



SOCCER P53

Chelsea return to winning ways

Blackburn ride Pedersen's strike to shock Arsenal in Premiership



AHMED KUTTY/Gulf News

ENDURANCE Presentation ceremony
Shaikh Maktoum Bin Hamdan Bin Rashid Al Maktoum with Saeed Al Tayer and Col Hussain Mohammad Hussain, Secretary General UAE Equestrian and Racing Federation, along with Rashid Mubarak Al Jafla, Dahi Abdullah Dahi Khamis and Yousuf Abdullah Al Hammadi, winners of the Shaikh Maktoum Bin Hamdan Al Maktoum Challenge, at the presentation ceremony yesterday.

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Henin reigns supreme

BELGIAN OVERCOMES A GRIPPING BATTLE TO DOWN SHARAPOVA FOR THIRD TITLE IN DUBAI



REGI VARGHESE/Gulf News

No-nonsense

Justine Henin-Hardenne of Belgium shapes for a backhand return to Maria Sharapova of Russia in the final of the Dubai Duty Free WTA final at the Dubai Tennis Stadium yesterday.

BY ALARIC GOMES
Staff Reporter

Dubai Justine Henin-Hardenne extended her impressive run in Dubai by clinching the third Dubai Duty Free Women's title with an engrossing 7-5, 6-2 win over glamour girl Maria Sharapova in the final at the Dubai Tennis Stadium last night.

Henin-Hardenne, a back-to-back winner here in 2003 and 2004, raised her game when needed to overcome a stiff challenge from a resurgent Sharapova to claim her second title of the season. Shaikh Hamdan Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Chairman of the Dubai Sports Council, was the chief guest and gave away the trophy to the winner as fireworks lit up the lively night skies.

Also present was Shaikh

Hasher Al Maktoum, Dubai Director of Information. Sharapova, seeded No 3, tried to stay a step ahead of her Belgian opponent with some aggressive strokes early in the encounter.

Spectators who packed the stadium got their money's worth as both finalists came up with some quality play.

Slow start

Henin-Hardenne took her time to settle in, like she normally does. But once she found her rhythm, there was no stopping the Belgian.

The tussle for supremacy continued through the early stages of the first set with both players going neck and neck until 3-3. Henin-Hardenne had the first opportunity to break as she led 40-15 in the seventh game. But Sharapova saved two



game points to hold serve, and came back strongly to catch her Belgian opponent off guard. Even before she could realise, Henin-Hardenne had lost her serve to go down 3-5 and the crowd favourite Sharapova serving for the set. "She was really too good, but I had to do something very special and go for everything," Henin-Hardenne said.

However, Henin-Hardenne was far from finished as she broke back with a stunning backhand down the line that left Sharapova in awe. She then held serve for 5-5, before breaking the Russian one last time and serving out the set to win 7-5 in exactly one hour.

Crucial break

In the second set, things turned around in the fifth game with Henin-Hardenne getting the crucial break against an opponent who hates losing to the same person twice.

Trailing 4-2, two successive double faults in the seventh proved to be the downfall for Sharapova as Henin-Hardenne went 5-2 clear. The Belgian then saved two break points and held serve to finish off the set and match in one hour

and 44 minutes. This was the fifth career meeting between the two top players with the diminutive Belgian holding the winning edge at 3-1.

Sharapova was victorious in their first meeting in Miami last season. But the Belgian had gained revenge twice during the clay court season, winning in Berlin and then in the quarterfinals of the French Open.

Their semifinal meeting at last month's Australian Open was equally gripping with Henin-Hardenne tilting the scales in her favour in a three-set thriller, considered by many as one of the most competitive matches of the tournament.

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DOUBLES

Francesca and Kveta triumph

Dubai Kveta Peschke and Francesca Schiavone rallied from a one-set deficit to win the doubles crown at the Dubai Open.

Kuznetsova was in the doubles final here for the fourth successive year, and she has won the title only once with Martina Navratilova in 2003.

Last year too, Kuznetsova lost in the final after partnering Alicia Molik.

Kuznetsova and Petrova started strongly by winning the opening set 6-3, with breaks in the fifth and seventh games.

The second set went the other way around with Peschke and Schiavone powering their way to an early 3-0 cushion. But the Russian pairing fought right back to draw level 3-3.

With neither pairing willing to give anything away, they headed to a tie-break after being tied 6-6.

But Schiavone and Peschke showed more accuracy and temperament as they were off to a 5-0 lead in the tie-break.

Winding things up

The Russians never recovered from this as the Czech-Italian duo wound things up in the tie-breaker at 7-1.

The Russians had the edge early in the third set after they broke Peschke and Schiavone and then held serve for a 2-0 lead. But Peschke and Schiavone came back for 2-2, only to be broken on the Czech's serve.

As the match entered its final stages, it was Schiavone and Peschke coming out guns blazing with two successive breaks to win the set 6-3.

-A.G.



KARL JEFFS/Gulf News

TENNIS Putting it in perspective

From left: Abdul Rahman Falaknaz, Ganem Al Merri, Salah Tahlak, Etienne de Villiers, Colm McLoughlin and Brad Drewett at the draw for the Dubai Duty Free Men's Open 2006.



