Sampras in the stands after wrapping up the victory in one hour and 29 minutes. Djokovic next faces German Philipp Kohlschreiber, a 6-4, 6-4 winner over Australian Nick Kyrgios. Kyrgios, seeded 31st, was coming off a scintillating run to the Mexico Open title in Acapulco, where he defeated Nadal, ninth-ranked John Isner and, in the final, third-ranked German Alexander Zverev.

Kyrgios said it wasn't a matter of an emotional let-down in the wake of his first title in over a year. "I didn't really have a problem getting up. I just didn't play well today," he said. "He's an incredible competitor," Kyrgios said. "He knows how to win tennis matches."

As men's seeds swung into action after first-round byes, third-seeded Zverev advanced when Slovakian foe Martin Klizan retired with an ankle injury with the German leading 6-3, 2-0.

Action opened on stadium court with 18-year-old Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime powering past Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas, 6-4, 6-2, for his first win over a top-10 player. In a battle of two ATP young guns, 58th-ranked Auger-Aliassime came out firing, and his aggression paid off with a victory over 20-year-old Tsitsipas, who shot to prominence with a victory over Federer at the Australian Open.

He moved into the top 10 for the first time with his runner-up finish to Federer in Dubai, where the Swiss great claimed a remarkable 100th career title. But Tsitsipas could find no answer to Auger-Aliassime, who broke early in the first to gain the upper hand and seized a 2-1 lead with the first of two breaks in the second. Auger-Aliassime saved all seven break points he faced-six of them in the first set. "It's unbelievable," Auger-Aliassime said. "I never expected to play that well today, to get my first top-10 win is special, against Stefanos who has been playing so well."

Auger-Aliassime, who next faces Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka, is one of four teens in the draw, along with countryman Denis Shapovalov, Alexei Popyrin and lucky loser Miomir Kecmanovic. Kecmanovic gained entry into the second round in place of injured fifth-



**INDIAN WELLS:** Novak Djokovic of Serbia plays a backhand against Bjorn Fratangelo of the United States during their men's singles second round match on day six of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden on March 09, 2019 in Indian Wells, California. — AFP

seed Kevin Anderson.

He made the most of his chance, beating Germany's Maximilian Marterer, 6-3, 6-2, to reach the third round.

At the other end of the age spectrum, 40-year-old Ivo Karlovic advanced with a 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) victory over 11th-seeded Croatian Borna Coric. — AFP



Waleed Al Khashti awarding a group of winners.



From the GulfRun race at Kuwait Motor Town Circuit.

## Zain awards winners of GulfRun Karting Endurance Race

**KUWAIT:** Zain, the leading digital service provider in Kuwait, awarded the winning teams of GulfRun's Karting Endurance Race as part of its strategic partnership of the 14th edition of GulfRun, the GCC's most popular motorsport event. The event, held at Kuwait Motor Town Race Circuit in Arifjan, in March.

Zain strongly believes in the important role the private sector plays in developing the youth and sports sectors in Kuwait. The company makes this concept a reality by sponsoring and supporting various major sporting events in Kuwait, including this regional event, as well as sponsoring and encouraging many Kuwaiti athletes who represent Kuwait in local, regional, and international arenas. Many of these athletes, who achieve great titles that Zain takes pride in, are motorsport champions.

GulfRun involved a Karting Endurance race, which was held at Kuwait's Motor Town Race Circuit over a continuous period of 24 hours. The activity witnessed tremendous success, gathering many enthusiasts of

this sport alongside the public. Zain awarded "Zain Karting Team" for winning the first place title, as well as awarding the winners of the second and third place titles.

GulfRun already kick-started with the sports cars show that took place at Murooj, where participants showcased their exquisite high-speed sports cars and thrilled visitors. In addition, the main GulfRun race, held at Bahrain International Circuit in the Kingdom of Bahrain, was a true test of the participants' motorsport skills, where they had the chance to take part in several training procedures in preparation for the final race that was extremely popular with professional and amateur racers alike.

Next March, GulfRun will feature the Karting Endurance race that will be held at the recently-opened Kuwait Motor Town Race Circuit in Arifjan, where it will continue over a period of 24-hours, offering racers, both professionals and amateurs, with an exciting and safe atmosphere to compete and win the

race title. The Karting Endurance race will also feature the participation of Zain's team.

Zain's support to GulfRun comes in line with its keenness on encouraging the various efforts that contribute to developing the Kuwaiti youth and sports sectors. The company puts the support of Kuwaiti sports at the forefront of its priorities under the umbrella of its Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy, and Zain's support of Kuwaiti champions results in many achievements that the company is proud of one year after another.

