

Djokovic Eases Through, Serena Williams Withdraws From French Open



Serbia's Novak Djokovic plays a shot against Sweden's Mikael Ymer (not in frame) in the first round match of the French Open tennis tournament at the Roland Garros stadium in Paris, France.

PARIS (Dispatches) - World Number 1 Novak Djokovic has dominated his first round match at the French Open, sweeping aside Sweden's Mikael Ymer 6-0, 6-2, 6-3 in just 98 minutes. The Serb frequently used drop shots throughout the game, just as he did during his Rome title run last week. "I think it's a great variety shot, the drop shot. I think it's important tacti-

cally to have it and to use it at the right time so that you can keep your opponent always guessing what the next shot is," said Djokovic, who is seeking his 18th Grand Slam title at Paris. With the victory over Ymer, Djokovic improved his record this season to a stellar 32-1. The only defeat came in a disqualification earlier

this month at the US Open, where he hit a ball in frustration which struck the line judge on the neck.

No. 6 seed Serena Williams was forced to pull out of the French Open ahead of her second-round match against Bulgarian Tsvetana Pironkova on Wednesday because of an Achilles injury.

"I really wanted to give an effort here. It's my Achilles that didn't have enough to properly heal after the Open. I was able to get it somewhat better, but just looking long-term in this tournament, will I be able to get through enough matches? For me, I don't think I could," said the three-time Roland Garros winner. "(I'm) struggling to walk so that's a tell-tale sign that I should try to recover," she added.

Williams injured her Achilles tendon during her semifinal loss to Victoria Azarenka at the U.S. Open earlier this month. The 39-year-old tennis great, who is seeking a record-tying 24th Grand Slam title, skipped all the tune-up tournaments for the clay majors and practiced at the Mouratoglou Academy, but acknowledged she was "not

one hundred percent" as the French Open started.

Pironkova, 33, who has just returned to the Tour after three years' absence at the US Open and made an impressive run to the quarterfinals, receiving a walkover to the third round in Paris.

Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic survived a scare from Egyptian opponent Mayar Sherif after she came back from one set down to beat her opponent 6-7(9), 6-2, 6-4 to reach the second round.

The former world No. 1 is set to face a tougher challenge in the second round against 2017 champion Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia, who knocked out American Madison Brengle 6-2, 6-1.

Pliskova wasted eight set points in the opener but recovered quickly in the following two sets, serving out the contest on Court Philippe-Chatrier after two hours and 15 minutes.

The 24-year-old Sherif, who ranks 172 in the world, was the first Egyptian woman to appear in a Grand Slam main draw, while Pliskova, 27, is bidding for her first major title in her 33rd Grand Slam appearance.

Esteghlal Inch Closer to Contract With Alexander Nouri



Iranian-German coach Alexander Nouri

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Esteghlal football club from Iran has reportedly moved an inch closer to signing a contract with Iranian-German coach Alexander Nouri.

Esteghlal tried to bring Italian coach Andrea Stramaccioni back to the team but it didn't happen.

Esteghlal general manager Ahmad Saadatmand has announced that they have reached an agreement with Nouri and the club's

board of directors should finalize the deal.

Nouri, 41, started his coaching career in 2014 at the VfB Oldenburg and has also coached Werder Bremen, FC Ingolstadt and Hertha BSC.

Esteghlal was headed by Majid Namjoo Motlagh in the 2020 AFC Champions League after Farhad Majidi stepped down from his role in early September.

Spurs Edge Chelsea in League Cup Shootout



Tottenham players celebrate after beating Chelsea on penalties during the English League Cup fourth round soccer match between Tottenham Hotspur and Chelsea at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium in London, England, Sept 29, 2020.

LONDON (Reuters)- Tottenham Hotspur overcame visitors Chelsea 5-4 in a penalty shootout to progress in the League Cup following a 1-1 home draw in their fourth round clash.

Chelsea appeared to be heading into the quarter-finals thanks to a 19th-minute strike from Timo Werner but Erik Lamela forced a shootout with an equalizer in the 83rd minute, finishing from close range after controlling a cross from debutant Sergio Reguilon.

In the shootout, Chelsea's Mason Mount struck the post to miss the decisive fifth penalty after every other spot kick had been converted.

Germany forward Werner scored his first goal for Chelsea in his fourth appearance, lashing the

ball into the net from the edge of the area after receiving a cut-back from Cesar Azpilicueta.

Chelsea's new goalkeeper Edouard Mendy had a confident display in his first game since switching from Stade Rennes, making a good save to keep out a vicious shot from Spurs' Spanish left back Reguilon in the second half.

