

# Federer Joins Djokovic, Sharapova in 2nd Round in Australia



Roger Federer

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) - Roger Federer picked up where he left off at the Australian Open on a day when Maria Sharapova and Novak Djokovic helped ensure there were all kinds of comebacks.

Defending champion Federer beating Aljaz Bedene 6-3, 6-4, 6-3 in a night match, his first on Rod Laver Arena since clinching a career-reviving title here last year. The 19-time major winner has been met on court after wins here previously by tennis greats Laver, John McEnroe and Jim Courier.

On Tuesday night, he got something different. Comedian Will Ferrell stepped out of the crowd and, slipping into character as Ron Burgundy from the movie Anchorman, conducted the post-match interview.

As usual, the 36-year-old Federer stayed classy.

Six-time champion Djokovic and 2014 Australian Open winner Stan Wawrinka earlier made successful returns from injury layoffs with victories in their first matches since Wimbledon.

Sharapova barely missed a beat in her first match in Melbourne since a failed doping test here in 2016 resulted in a 15-month ban from tennis.

The five-time major winner recovered from an early break in the second set and closed out her 6-1, 6-4 victory over Tatjana Maria with an ace.

"It's been a couple of years since I've been back here - obviously I wanted to enjoy the moment," the 2008 Australian Open champion

said after blowing kisses to the crowd.

Former No. 1-ranked Kerber, the 2016 Australian Open winner, continued her resurgent run with a 6-0, 6-4 victory over Anna-Lena Friedsam to extend her streak to 10 consecutive wins.

"Something is going on with Australia and me," said former No. 1-ranked Kerber, who the Sydney International last week for her first title since the 2016 U.S. Open.

Djokovic tweaked his service motion while recovering from an injured right elbow, and used it to good effect in a 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 win over Donald Young.

Djokovic lost in the second round here last year, but won five of the previous six Australian Open titles.

Wawrinka, who had six months out after surgery on his left knee, beat Ricardas Berankis 6-3, 6-4, 2-6, 7-6 (2).

No. 4-ranked Alexander Zverev, No. 5 Dominic Thiem, No. 7 David Goffin, No. 19 Tomas Berdych advanced, but No. 20 Roberto Bautista Agut lost to Fernando Verdasco and former Wimbledon finalist Milos Raonic lost to Lukas Lacko.

No. 13 Sam Querrey restored some order for the U.S. men with a 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 win over Feliciano Lopez.

Madison Keys reversed a trend,

becoming the only one of the four American women who contested the U.S. Open semifinals four months ago to reach the second round in Australia.

No. 17-seeded Keys, the U.S. Open runner-up, advanced with a 6-1, 7-5 win over Wang Qiang and will be one of four American women in the second round.

Top-ranked Simona Halep had to save set points at 5-2 down in the first set, and badly twisted her left ankle early in the second, before beating teenage wild-card entry Destanee Aiava 7-6 (5), 6-1.

Halep next plays 2014 Wimbledon finalist Eugenie Bouchard.

Wimbledon champion Garbine Mugurza, No. 6 Karolina Pliskova, No. 8 Caroline Garcia, No. 9 Johanna Konta, No. 16 Elena Vesnina, No. 26 Agnieszka Radwanska, No. 28 Mirjana Lucic-Baroni and No. 29 Lucie Safarova advanced.

Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova lost 6-3, 4-6, 10-8 to Andrea Petkovic.

Sharapova was banned after testing positive for the drug meldonium when she was here in 2016, and finished last year ranked No. 60 following a return to Grand Slam tennis at the U.S. Open.

Sharapova will next play No. 14-seeded Anastasija Sevastova, who beat her at last year's U.S. Open.

# Greipel Claims Emotional Tour Down Under Stage Win



Tour de France cycling race - The 113-km (70.4 miles) Stage 21 from Chantilly to Paris, France - 24/07/2016 - Lotto Soudal rider Andre Greipel of Germany wins on the finish line.

BERLIN (Reuters) - German Andre Greipel snatched his 148th professional victory when he claimed an emotional win in the Tour Down Under opening stage on Tuesday.

The Lotto-Soudal rider, whose mother died last month, edged past Australian Caleb Ewan

with 50 meters left as world champion Peter Sagan of Slovakia took third place.

Greipel now has one more professional career victory than Briton Mark Cavendish, who is not taking part in the first World Tour (elite) race of the season.

# Mkhitarian Holds Key in United's Deal for Sanchez



Henrikh Mkhitaryan (10) vies for the ball.

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - This is getting very, very interesting. The late bid from Chelsea and Man City's exit from the deal aside, there's been another twist in this saga.

Manchester United's move for Alexis Sanchez appeared to be getting closer to completion but the agent of Henrikh Mkhitaryan, the suggested makeweight in the \$48 million deal between United and Arsenal, has thrown a spanner in the works.

Mino Raiola has told media that United's deal for Sanchez won't go through unless his client agrees to join Arsenal.

"Manchester United is not going to sign Sanchez unless Mkhi agrees to join Arsenal," Raiola said. "Sanchez is part of the Mkhi deal, not the other way around."

