

## Sports

# Good night and good morning; Muguruza wins late Dubai duel

## Champion Svitolina books semi-finals

**DUBAI:** Defending champion and top seed Elina Svitolina toiled for more than two hours to reach the Dubai quarter-finals while second seed Garbine Muguruza had to wait until 2 am to complete her opening victory. Play ran exceptionally late at the event, with lengthy, slow-moving matches to blame. Svitolina took two and a quarter hours to overcome stubborn resistance from China's Wang Qiang 6-1, 5-7, 6-2.

Muguruza, the runner-up in Qatar last weekend, had to wait out a three-hour epic as Daria Kasatkina beat British seventh seed Johanna Konta 4-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-2 before the Spanish second seed got on court in the early hours of yesterday. But Muguruza at least then picked up the pace to defeat American CiCi Bellis 6-3, 7-5, a match which took one and three-quarter hours and ended just before 2 am.

Svitolina had to save nine of 11 break points against world number 46 Wang who entered the field after the withdrawal of Petra Kvitova, the Qatar champion. "I was a little bit angry at myself that I didn't bring my best game in the end of the second set. I had to accept and bounce back," Svitolina said. "But I was very happy the way I was playing. In the end, the win is the win."



**Kasatkina beat British 7th seed Johanna Konta**

Konta, the first ever British woman to win a round in Dubai, was unable to get past Russian Kasatkina. "I can only really look back on this match, and take the good things. I did do a lot of good things, (and I can) then learn from the things and try to do better," Konta said. Karolina Pliskova and Angelique Kerber advanced to set up a battle of ex-world number ones in the last eight. Czech Pliskova, the third seed, beat Carla Suarez Navarro 5-7, 6-2, 6-4, while Germany's Kerber dispatched Italian qualifier Sara Errani 6-4, 6-2. Sixth seed Kerber, who won the Sydney title in January before reaching the Australian Open semi-finals, leads the series with her Czech opponent 6-3, winning their last two matches.

"It was a tricky match, especially because she was playing well," Kerber said after taking the win over Errani on a secondary showcourt at the Aviation Club. "I don't care which court I play on. It's always important now to win the matches and focus more on my opponent, on my game, on the next round." Japan's Naomi Osaka, the next opponent for Svitolina, beat Anett Kontaveit of Estonia 6-2, 7-6 (7/5), while French fifth seed Caroline Garcia put out Ekaterina Makarova 6-4, 6-2.



**DUBAI:** Elina Svitolina of Ukraine serves the ball to Naomi Osaka of Japan during the quarter-final tennis match in the WTA Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championship yesterday. — AFP

Russian Elena Vesnina upset Roland Garros champion and fourth seed Jelena Ostapenko 6-1, 7-6 (8/6). "It was a weird match. At the beginning, everything was going my way. I was playing very clean. Jelena was missing a lot of shots," Vesnina said. "In the second set, she got back. She is a top 10 player, she is a Grand Slam champion. Of course, she will rebound, she will

change something in her game." Pliskova, who headed the rankings from mid-July to mid-September, needed a fightback against Suarez Navarro after losing the opening set to her 27th-ranked opponent. "I was not playing the best tennis today, we were both a little bit struggling," Pliskova said after finishing with 11 aces, six double-faults and losing her serve five times.—AFP

## Sock, Isner, Raonic bundled out of the Delray Beach Open

**FLORIDA:** Top seed Jack Sock was "served off the court" while John Isner and Milos Raonic also exited on a day of upsets at the Delray Beach Open in Florida on Wednesday. Two months after clinching his first Masters 1000 title in Paris, Sock was in less stellar form, beaten 4-6 7-5 6-3 by fellow American Reilly Opelka 4-6 7-5 6-3 in the second round. The 6-foot-11-inch Opelka used his height and power to fire down 17 aces, though the 20-year-old was not really happy with his biggest weapon.

"I didn't serve as well as I'd have liked to or as well as I usually do," the world number 228 said after the biggest win of his career. "I was really pleased with how I played from the baseline though. I thought I hit my forehand great and made it really tough for him to be offensive, which is his game." World number eight Sock spoke of the difficulty of playing against someone of Opelka's height. "You're not really ever in control against a seven-foot guy who can serve you off the court," he said. "Even after winning the first set it's still 50-50 with his style of play." Isner came out on the wrong end of three consecutive tiebreaks against German Peter Gojowczyk, who prevailed 7-6(3) 6-7(4) 7-6(5). —Reuters

## Jerusalem club fans fed up with racism form a new outfit

**JERUSALEM:** A group of Jerusalem soccer supporters who were fed up with the behavior of their fellow fans have turned their backs on the club they followed and set up a friendlier, more tolerant outfit. Around 4,000 fans who were previously loyal to Beitar Jerusalem, one of Israel's biggest and best supported clubs, have broken away to follow Betar Nordia, which was formed by a small group of them four years ago.

Beitar Jerusalem are a bastion of Israel's political right-wing and a group of their supporters known as "La Familia" has been openly hostile and violent towards fellow fans. Israel's Arab minority has been the main object of their hatred. While Beitar's players have worked to deliver success on the pitch, the club's "La Familia" supporters have often frustrated those efforts through their misconduct. The club has faced disciplinary action, including fines and points deductions, and even had to play matches behind closed doors for offences including fan violence, the use of flares, pitch invasions and racist chanting.

Unlike almost all other Israeli soccer clubs, Beitar have never employed an Arab player. Nordia, who have adopted the same yellow and black strip and the same team emblem, have a completely opposite attitude and have fielded four Arab players since they were founded and even have Arab fans. Team captain Tzion Zaken, a former Beitar player, said the Nordia setup was unique because of its drive against racism and violence. "Betar Nordia is

the only Israeli club I know that has formed to fight racism. Elsewhere, fans have rebelled because they didn't like the way their team was run but Nordia is unique," he told Reuters.

### Third division minnows

Now making a bigger effort to curb the fan violence, after another incident last month, Beitar ordered the east stand at Jerusalem's Teddy Kollek Stadium, where the most fanatical supporters sit, to be closed until further notice. "The club feels disgusted by the violence, and even more so, by the racism and from now on it will battle those fans who wantonly harm the club," said part of a Beitar statement after their 4-2 home victory over Israeli-Arab outfit Bnei Sakhnin. Aviv Sharfstein, a member of Nordia's management, said the new club hope one day to persuade the violent Beitar fans to abandon their militancy so that the two clubs could perhaps merge. This appears unlikely in the short term, however, as Beitar have a far larger fan base and are Premier League high flyers while Nordia are relative upstarts and third division midtable minnows. Sharfstein said Nordia's supporters felt alienated because of the Beitar fans and the only course open to them was to form a separate club. "We could no longer agree to hear the club narrative when fans used violence and displayed their racism by shouting 'death to Arabs'," he said.

"We felt we were going to matches alongside criminal organisations, they even used violence against us, the ordinary fans." Taer Zaro, a resident of the Palestinian neighborhood of Beit Hanina in East Jerusalem, who is studying physical education at Israel's Wingate Sports Institute, said he was happy to support Nordia and had found conviviality among his fellow fans. "I was a supporter of Beitar Jerusalem when I was a boy and I only cared about the play on the pitch, I was not interested with what the racist fans were saying but I moved to support Nordia because I didn't want any part of the racism," Zaro said.—Reuters