

## Sports

# Disappointed Nadal sees chances of third Wimbledon title slipping from his grasp

‘Today is sad because for me I know chances are not forever’

**LONDON:** Rafael Nadal rued missing out on the Wimbledon final after losing to great rival Roger Federer and admitted his chances of adding a third title on the grass of the All England Club are receding. The 33-year-old Spaniard, who remains two off Federer's Grand Slam record title haul of 20, has two Wimbledon crowns to his name.

But he said his game on Friday was never at the level required to repeat his epic win in his first championship victory over Federer 11 years ago. Nadal, who won his 12th French Open trophy in June, ended up on the wrong end of a 7-6 (7/3), 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 defeat. It will be Federer who bids for a ninth Wimbledon title against the four-time champion Novak Djokovic, the third member of the great triumvirate that still dominate the sport.

“I am sad for the loss because for me it was another opportunity,” he said. “But at the same time I created another opportunity to be in another final of a Grand Slam.” Just accept that was not my day. I played a great event. I take this in a positive way. “At the same time, today is sad because for me I know chances are not forever. “Last year I had chances here (he lost in five sets to Djokovic in the semi-final), I had another one, and I was not able to convert to win it one more time here.”

## ‘We are not done’

Nadal, who suffered his first loss to Federer in a Grand Slam semi-final after winning on the previous four occasions, said it was a wonderful experience to be part of the great rivalry with fellow 30-somethings

Federer and Djokovic. Indeed — Andy Murray aside on two occasions — no other player apart from them has lifted the Wimbledon trophy since Australian Lleyton Hewitt in 2002.

“We spoke about that one thousand times,” said Nadal. “The same time is great to be part of this rivalry, be in the middle of these three players that achieved that much in this sport in the same era.” If the increasingly harassed ‘NextGen’ group of players — who speak of the unbearable pressure they feel in trying to break up the trio's dominance — were hoping for light at the end of the tunnel Nadal offered none. “It is something that is going to be difficult to see again,” he said. “We are not done, so... Things continue. Just another episode this afternoon.”

“Of course, as I said the other day, we know that every time there are less chances to play against each other in these high quality matches. “Was another chance this afternoon.”

Nadal said defeat was tough but graciously congratulated Federer on being the better player on the day. Nadal said 37-year-old Federer's qualities remain undimmed and constant. “The same like all my career, no?” he said. “He is always able to do the most difficult things easy.” He's able to move inside the court quicker than anyone. “He puts pressure on the opponent all the time because he has the ability to take the ball earlier than anybody else.” That's probably the most difficult thing to make that happen, and he is able to do it so well.” — AFP



**LONDON:** Spain's Rafael Nadal speaks during a press conference at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, on July 12, 2019 after losing his semi-final match against Switzerland's Roger Federer. — AFP

## Sublime Pogba helps Man Utd to 2-0 win over Perth Glory

**PERTH:** Ole Gunnar Solskjaer insisted wantaway star Paul Pogba will be a contender for Manchester United's captaincy after the French World Cup winner overcame a turbulent week and helped a lackluster United post a 2-0 friendly victory over Perth Glory yesterday.

After being linked with a move to Real Madrid and Juventus, Pogba's uncertain future at Old Trafford has overshadowed United's pre-season tour of Australia. Following Antonio Valencia's exit, Solskjaer is looking for a new captain and has thrown Pogba's name into the ring. Ashley Young and Juan Mata skippered 45 minutes each against Perth.

When asked if Pogba was under consideration, the United boss said: “Yep. We've got quite a few possibilities there and when the season starts we'll announce it. “Of course we'll have a good assessment and see how pre-season goes.” An under-pressure United initially struggled against a weakened Perth Glory, who won Australia's A-League Premiers Plate last season.

After a scoreless opening half, Solskjaer changed his entire lineup and inserted several stars, including Pogba. United finally cracked Perth's tenacious defence in the 60th minute when Pogba showcased his sublime touch with a deft backheel to forward Marcus Rashford, who struck it past goalkeeper Liam Reddy.

James Garner, 18, sealed the result with a long-range strike in the dying stages. Solskjaer was optimistic about his side's performance despite the modest score line. “We are happy. It was all about continuing the good fitness work they've done,” he said. “We played a very well organised team. We did enough in the end. It was professional work from everyone.”