Wow. Okay. He's really doing this. Now, Mkhitaryan is a good player. You aren't named the best player in the Bundesliga and signed by Man United if

you're not. But we all know the Armenian playmaker has struggled this season and for the opening half of the 2016-17 campaign after arriving from Borussia Dortmund.

His agent suggesting that Mkhitaryan is the main prize in this deal is obvious from his point of view as he protects the interest of his client, but the rest of the world knows Alexis is the man everyone wants in January.

It is said that Mkhitaryan (who was left out of United's squad for the 3-0 win against Stoke on Monday due to the uncertainty around his future) would prefer a return to Dortmund but the Bundesliga giants aren't said to be willing to pay his wages.

Arsenal were interested in Mkhitaryan in the summer of 2016 but he decided to join United instead, but it would appear that getting \$48 million and Mkhitaryan for Sanchez, a player who has less than six months to run on his current contract, is a good deal for the Gunners.

Mkhitarian holds the key to United's Sanchez deal and it doesn't seem like he's in any rush to sort out his future. Could his delay hand Chelsea some time to try and sew up their own deal for Sanchez?

# Germany, Denmark Stunned in Euro Handball Thrillers

ZAGREB (Reuters) - Holders Germany have scraped a controversial 25-25 draw against Slovenia and Olympic champions Denmark suffered a shock 28-27 defeat by the Czech Republic in a pair of European handball championship classics.

The Germans booked a main round berth along with Spain and Macedonia, who ground out hard-earned wins against Hungary and Montenegro respectively, while the Danes left themselves work to do in their final preliminary pool match against the Spaniards.

After lengthy video-assisted deliberations, the officials awarded Germany a penalty on the buzzer for an infringement on the halfway line and Tobias Reichmann converted from seven meters amid a chorus of jeers from the Slovenia fans.

The outcome flattered Germany who were outplayed for much of



Men's EHF European Handball Championship - preliminary round Group D - Czech Republic v Denmark - Arena Varazdin, Varazdin, Croatia - January 15, 2018. Mikkel Hansen of Denmark in action with Leos Petrovsky and Pavel Horak of the Czech Republic.

their preliminary round contest in the Zagreb Arena and trailed by as many as six goals before the dramatic climax, which produced three goals in 13 frantic seconds.

Germany equalized only to fall behind again to a Blaz Janc goal with five seconds left, before Slovenia's Blaz Blagotinsek was adjudged to have deliberately encroached on an opposition

player looking to restart the game.

Reichmann held his nerve to deny the Slovenians, whose playmaker Miha Zarabec named Man of the Match after a dazzling display of speed and skill as he scored five goals and dished out a barrage of assists.

Germany winger Uwe Gensheimer led all scorers with seven goals and goalkeeper Silvio Heinevetter pulled off several superb saves in the second half.

The much-improved Czechs, who suffered a 32-15 drubbing by Spain in their opener, prevailed after a tense finish to their preliminary round game with the Danes thanks to eight goals by Ondrej Zdrhal.

Spain had to dig deep for a 27-25 victory over Hungary with four of their players netting four goals each, while Macedonia beat the Montenegrins 29-28 in a tense Balkan derby.

# Bundesliga Still Top of Leagues for Attendances

ZURICH (Reuters) - The German Bundesliga boasted the highest average attendances in Europe last season, once again edging the English Premier League, a report released has said.

The average attendance at a Bundesliga match in 2016/17 was 40,693, compared to 35,838

for England, the umbrella organization for European domestic leagues (EPFL) said.

Spain's La Liga was next with 27,609 followed by Italy's Serie A with 22,177 and France's Ligue 1 with 21,202.

Average attendances in Russia, which will host this year's World Cup, were a modest 11,415, just

below Portugal's 11,838.

Figures in some Eastern European countries made grim reading with an average attendance of 4,665 in Ukraine, 2,783 in Romania and 2,233 in Serbia.

Although the Bundesliga had the best figures, attendances have dropped since 2011/12 when the

average was 44,293. During the same period, the league has faced criticism that it has become too predictable with Bayern Munich winning five successive titles.

England boasted the fullest stadiums with an average occupancy of 96.5 percent last season compared to the Bundesliga's 64.7 percent.

# Dortmund Sign Swiss Defender Akanji From Basel

DORTMUND (Reuters) - Borussia Dortmund have signed defender Manuel Akanji from Swiss champions Basel on a four-and-a-half year contract, the eight-time German champions said. The Switzerland international

scored seven goals in over 50 appearances for Basel and helped them win the Swiss domestic double last season.

"He has already demonstrated at international and Champions League level that he can play

at the highest level in Europe. Nonetheless, we still see him as a defender who has potential for further development," Dortmund's sporting director Michael Zorc said.

The 22-year-old Akanji, who has four won caps for Switzerland,

featured in all Basel's Champions League group matches this season and is eligible to play for Dortmund in the Europa League.

"The discussions I've had with those responsible at Borussia Dortmund made me feel

comfortable. In that respect it was a decision of the heart. And I've always enjoyed the football they play in Dortmund," Akanji said.

Dortmund are fourth in the Bundesliga and face Hertha Berlin on Friday.