

Hosts 319-7 at close, lead tourists by 139 runs

Ireland fight back to set up possible win over Pakistan



Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns the ball to Alexandr Dolgoplov of Ukraine during the ATP Tennis Open tournament on May 14, at the Foro Italico in Rome. (AFP)

Djokovic blasts into Rome second round

Osaka powers past Azarenka

ROME, May 14, (AFP): Novak Djokovic got off to a winning start in his bid for a fifth ATP Italian Open title on Monday with a straight sets win over Ukraine's Alexandr Dolgoplov 6-1, 6-3 on the red clay of the Foro Italico.

The 11th-seeded Serb, who has reached eight of the last ten finals in Rome and won four — took 55 minutes to oust Dolgoplov 6-1, 6-3 on the red clay of the Foro Italico.

Former world number one Djokovic has slipped six places to 18th after his second round defeat in Madrid, his lowest ranking since October 2006.

The 12-time Grand Slam winner broke 54th-ranked Dolgoplov three times in the opening set, with another break in the second helping him wrap up the match.

"Today's match is encouraging and gives me reason to believe I can go all the way, but at the same time I have to be modest" said Djokovic who has been battling his way back from elbow surgery. "The conditions here are pretty suitable to my game. In 2008 it was one of the first titles I won and I always play well in Rome."

Djokovic, who last won in Rome in 2015, next plays either Nikoloz Basilashvili or Filippo Baldi two qualifiers before a potential third round meeting with American eighth seed John Isner.

And the 30-year-old said his focus was on the French Open where he won his last Grand Slam title in 2016.

"The French Open is where I want to play my best tennis that is one big goal for this part of the season. I feel I'm going in the right direction."

Earlier Japan's Kei Nishikori eased into the men's second round with a 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 win over Spaniard Feliciano

Lopez as Italy's Roberta Vinci bowed out of her final WTA tournament with a first round defeat.

Former US Open finalist Vinci fell 2-6, 6-0, 6-3 to Serbian qualifier Aleksandra Krunic.

The 35-year-old reached the US Open final in 2010 and won ten singles titles in her career spanning nearly two decades.

Nishikori — who had lost his two matches on clay in Spain in the previ-

ous two weeks — needed 1hr 48min to hand Lopez his sixth defeat in seven trips to the Italian capital.

"It wasn't an easy match. It was windy so conditions were tough for both of us," said 24th-ranked Nishikori, who hit 18 winners to counter the seven aces fired down by Lopez.

Nishikori arrived in Rome after losing his two matches on clay in Spain — retiring in Barcelona due to a recurring wrist injury problem before losing his opening-round in Madrid to Djokovic.

"He used a lot of slice and great serves, but I think I handled his slice well," continued Nishikori who won his last title in Memphis in February 2016. "The first set could have gone both ways, luckily I got it and after that, I was more confident and I was playing better tennis."

Nishikori took a one-set lead after a first set-tiebreak that featured nine mini-breaks. The pair exchanged serves in the second set before 2016 semi-finalist Nishikori broke again and served out to love to book his place in the second-round where he meets third seed Grigor Dimitrov of Bulgaria.

Robin Haase of the Netherlands needed three sets to get past Russian Daniil Medvedev 3-6, 6-4, 6-1 with ninth seed Davis Goffin of Belgium seeing off Argentina's Leonardo Mayer 6-1, 6-2.

In the women's event, Japan's Naomi Osaka powered her way past former world number one Victoria Azarenka of Belarus 6-0, 6-3 to set up a meeting with top seed Simona Halep of Romania. American Madison Keys, seeded 13th, beat Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova 6-4, 6-1, with Britain's Johanna Konta easing past Slovak 17th-seed Magdalena Rybarikova 6-4, 6-3.

Also: PARIS: Serena Williams might well be "stressed and excited" at the prospect of her season clay debut at the French Open, but she remains capable of winning the tournament, according to her coach Patrick Mouratoglou.

Williams landed a 23rd major at the 2017 Australian Open while pregnant, but Mouratoglou admitted that the American, who lost early in Indian Wells and Miami in March and then withdrew from this month's Madrid and Rome tournaments, returned to the WTA Tour too soon.



Victoria Azarenka of Belarus returns the ball to Naomi Osaka of Japan during the Rome's WTA Tennis Open tournament at the Foro Italico.

DUBLIN, May 14, (AP): Ireland has an outside chance of winning its inaugural cricket Test after Kevin O'Brien led a second-innings recovery with an unbeaten century to lead Pakistan by 139 runs on Monday heading into the final day.

Hours earlier on day four, the Irish were facing the prospect of an innings defeat but they lost only three wickets in the final two sessions to reach stumps on 319-7 following on.

Even a draw would be a marvelous achievement for a country which was awarded Test status only last June.

O'Brien became the first player to score a Test century for Ireland and

CRICKET

he was there at the close on 118 not out, with his 114-run partnership with Stuart Thompson (53) for the seventh wicket proving decisive. Tyrone Kane was with O'Brien on 8 not out.

Mohammed Amir shrugged off a nagging knee problem to be the pick of the bowlers, finishing the day with figures of 3-57 as he reached 100 Test wickets. The left-arm pacer's turbulent Test career was interrupted by a jail sentence by an English court and a five-year ban by the ICC for his involvement in a spot-fixing scandal in 2010.

Resuming its second innings on 64 without loss after being asked to follow on and still needing 116 more runs to make Pakistan bat again, Ireland slumped to 123-4 by lunch. When Amir removed Gary Wilson (12), caught by Haris Sohail in the slips, and Paul Stirling (11) was trapped lbw by Mohammad Abbas, Pakistan was close to clinching victory.