GulfRun is considered an ideal and safe alternative to street racing, which threatens the lives of many people, many of them young drivers. Motorsport enthusiasts are able to showcase their talents within professional and certified grounds at the Kuwait Motor Town Race Circuit and Bahrain International Circuit, in addition to having taken advantage of the opportunity to gain valuable insights with the help of qualified trainers and experienced professional instructors.

## Osaka turns tables on Mladenovic, Venus rallies at Indian Wells

**INDIAN WELLS:** World number one Naomi Osaka launched her Indian Wells WTA title defense with a 6-3, 6-4 victory in a grudge match against Kristina Mladenovic on Saturday. Osaka, whose second straight Grand Slam title at the Australian Open in January propelled her to the top of the rankings, was beaten by 65th-ranked Mladenovic in Dubai last month in her first match since she lifted the trophy in Melbourne.

Keen to avoid a repeat, Osaka marched through the opening set in 38 minutes, but she hit a speed bump as she was broken when serving for the match at 5-2 in the second. After Mladenovic held serve to narrow the deficit to 5-4, the Japanese player faced another break point before wrapping up the match after one hour and 21 minutes. "The last time I played her I lost, so anything's a bonus," Osaka said, adding that she felt a few butterflies before opening the first title defense of her career. Her surprise triumph at Indian Wells last year launched a 2018 campaign that would eventually include her first Grand Slam crown at the US Open.

"I've never been a defending champion before, that's new and I was really nervous," said Osaka, who booked a third-round meeting with American Danielle Collins, a 6-4, 6-1 winner over Kirsten Flipkens.

Seven-time Grand Slam champion Venus Williams pulled off the upset of the day, rallying from a set and two breaks down to topple third-seeded Petra Kvitova 4-6, 7-5, 6-4. "I just fought and tried my hardest," said Williams, currently ranked 36th in the world. "A double break is not ideal against a great server, especially a left-handed server," Williams said, adding that the secret to coming back was "just being in the moment". "I think I created some opportunities. I had some good points. I think she had a few tight points, and here we are."

She booked a third-round clash with fellow American Christina McHale, a 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 winner over 30th-seeded Russian Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova. Two-time Wimbledon champion Kvitova, who was runner-up to Osaka in Melbourne, appeared to have taken control of the stadium court slugfest when she broke Williams for a 4-3 lead in the third. But Williams immediately broke back and Kvitova soon found herself serving to save the match. She took a 40-15 lead in the final game, but two double faults, followed by a lucky netcord bounce for Williams gave the American a match point and Kvitova sailed a ball long to end matters after two hours and 27 minutes.

Williams pulled off the unlikely comeback despite failing to produce a single ace although she said her varying serve speeds were "what I needed to do". She was broken four times, but proved more consistent in the bruising baseline rallies. Kvitova fired 10 aces, but also had 10 double faults and while the Czech fired 38 winners to Williams's 15, her 56 unforced errors were more than double the American's 25.

"It was such a weird match," Kvitova said, calling it her worst of the year. "I took the first set. Suddenly I was leading in the second, but somehow I just gave her a chance again to be back in the match, and she took it. "I was so frustrated with myself from the half of the second set to the end, which shouldn't happen to me," she said.

There was disappointment, too, for 2011 winner Caroline Wozniacki, who fell 7-5, 2-6, 7-5 to 59th-ranked Russian Ekaterina Alexandrova. — AFP



## KAC sponsors 15th Special Olympics World Games tourney

**KUWAIT:** Kuwait Airways Corporation (KAC) announced sponsoring Kuwait Special Olympics national Team as an official carrier of the team that left on Friday from T4 aboard a KAC flight heading to Abu Dhabi to take part in the 15th Special Olympics World Games tourney held in UAE in the period of March 14-21. The team comprising of 86 players received swift service through 10 check-in counters.

In this regard, KAC's PR and media manager, Fayeze Al-Enezi said that this sponsorship is part of KAC's social responsibility activities and represents its keenness on supporting people with spe-

cial needs to represent Kuwait in international arenas. He added that KAC is also keen on encouraging young people with special needs to integrate with their peers in various sports, cultural and social fields. On her part, head of the Kuwaiti delegation and the chairperson of Al-Tomoooh Sport Club for Intellectual Disabilities and the manager of Kuwait Special Olympic Games, Rehab Boreesly expressed her joy with the new experience of taking part in the games along with 7,500 players from 192 countries. "This will be a unique experience for both the players and their parents", she underlined.

