

Sports

Federer eyes 100th Wimbledon victory and Nadal showdown

'He can be very, very dangerous on all surfaces'

LONDON: Roger Federer can rack up his 100th win at Wimbledon today and set-up a blockbuster semi-final against Rafael Nadal. In a quarter-final line-up which features five players over 30, there is a growing anticipation of a potential 40th career match-up between the sport's two most successful players. If it does happen, it will be their first at the All England Club since 2008 when Nadal triumphed in what is widely regarded as the greatest final ever played at the tournament.

However, before they reach that stage, eight-time champion Federer has to get past Kei Nishikori while Nadal, a two-time winner, tackles big-hitting Sam Querrey. Whoever battles through that side of the draw is likely to find defending champion and four-time winner Novak Djokovic waiting in the final. At 37, Federer is the oldest quarter-finalist since Jimmy Connors in 1991.

He reached his 17th quarter-final at the All England Club—and 55th at the majors—with a 74-minute demolition of Italy's Matteo Berrettini, dropping just five games. Between them, Federer, Nadal and Djokovic lost only 19 games in their fourth-round ties and faced just one break point. "I think the best guys now are fully engaged, they know exactly what to expect from the court and the conditions," said second seed Federer.

'Nishikori great talent'

"That helps us to play better. I think with experience, that's good. We haven't dropped much energy in any way." Federer will take a 7-3 record over seventh-seeded Nishikori into his quarter-final. Nishikori defeated the great Swiss in the ATP Finals last year, ending a drought which had stretched to almost five years. "I'm a big fan of his game," said Federer of the Japanese star, who is into his second successive quarter-final at Wimbledon. "I think he's got one of the best backhands in the game. He's a great return player. Solid mentally. I always thought he was a great talent." Nadal, playing in his seventh Wimbledon quarter-final, faces Querrey backed up by a 4-1 record over the 65th-



LONDON: Switzerland's Roger Federer attends a training session on day eight of the 2019 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis Club in Wimbledon yesterday. —AFP

ranked American. Querrey made the semi-finals in 2017, beating then world number one Andy Murray in the last-eight before falling to Marin Cilic. The American has pounded down 100 aces so far at the tournament, dropped serve just once and accounted for fifth seed Dominic Thiem in the first round.

"When he plays well, he can be very, very dangerous on all surfaces," said Nadal, whose recent 12th French Open title took him to 18 majors, just two back from Federer's record. Top seed Djokovic has a 5-1 record over his quarter-final opponent David Goffin who, at 28, is the youngest man left. Belgian 21st seed Goffin beat Djokovic the last time they met in 2017 but that was on the clay of Monte Carlo.

Goffin is playing in his first All England Club quarter-final but was runner-up to Federer on the grass of Halle on the eve of Wimbledon.

"He's one of the quickest players on the tour. I think his footwork is probably his biggest asset," said Djokovic ahead of his 11th Wimbledon quarter-final and 45th at the Slams. Today's other quarter-final pits Argentine 26th seed Guido Pella, who had never previously got into the second week of a Slam, against Spanish 23rd seed Roberto Bautista Agut. Whereas 29-year-old Pella is in uncharted territory, Bautista Agut is in his second Slam quarter-final of the season having also gone to the last eight at the Australian Open.—AFP

Indonesian pleads for help after tennis courts replaced by baseball field

LONDON: Christopher Rungkat is ploughing a lone furrow for tennis in one of the world's most populous nations: a task made all the harder after Indonesia turned a top tennis facility into a baseball field. Rungkat, 29, is one of Asia's top doubles players, riding on a career high in the rankings and making his main draw debut at Wimbledon.

The 2018 Asian Games mixed doubles gold medalist hopes his exploits can inspire a new generation to take up tennis - but said it could only happen if the Indonesian authorities build the facilities. "There are younger guys trying to come up. I know it's tough; I've been there," Rungkat said. "But we don't really have a good facility back home in Jakarta. "We had a good facility with a lot of clay courts and hard courts - but the government decided to convert them to a baseball field, which is very sad for me. It's right in the centre of Jakarta."