Suffering from a lack of numbers for the friendly,



**PERTH:** Manchester Paul Pogba (C) fights for the ball with Perth Glory's Chris Harold (L) and Gabriel Popovic (R) during their pre-season friendly match at Optus Stadium. — AFP

Perth fielded a youthful team including two 15-year-olds. Solskjaer rested most of his guns in the first half, including Pogba, Rashford and regular goalkeeper David de Gea. United, in their new gold away strip, controlled a subdued first 45 minutes with speedy winger Daniel James eye-catching on the left flank.

Teenage midfielder Tahith Chong worked his way into the game after a slow start but could not break through. The Dutchman was on the end of Perth's physicality when he received a strong bump from Glory captain Shane Lowry that looked more reminiscent of

the Australian Rules football match played on the same Perth Stadium ground the night before. Solskjaer said defender Luke Shaw suffered a tight hamstring and came off late in the game as a precautionary measure.

Romelu Lukaku, reportedly looking to secure a move to Inter Milan, was rested but is expected to play on Wednesday against Leeds United to end United's 10-day Australian tour before pre-season games in Singapore and China. Meanwhile, Manchester United coach Mark Dempsey will fly home after he fell ill and was admitted to hospital on Friday. — AFP

## Starlet Chukwueze offers glimpse of Nigeria future

**CAIRO:** He was young enough to participate at this year's Under-20 World Cup, but Samuel Chukwueze is assuming a far greater role as a future Nigeria lynchpin with his country attempting to capture a fourth Africa Cup of Nations title. At 20 years and 49 days, Chukwueze became the youngest scorer at this year's tournament as he grabbed his first international goal for the Super Eagles in the quarter-final win over South Africa.

It has been a meteoric rise for the youngster, signed by Villarreal in 2017, following a strong debut season in Spain's top flight which included a goal in April's thrilling 4-4 draw with Lionel Messi's Barcelona and a match-winning strike against Girona that lifted his side out the relegation zone for good. While he may not be cut from the same cloth as the Argentine, comparisons with another left-footed wizard, the recently retired Arjen Robben, are plentiful.

Inspired by the former Dutch star growing up, Chukwueze concedes he would do well to come anywhere close to what Robben achieved as a former Champions League and eight-time Bundesliga winner with Bayern, a World Cup finalist, and league champion at Chelsea, Real Madrid and PSV Eindhoven.

“Chukwueze has a good left foot, is quick, has a low centre of gravity — which gives him very good balance — and can deliver and score,” was Nigeria coach Gernot Rohr's Robben-esque appraisal of his winger. Yet the German has taken a steady approach to blood- ing Chukwueze, handing him a start in the opening win over Burundi before restricting him to a pair of substitute appearances over the next three games in Egypt.

### ‘Quality overflows’

“We're here to win the title. Sitting on the bench doesn't make me feel bad, it makes me wait for the chance I get to help the team like I did today,” Chukwueze said after his man-of-the-match display against South Africa. Chukwueze came close to joining Arsenal before arriving at Villarreal, following in the footsteps of striker Ikechukwu Uche, who won the 2013 Cup of Nations with Nigeria during his four-year spell at the Spanish club.

“He has a quality that just overflows and you can't stop, like a river,” said Villarreal reserve team coach Miguel Alvarez, who helped Chukwueze make the step up to the top tier. Both he and Victor Osimhen, yet to feature in the tournament here, formed part a core part of Nigeria's Under-17 World Cup winners from 2015, and forward Ahmed Musa believes Chukwueze will become one of the stars of the senior side.

“I think with time he is going to be one of the best players we have in the Super Eagles team,” Musa told reporters after the quarter-final victory. “The old players in the squad are gradually winding down and will not be here in a couple of years from now. “So, we definitely need players like them to step up and take over from us.”