O'Brien's circumspect batting — his 118 has come from 216 balls and contained 12 fours — has ensured



Pakistan's Sarfraz Ahmed (right), watches as Ireland's Niall O'Brien plays a shot during play on day four of Ireland's inaugural Test match against Pakistan at Malahide Cricket Club, in Dublin on May 14. (AFP)

Ireland vs Pakistan Scoreboard

DUBLIN, May 14, (AFP): Scoreboard at stumps on the fourth day of a one-off Test between Ireland and Pakistan at Malahide on Monday:

PAKISTAN 1st Innings 310-9 dec (Faheem Ashraf 83, Asad Shafiq 62, Shadab Khan 55; T Murtagh 4-45, S Thompson 3-62)

IRELAND 1st Innings 130 (Mohammad Abbas 4-44, Shadab Khan 3-31)

IRELAND 2nd Innings (following-on, overnight: 64-0)

E. Joyce run out (Faheem Ashraf) ... 43
W. Porterfield c Sarfraz Ahmed b Mohammad Amir ... 32

A. Balbirnie lbw b Mohammad Abbas 0
N. O'Brien b Mohammad Amir ... 18
P. Stirling lbw b Mohammad Abbas ... 11

K. O'Brien not out ... 118
G. Wilson c Haris Sohail b Mohammad Amir ... 12
S. Thompson b Shadab Khan ... 53

T. Kane not out ... 8
Extras (b1, lb18, nb1, w4) ... 24
Total (7 wks, 122 overs, 504 mins) 319

To bat: B Rankin, T Murtagh

Fall of wickets: 1-69 (Joyce), 2-69 (Balbirnie), 3-94 (N O'Brien), 4-95 (Porterfield), 5-127 (Stirling), 6-157 (Wilson), 7-271 (Thompson)

Bowling: Amir 25.2-8-57-3; Abbas 25-9-54-2; Rahat 23-3-75-0 (2w); Faheem 18-3-51-0 (1nb, 1w); Shadab 30.4-7-63-1

PAKISTAN: Azhar Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Haris Sohail, Asad Shafiq, Babar Azam, Sarfraz Ahmed (capt/wkt), Shadab Khan, Faheem Ashraf, Mohammad Amir, Mohammad Abbas, Rahat Ali

Match position: Ireland lead by 139 runs with three second-innings wickets standing.

Toss: Ireland
Umpires: Richard Illingworth (ENG), Nigel Long (ENG)

TV umpire: Mark Hawthorne (IRE)

Match referee: Chris Broad (ENG)

Ireland stay alive at Malahide. Pakistan declared its first innings

on 310-9 early on day three. The first day was washed out.

Best of the Rest

Hamilton 'close' to new deal:

Lewis Hamilton says he is close to signing a new Mercedes contract after winning Sunday's Spanish Grand Prix watched by several members of the all-conquering German constructor's board.

In the aftermath of his dominant triumph ahead of team-mate Valtteri Bottas the defending four-time world champion indicated he will soon be inking a long-awaited new deal with the champions. An announcement before or during the Monaco Grand Prix later this month is now expected. (AFP)

Sports betting likely to be legal:

The Supreme Court on Monday struck down a federal law that bars gambling on football, basketball, baseball and other sports in most states, giving states the go-ahead to legalize betting on sports.

The Supreme Court ruled 6-3 to strike down the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act. The 1992 law barred state-authorized sports gambling with some exceptions. It made Nevada the only state where a person could wager on the results of a single game. One research firm estimated before the ruling that if the Supreme Court were to strike down the law, 32 states would likely offer sports betting within five years. (AP)

Hall of Famer Drake dies:

Clare Drake, the winningest coach in Canadian college hockey history and a member of the Hockey Hall of Fame, died Sunday at the age of 89.

Drake coached the University of Alberta to 697 victories and six University Cup championships over 28 years before leaving in 1989. He also coached the Edmonton Oilers during the 1975-76 World Hockey Association season and served as a co-coach for the 1980 Canadian Olympic Hockey Team in Lake Placid, N.Y.

Drake was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame last November. (RTRS)

Tsonga ruled out of Garros: Jo-Wilfried Tsonga has lost his race for fitness for Roland Garros after surgery on his left knee, the 2013 and 2015 French Open semifinalist confirmed on Monday.

No Frenchman has won at Roland Garros since Yannick Noah in 1983 and Tsonga's two previous semi-final runs had given home fans reason to

hope. "Despite all our best efforts to be fit in time I am afraid to say unhappily I'm ruled out of Roland Garros," the 33-year-old wrote on Twitter on Monday. (AFP)

Morocco loses appeal: Morocco's soccer federation has lost its case against FIFA to recruit Spain forward Munir El Haddadi before the World Cup.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport says it dismissed Morocco's appeal against a FIFA ruling that blocked the Barcelona player from transferring allegiance. The verdict was given after a hearing on Monday. FIFA rules prohibit switching nationality after playing in a competitive match. (AP)

Bangalore crush Punjab: Royal Challengers Bangalore crushed Kings XI Punjab by 10 wickets in a must-win Indian Premier League match on Monday and kept its hopes alive for a place in the playoffs.

Umesh Yadav's short-pitched deliveries got the big wickets of Lokesh Rahul (21) and Chris Gayle (14) as Punjab was bowled out for 88 in 15.1 overs after Bangalore won the toss and opted to field. Captain Virat Kohli (48 not out) and Parthiv Patel (40 not out) then piloted Bangalore to 92 without loss in just 8.1 overs as Punjab missed its injured mystery spinner Mujeeb Rahman. (AP)

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