The doubles world number 69 said Indonesia's prospects in the sport could be bright, with its population of more than 250 million people and love of the fellow racquet sport badminton. "We have a good future in tennis. I really hope I can inspire younger kids," he said. "I really hope the government can help them. "We have to start, at least, by having courts and a proper facility."

Rungkat has been playing men's doubles with Taiwan's Hsieh Cheng-Peng for 18 months. They are two of the top six men's doubles players from Asia on the tennis circuit. "We've had so much history with Asian doubles players like Leander Paes," said Rungkat. "Being there on top

with them is a great achievement. It's the new generation we have coming up.

"Me and Hsieh are among the few still under 30. "All the work that we've been putting in is paying off this year." The pair lost their Wimbledon first round encounter to the experienced 14th seeds Jurgen Melzer and Oliver Marach of Austria, 11-9 in the final set. "I was very excited, especially playing in the main draw at this most prestigious event. I've waited so long for this moment and I'm very proud of myself for getting to this stage," said Rungkat.

He is the sole figure on the men's tour from the world's fourth most populous country. There are no Indonesians at all in the world men's singles rankings - and just him in the top 700 in the doubles. There are three Indonesian women in the singles rankings, all outside the top 400. However, Rungkat is not the sole Indonesian at Wimbledon. Priska Madelyn Nugroho, 16, is in the girls' competitions, winning her first round singles match in three sets.

"She's been doing well, she's a very talented young girl and I see a good potential in her," said Rungkat. "I think she's going to be the next Indonesian hope in tennis." Rungkat said winning medals at the Asian Games and breaking into Grand Slam events was making people sit up and notice tennis back home. As part of his vision for inspiring a new generation of players in Indonesia, Rungkat would love to back up his Asian Games success with a spot at Tokyo 2020. "I would love to play in the Olympics. It's my dream since I was a child," he said.—AFP

Red Bull Athlete, Ahmad Daham, becomes first Arab drifter to participate in the renowned Drift Masters European Championship & Goodwood Festival of Speed

The five-time Middle East drift champion already has over 75 podium wins to his name. This summer, the UAE-based, Jordanian athlete is taking on Europe, including a special debut in the United Kingdom.



Ahmad Daham is gearing up for a summer of international participation, making history in the process. The five-time Middle East drift champion is currently taking part in the 2019 edition of the renowned Drift Masters European Championship. Considered the "Champions League of professional drifting", this year's competition sees 42 drivers from 18 countries compete over six rounds, hosted in different locations across Europe, battling it out for a coveted top three position. And the 32-year-old Red Bull athlete - who is already a Guinness World Record holder - is creating more history by becoming the very first Arab to participate in Drift Masters. Additionally, the UAE-based, Jordanian

is also the only participant from outside of Europe to take part in the distinguished event.

The latest round (Round 3) of the 2019 Drift Masters European Championship took place between 28-29 June in Plock in Poland, where Daham is quickly moving up the ranks.

Round 4, which marks the second half of the season, commences 23- August at Biernieku Trase in Riga, Latvia. The Latvia leg will be followed by Round 5 in Ferropolis, Germany (16-17 August), before concluding in Mondello Park, Ireland for Round 6 between 21-22 September. The season finale - known as Ireland's biggest automotive event - is set to attract over 15,000 fans.

GOODWOOD FESTIVAL OF SPEED

In the interim, Daham will be making another first by making his Goodwood Festival of Speed debut this month between 4-7 July in the United Kingdom. The annual event is a hill climb featuring historic motor racing vehicles, as well as F1 machines and other cars and motorbikes. Daily attendance is estimated at between 100,000 to 150,000 motorsport fans. And what makes his inaugural participation extra special is that it will be the first time his custom Lexus RC F Pro Drift spec car - which was unveiled by Al-Futtaim Lexus in the UAE in May - will make an appearance in Europe.

Daham, recently teased this announcement on his official Instagram page by posting: "While I'm heading to the airport for @driftmasters.gp round in Poland, the @lexusuae RC F is also getting ready for her first flight to Europe! Who can guess where?" Stay tuned for more events featuring Daham. Commenting on his latest participations, he said: "A lot of hard work leads up to big events, and it's such an honour to be representing the Middle East region at these world-renowned competitions. 2019 has brought a lot of good fortune and I look forward to continuing momentum."