Chukwueze was not part of the 2018 World Cup campaign, where a youthful squad failed to go beyond the group stage, but Rohr says the increased maturity and influx of fresh faces will serve return Nigeria well as they target a return to the top in Africa. Their next test comes on Sunday against an impressive Algeria team that have looked a cut above the rest in Egypt. — AFP

## De Ligt close to Juventus after skipping training

**PARIS:** Matthijs de Ligt is closing in on a move to Juventus after Ajax announced yesterday that the rising star will skip the Dutch champions pre-season training camp due to his expected departure. In a statement, Ajax named a 28-man squad travelling to the camp in Bramberg in Austria on Saturday afternoon, adding that “awaiting a possible transfer, Matthijs de Ligt is not travelling with the group”.

Last week the player's agent Mino Raiola told Dutch newspaper De Telegraaf that a deal had been struck between Juve and the powerful centre-back, reportedly a five-year contract worth 12 million euros (\$13.5 million) a season with a 135 million-euro release clause. However the two clubs had been locked in negotiations with Ajax reportedly demanding 75 million euros, but the Gazzetta dell Sport claims that the a fee of 70 million euros is set to be agreed. De Ligt, who turns 20 next month, is expected to join Serie A champions Juve after wowing with superb displays during Ajax's thrilling charge to the Champions League semi-finals last season. He captained the team to a domestic double as their fairytale European run — which included wins over Real Madrid and Juve — came to a heart-breaking end with semi-final defeat to Tottenham Hotspur after leading 3-0 on aggregate at half-time in the second leg.

The signing would be the sixth of what has already been a busy summer for Juventus, who have brought in Maurizio Sarri as coach after removing Massimiliano Allegri and signed Paris Saint-Germain's want-away midfielder Adrien Rabiot, Aaron Ramsey, Luca Pellegrini, Merih Demiral and 41-year-old Gianluigi Buffon, who returns to Turin after a year alongside Rabiot in the French capital. — AFP

## Idrissa Gueye: Team Senegal's heart and soul

**CAIRO:** Indispensable under Alain Giresse, Idrissa Gueye remains central to successor Aliou Cisse's plans at the heart of the Senegal midfield, and has excelled during the country's run to the Africa Cup of Nations semi-finals. The one game he missed, through injury, corresponded with the Teranga Lions' only setback in Egypt, a 1-0 loss to Algeria in the group stage. With Gueye in the line-up Senegal have looked a dominant force, in keeping with the team's billing as title favourites.

The 29-year-old is essential to Senegalese plans as the link between Kalidou Koulibaly and the defense and an attack spearheaded by Sadio Mane. Gueye has complemented his renowned ball-winning ability with telling contributions in front of goal, hitting the winner against Benin in the quarter-finals. “He's a boy with an enormous amount of quality, who is capable of playing as a holding midfielder or much higher up the pitch,” said Cisse.

“He is gifted with great technique that allows him to play in pockets of space and have a bit more creativity. If he scores it's because he throws himself forward as well.” Forging ahead is what Gueye has done for several years in the national team. A starter under Giresse, between 2013 and 2015, he has stepped it up a notch in Egypt after a World Cup which saw him restricted in a more defensive role. In Russia, while Gueye scored with a deflected effort in a 2-1 victory over Poland, his former boss at Lille, Rudi Garcia, regretted that Gueye had not shown his full potential as “one of the greatest players” he has coached.

### ‘Like good wine’

That message has filtered through, with Gueye tapping into his less-heralded attacking qualities to unpick a deep-lying Benin defense. “I'm trying to do my best to



**CAIRO:** Senegal's midfielder Idrissa Gueye celebrates after scoring during the 2019 Africa Cup of Nations (CAN) quarter final football match between Senegal and Benin. — AFP

help my team. I have Papa Ndiaye who's playing in a holding position which allows us to attack, to be close to goal to try and score. I'm helping the team playing this position and I'm very happy,” said Gueye, man of the match in the 1-0 win against the Squirrels.

His development has followed that of his team which, after returning to the World Cup following a 16-year absence, is through to a first Cup of Nations semi-final since 2006. “We're a team which is progressing little by little,” said Cisse. To continue their progress they must now navigate a Tunisia side coached by Giresse, who doesn't believe the knowledge from his two-year spell with Senegal will have much impact on the result. “If the match came down to knowledge of the players that would be a good thing, but the reality is different,” said Giresse. “Knowledge and relationships are one thing but what happens on the pitch is the most important.” — AFP