



Andy Murray of Britain reacts after defeating Nikoloz Basilashvili of Georgia in their first round match at the Australian Open tennis championships in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)

Sports

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Stafford propels Rams past Cardinals

Nightmare start for Murray

INGLEWOOD, Calif., Jan 18, (AP) — The Rams had a 20-point lead on Arizona with 4 1/2 minutes left at raucous SoFi Stadium. Matthew Stafford's 13-year quest for his first playoff victory was all but complete after Los Angeles' dominant performance on both sides of the ball.



Murray

The quarterback still took off running on third-and-long through the heart of the Cardinals' defense on a gleeful, perilous scramble that ultimately ended short of a first down.

Even while shouldering enormous postseason pressure, Stafford never forgot to have fun. He was strong enough to carry it all - and the Rams are riding him on to Tampa Bay.

Stafford passed for 202 yards and two touchdowns and ran for another score in his first playoff win, and the Rams roared out of the wild-card round with a 34-11 victory over Arizona on Monday night.

Odell Beckham Jr. and Cooper Kupp made touchdown catches for the NFC West champion Rams (13-5), who will visit the defending Super Bowl champion Buccaneers on Sunday for a spot in the NFC championship game.

David Long also scored on a 3-yard interception return while the Rams' defense harassed Kyle Murray into a calamitous playoff debut. Los Angeles led 28-0 before cruising in the first playoff game at SoFi, which will host Super Bowl 56 next month.

Stafford was outstanding in his first playoff game with the Rams, completing 13 of his season-low 17 passes without an interception and despite three drops. He scored his first playoff rushing TD since January 2012 on a goal-line sneak, and he coolly directed

FOOTBALL

LA's offense while seizing his first playoff win in a career that began with 12 years in Detroit, where his Lions went 0-3 in the postseason.

After an inconsistent finish to the regular season, the Rams' constellation of big stars came together brilliantly around Stafford on the postseason stage.

Beckham had four catches for 54 yards, including his first career playoff touchdown catch for the Rams' first points. He also threw a 40-yard pass during his own first postseason victory. Linebacker Von Miller added six tackles and a key early sack in his first postseason appearance since winning the MVP award in Super Bowl 50.

Murray went 19 of 34 for 137 yards and two interceptions for the Cardinals (11-7), who followed their 10-2 start with a 1-5 slide. Arizona lost on the road for only the second time in 10 games this season under coach Kliff Kingsbury.



Los Angeles Rams quarterback Matthew Stafford (left) is sacked by Arizona Cardinals outside linebacker Markus Golden during the first half of an NFL wild-card playoff football game in Inglewood, Calif. (AP)

Cape Verde hold Cameroon

Burkina Faso clinch place in last 16

YAOUNDE, Cameroon, Jan 18 (AP) — Burkina Faso clinched a place in the last 16 at the African Cup of Nations behind hosts and group winners Cameroon, while Cape Verde must wait to see if they go through as one of the four best third-place teams.

Meanwhile, Malawi's players have been given an unusual incentive to upset Senegal in their final group game on Tuesday: A year's

SOCCER

supply of eggs for every member of the squad if Malawi win and make the knockout stages for the first time.

Burkina Faso drew with Ethiopia 1-1 in their final Group A game in Bafoussam, and were content to hold on for the point that took them through. Cyrille Bayala put the Burkinabes ahead in the first half by sending a lob over the goalkeeper. Getaneh Kebede equalized for Ethiopia from the penalty spot early in



Cape Verde's Roberto Lopes (left) heads the ball as he defends against Cameroon's captain Vincent Aboubakar, during the African Cup of Nations 2022 group A soccer match between Cape Verde and Cameroon at the Olembe stadium in Yaounde, Cameroon. (AP)

the second half.

Burkina Faso and Cape Verde both finished on four points but Burkina Faso took second place in

the group because they beat Cape Verde.

Cameroon and Cape Verde also drew 1-1 in a game played at the same time in Yaounde.

Cameroon had already progressed, but couldn't finish with a 100% record in the group stage despite captain Vincent Aboubakar putting them ahead with his fifth goal in three games at the African Cup.

Gary Rodrigues gave Cape Verde a draw with a delightful goal, letting a cross run between his legs and flicking it in with a backheel.

The final round of group games started on Monday and the 16 teams to make the knockout stages in Cameroon will be decided by Thursday.

There were surprise results in the first week of the tournament, none bigger than Algeria's stunning 1-0 loss to Equatorial Guinea on Sunday.

Gabon released Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and Mario Lemina to return to their clubs after they were diagnosed with heart lesions during their recovery from COVID-19 at the African Cup of Nations in Cameroon.