But Mendy was finally beaten in the 83rd minute when Reguilon turned in the box and found Lamela, who controlled the ball at the far post before netting from close range to force the shootout in which Tottenham prevailed.

The victory was revenge for Spurs for a 2019 League Cup semifinal second-leg defeat to Chelsea on penalties.

Getafe, Valencia Win in La Liga Matchday 4

MADRID (Dispatches) -- Getafe produced an impressive display of counter-attacking football to beat Betis 3-0 in the fourth round of games in La Liga on Tuesday night.

Although Betis had over 70 percent of the possession in the first half, they were 3-0 down at the break after Angel Rodriguez scored twice and Marc Curcurella netted Getafe's other goal.

Angel's first goal was an overhead kick which was originally ruled out for offside, but reinstated after the referee consulted the VAR.

Curcurella doubled Getafe's lead with a powerful shot into the corner of the net in the 38th minute and Angel rounded off the scoring with his second of the night after Betis lost possession in midfield.

Betis' horrible night was completed eight minutes from time when Alissa Mandi was sent off for two yellow cards to leave his side to play out the final minutes with 10 men.

The round of games kicked off with Valencia producing a solid defensive display to take all three points from their visit to San Sebastian with a 1-0 win away to Real Sociedad.

Chinese Swimmer Breaks Asian Record in Women's 100m Butterfly

QINGDAO, China (Xinhua) -- Chinese swimmer Zhang Yufei broke the Asian record in the women's 100m butterfly in 55.62 seconds at the Chinese national swimming championships.

Zhang was 0.45 second faster than the former Asian record holder, Olympic champion Liu Zige, who has kept it for 11 years. There is only a 0.14-second difference between Zhang's new record and

the world record held by Swedish Sarah Sjöström.

"It was beyond my imagination. I had thought the best result would be around 55.8 seconds," said Zhang.

"This is the first major tournament in the last 11 months because of the epidemic. I know I can swim faster this time and want to see how fast I could be," said the bronze medalist of the world championships.

Zhang wants to improve her time further in 200m butterfly after the championships.

"The Tokyo Olympics were postponed, and this is good for me. Now I have more time to prepare and will try to show my best in the Olympics," she said.

The 22-year-old swimmer also broke the national record of the women's 100m freestyle in 52.90 seconds on Sunday.

Iranian Ali Alipour Joins Portuguese Side Maritimo



TEHRAN (Dispatches) -- Ali Alipour, former Persepolis striker, has joined Portuguese team Maritimo.

"I am very happy and excited to sign for Maritimo," Alipour said.

"It will be a new experience for me. I want to help the team achieve their goals. I want to score a lot of goals," he said.

UEFA Rejects Belgium FA's Proposal to Allow Fans Back

BRUSSELS (AP) - UEFA has rejected a proposal from Belgium to allow fans back into the King Baudouin stadium as early as next month for a friendly match against Ivory Coast, the Belgian soccer federation said.

After setting up a protocol in cooperation with Brussels authorities, the federation had hoped to allow some 11,000 supporters back while respecting COVID-19 social distancing measures.

"Unfortunately, UEFA considers that the Red Devils' next match against Ivory Coast on Oct. 8 is premature to apply



this protocol," the federation said. "The match will therefore be played in an empty stadium. But everything is now ready."

Federation head Peter Bossaert said UEFA's decision is not limited to Belgium and is implemented at European level.

"Hopefully we can have an audience in November for our three home games," he said. "We are ready."

Belgium will play a friendly game at home against Switzerland in November before hosting England and Denmark in the Nations League.

Kenyans to Headline Valencia Marathon in December

NAIROBI (Xinhua) -- Kenya's Boston and Chicago marathon champion Lawrence Cherono will lead the 2020 Valencia Marathon assault, organizers confirmed on Wednesday.

Cherono will take on Ethiopians Birhanu Legese, holder of the third-fastest time of 2:02:48 in marathon history and Kinde Atanaw, the race defending champion and current record holder for the Valencian course in a race slated for December 6.

"I feel great that I will finally compete this year after the corona-

virus shattered by season, including my Olympic debut. Now I have a chance to race before starting again on my Olympic preparations," Cherono, who was named by Athletics Kenya in their Olympic men team alongside world marathon record holder Eliud Kipchoge and world marathon bronze medalist Amos Kipruto said.

In the women's elite race, former world half-marathon record holder and winner of the 2019 New York Marathon winner Joyciline Jepkosgei will spearhead the event.