

25 Blues march to first final since 1970, rested Bruins open at home



26 Valencia stun Barcelona to win Copa del Rey



26 Lewandowski fires Bayern Munich to domestic double



PARIS: Russia's Anastasia Potapova returns the ball to Germany's Angelique Kerber during their women's singles first round match on day 1 of The Roland Garros 2019 French Open tennis tournament in Paris yesterday. —AFP

Kerber crashes to Russian teen

Federer returns at Roland Garros after a four-year absence

PARIS: German fifth seed and reigning Wimbledon champion Angelique Kerber saw her hopes of a career Grand Slam ended by Russian teenager Anastasia Potapova at Roland Garros yesterday as Roger Federer prepared to make his Paris return after a four-year absence.

Fifth-seeded Wimbledon champion Kerber slumped to a 6-4, 6-2 defeat to 18-year-old Potapova who was making her French Open debut. "I had a lot of confidence and I have to thank my coach for that," said 81st-ranked Potapova who hit 28 winners past her German opponent.

Kerber, 31, has now lost six times in the French Open first round. The German left-hander had come into Roland Garros carrying a right ankle injury which forced her to pull out of the Italian Open and retire from her second round tie in Madrid.

"She played really good, I tried my best," said Kerber who was broken six times in the match which brought the curtain up on a rebuilt Court Philippe

Chatrier. "I didn't really have great preparation and I was just happy to get on court to play the match."

"I didn't have many expectations coming in." Potapova's first win over a top 10 player gives her a second round clash against either China's Wang Yafan or Marketa Vondrousova of the Czech Republic.

Later yesterday, Federer returns to the new look Roland Garros, admitting he'll be an underdog in his attempt to claim a 21st Grand Slam title. The 37-year-old Swiss star is the headline act on opening day, 10 years after his one triumph in Paris and two decades since his tournament debut.

Federer, who played his last French Open in 2015, preferring to concentrate his powers on Wimbledon, starts against Lorenzo Sonego, the world number 73 from Italy. Third-seeded Federer insists that it would be a shock even to him should he manage to prevent either Rafael Nadal from sweeping to a 12th title or Novak Djokovic becoming just the second man to hold all four Slams at the same time twice.

"I feel like I'm playing good tennis, but is it enough against the absolute top guys when it really comes to the crunch? I'm not sure if it's in my racket," said Federer. Greek sixth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas faces German left-hander Maximilian Marterer, the world 110. Tsitsipas made the Australian Open semi-finals in January, beating Federer on the way.

NEW COURT SET FOR UNVEILING

The 20-year-old also defeated Nadal in the Madrid semi-finals before falling to the Spaniard at the same stage in Rome last week. Second seed Karolina Pliskova closes play on Chatrier against Madison Brengle of the United States.

The centrepiece court of Roland Garros has been demolished and 90% rebuilt since 2018 as part of the 350 million euro refurbishment of the French Open's historic home. Fans and players will have to wait until 2020 to see the retractable roof in oper-

ation over the court.

However, this year sees the tournament bow of Court Simonne Mathieu, a 5,000-capacity semi-sunken arena enclosed by greenhouses. Spain's Garbine Muguruza, the 2016 champion, had the honour of opening proceedings on the new court against America's Taylor Townsend.

The 19th seed marked the occasion with a 5-7, 6-2, 6-2 win. Venus Williams, the 38-year-old American, faces Ukraine ninth seed Elina Svitolina on the same court later in the day. Williams, runner-up to sister Serena in 2002, made her debut in Paris in 1997.

Also in action on the first day is Italian 16th seed Marco Cecchinato who shocked Djokovic in the quarter-finals in 2018. Japan's Kei Nishikori, seeded seven, faces France's Quentin Halys on the 30th anniversary of his coach Michael Chang winning the title in Paris. American seventh seed Sloane Stephens, the 2018 runner-up to Simona Halep, begins against Japan's Misaki Doi. —AFP

Raptors rally past Bucks to reach first NBA final

LOS ANGELES: Kawhi Leonard finished with 27 points and a career high 17 rebounds as the Toronto Raptors advanced to their first NBA final with a 100-94 win over the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks.

The Raptors won the series 4-2 as Saturday's contest at Scotiabank Arena was a mirror image of game five, featuring a strong start by Milwaukee before Toronto came back in the fourth quarter to close it out

with several clutch plays down the stretch.

The Raptors reached their first finals in their 24-year history where they will face the two-time defending champion Golden State Warriors. Game one of the best-of-seven final is Thursday in Toronto.

"I just took it one possession at a time," Leonard said. "We kept fighting all game. The calls were not going our way, but we kept striving and striving." The victory has galvanized the Canadian city's sports fans and touched off a wild celebration among the crowd of 19,800 in the arena and tens of thousands more in the downtown "Jurassic Park", who watched the game on a giant screen.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said he will be cheering on the Raptors. "History made! @Raptors, it's time to bring that championship to Canada! #WeTheNorth," Trudeau tweeted Saturday.

Leonard won the head-to-head battle against Giannis Antetokounmpo, even dunking over the mighty "Greek Freak" with six minutes left in the fourth to give Toronto a 87-79 lead. Leonard also hit another dynamic three-pointer from his favourite corner spot on the floor with three minutes left to make it 95-90.

He shot nine of 22 from the field and had seven assists for the Raptors, who roared back to win four straight games after falling into an 0-2 hole to begin the series. Pascal Siakam tallied 18 points, Kyle Lowry finished with 17 and Fred VanVleet came off the bench to score 14 points in the win.

"I've been here seven years and this means a lot," said Lowry. "This group is so special." Toronto was down by 15 points at one stage in the third quarter before Leonard and his supporting cast cut the deficit

to five entering the fourth.

"We thrive at it. We enjoy the moment," Leonard said. "My teammates have my back. I was on the bench to start the fourth quarter and they came back. It was a collective effort." Antetokounmpo tallied a double double with 21 points and 11 rebounds for the Bucks, who lost in the NBA playoff semi-finals after finishing with the best record in the regular season.

"The game plan was to double-team me and not allow me to get into a rhythm," Antetokounmpo said. "We weren't able to rebound the ball and get easy points in transition and that's why we lost the lead."

Leonard said they were looking forward to putting their winning streak on the line and hosting the Warriors for the first two games of the final. "Man, they are the champions. We got to go in there with mental focus and enjoy the moment," he said. —AFP