Aubameyang, a striker for Arsenal in the English Premier League, and Lemina, a midfielder with French club Nice, will undergo more thorough medical tests at their clubs, the Gabon Football Federation said.

The federation announced on Friday that the players were diagnosed with "cardiac lesions" in tests by Confederation of African Football medical officials who were checking on their condition after they contracted the coronavirus.

Aubameyang and Lemina tested positive for the virus at an airport in Cameroon on their arrival for the African Cup. They missed Gabon's first game while in isolation and the second game after CAF's medical commission advised that they shouldn't play following the tests. Gabon said the checks were procedural for all players returning to action at the African Cup after a positive virus test.

While the federation announced they both had heart lesions, Gabon coach Patrice Neveu later said neither player had serious heart problems but rather they were suffering from some aftereffects of COVID.

On Monday, Aubameyang posted on Twitter: "We have problems that are already complicated to solve, then on top of that there are rumours, in short, we have our health to take care of first and foremost."

Several other Gabon players have tested positive for the virus at the African Cup, as has coach Neveu.

Muguruza keeps perfect streak intact

Murray wins in Australia for first 'time' since 2017

MELBOURNE, Australia, Jan 18, (AP) — Five years and five long sets later, five-time Australian Open runner-up Andy Murray finally has won another match at the season-opening Grand Slam tournament.

The former No. 1-ranked Murray, playing thanks to a wild-card invitation as he continues his career comeback from hip operations and thoughts of retirement, beat 21st-seeded Nikoloz Basilashvili 6-1, 3-6, 6-4, 6-7 (5), 6-4 on Tuesday to reach the second round at Melbourne Park.

He lost a five-setter in the first round in 2019 - a match he, and everyone else, thought might have been his last in Australia - after missing the 2018 edition with an injury. He missed the 2020 tournament with a pelvic injury and last year's event because of COVID-19.

Ninth-seeded Felix Auger-Aliassime fended off Emil Ruusuvuori 6-4, 0-6, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4, and Maxime Cressy overcame 20 double-faults to upset fellow American No. 22-seeded John Isner 7-6 (2), 7-5, 6-7 (4), 6-7 (4), 6-4.

Second-seeded Daniil Medvedev, one of the biggest potential beneficiaries of Djokovic's deportation, had a much more routine first round.

Nine-time champion Djokovic was already back in Serbia - two days after losing his legal challenge to stay in Australia despite being unvaccinated against COVID-19 - when Medvedev went into Rod Laver Arena for a 6-1, 6-4, 7-6 (3) win over Henri Laaksonen.

Aiming to be the first man in the Open era to win his second major title in the very next Grand Slam appearance after his first such trophy, Medvedev advanced along with No.

4 Stefanos Tsitsipas, No. 5 Andrey Rublev, No. 11 Jannik Sinner, No. 13 Diego Schwartzman and No. 15 Roberto Bautista Agut.

That's something Leylah Fernandez has had to confront. The 19-year-old Canadian lost 6-2, 6-4 to 133rd-ranked wild-card entry Maddison Inglis in her first Grand Slam match since her runner-up finish at the U.S. Open.

Raducanu fared better in her debut at the Australian Open. The 17th-seeded Briton beating 2017 U.S. Open champion Sloane Stephens 6-0, 2-6, 6-1 in a seesawing night match that brought the Day 2 program to a close.

TENNIS

Second-seeded Aryna Sabalenka appeared to be on the way out before she rallied from a set and a break down, winning nine straight games before completing a 5-7, 6-3, 6-2 win over No. 128-ranked Storm Sanders.

Third-seeded Garbiñe Muguruza, meanwhile, kept a perfect streak intact when she won her first-round match at the Australian Open for the 10th straight time, beating No. 77-ranked Clara Burel 6-3, 6-4.

"Very tricky. You're always nervous going out there on Rod Laver, which I love, and starting a Grand Slam campaign," Muguruza said. "Very happy the way I played and, of course, controlling the nerves."

Muguruza, a two-time major champion who was the 2020 runner-up in Australia, next plays French veteran Alize Cornet.

Also advancing were No. 6 Anett Kontaveit, 2020 French Open champion Iga Swiatek, 2021 French Open finalist Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, two-time major winner Simona Halep and 2011 U.S. Open champion Sam Stosur, who rallied to beat Robin Anderson 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-3 to start her 20th - and last - Australian Open singles campaign.



Muguruza



Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece plays a backhand return to Mikael Ymer of Sweden during their first round match at the Australian Open tennis championships in Melbourne, Australia. (AP)