KARL JEFFS/Gulf News

Breezes through

Younes Al Aynaoui of Morocco, making a forehand return, defeated Victor Bruthans of Slovakia in the first round of the qualifiers for the Dubai Open men's event yesterday. The Moroccan won the match 6-2, 6-2.



KARL JEFFS/Gulf News

Bad start

Victor Bruthans of Slovakia, who is serving during the first round of the qualifiers for the Dubai Duty Free Men's Tennis Championships yesterday. The left-hander lost to Moroccan Younes Al Aynaoui.



KARL JEFFS/Gulf News

Interesting dual

UAE's top tennis player Omar Behroozian attends the draw for the men's open as the players' representative yesterday. In a historic event, Behroozian will meet Kuwait's Mohammad Al Gareb in the first round with the regional winner meeting Roger Federer in the second.

BRIEFS

TENNIS

DDF increases prize money to \$1.5m from next year

Dubai Dubai Duty Free, owners and organisers of the Dubai Tennis Championships, have once again taken the lead by increasing the prize money at the annual two-week extravaganza. Colm McLoughlin, Managing Director of Dubai Duty Free, announced that the ATP Tour Board has cleared the increase of prize money from its present \$1 million to \$1.5 million starting next year. Later in the evening, at the presentation following the women's final, McLoughlin disclosed that the women's prize purse will also be increased to an identical \$1.5 million starting from next year.

Davydenko reaches Rotterdam semis

Rotterdam Second seed Nikolay Davydenko brushed aside Daniele Bracciali 6-4 6-2 to reach the semifinals at the Rotterdam Indoor tournament on Friday. The 24-year-old Russian, chasing a sixth career title, has yet to drop a set at the injury-ravaged tournament, although he was unhappy with his performance against the Italian qualifier.

—Compiled from Staff Report and agency

Federer takes on Wawrinka in first round

Spanish sensation Nadal faces Mathieu in opener of Dubai Duty Free Men's Open as Santoro replaces injured Ljubicic



KARL JEFFS/Gulf News

Draw of lots

The draw for the Dubai Duty Free Men's Open 2006 was held at the Cellar yesterday.

BY ALARIC GOMES
Staff Reporter

Dubai World No 1, top seed and three-times Dubai champion Roger Federer will take on countryman Stanislas Wawrinka in the opening round of the Dubai Duty Free Men's Open, starting at the Dubai Tennis Stadium tomorrow.

The draws were conducted at the Cellar in the presence of ATP Chairman Etienne de Villiers, Colm McLoughlin, Managing Director of Dubai Duty Free, Tournament Director Salah Tahlak, Abdul Rahman Falaknaz, Vice President of Tennis Emirates, and Ganem Al Merri from new sponsors, Etisalat. Representing the players

at the draws were Russia's Mikhail Youzhny, Frenchman Paul-Henri Mathieu and the UAE's Omar Behroozian.

McLoughlin said that, as organisers and sponsors of this two-week event, he was pleased with what they have achieved so far.

"Despite the bad weather, the crowds have shown a 20 per cent increase from 43,000 spectators to 52,000 after one week," McLoughlin stated.

"The event is growing the way we wanted it to. There are so many new things here and players and people want to come for this competition," he observed.

Second-seeded Spanish sensation Rafael Nadal has been drawn to take on Paul-

Henri Mathieu, who was present at the draws.

Another sensational match will be the one between third seed Nikolay Davydenko and former Australian Open champion Marat Safin.

In what be a historic first, the UAE's Omar Behroozian and Kuwait's Mohammad Al Gareeb will get the rare opportunity of playing against the best player in the world. The winner of the all-Gulf first round will meet Federer in the second round.

Taking a bit of the sheen off this event was the late withdrawal of last year's losing finalist Ivan Ljubicic following injury. He was replaced by former champion Fabrice Santoro.

Klec proves too strong for Bastl in first round of qualifiers

BY ALARIC GOMES
Staff Reporter

Dubai Ivo Klec of Slovakia dumped fifth-seeded George Bastl of Switzerland 6-3, 6-1 in the opening round qualifying of the Dubai Duty Free Men's Open here yesterday.

Klec, who splits his time between his two homes in Munich and native Bratislava, was simply too strong for his Swiss opponent, who had been handed a seeding here. "I think it was more about adapting to outdoors

for the two of us immediately after getting here. Unfortunately, there was no time for that adaptation as the weather has not been suitable," Klec told *Gulf News*.

Klec took the first set easily, foxing Bastl with a mixture of slices and winners down the line. "I was feeling good, and added to that, I was moving well on the court," Klec said.

In the second set, Bastl tried to alter his strategy rushing to the net in an attempt to get the Slovak into making errors. But Klec

stayed focused, and every time Bastl came to the net, the Slovak sent down winners and a couple of breaks ensured an early 4-0 lead.

Bastl did manage to hold serve for the first time in the second set to make it 1-5, but the match was as good as over with his error-ridden game continuing.

Klec next runs into Serbia-Montenegro's Nenad Zimonjic, who battled past Klec's close friend and No 3 seed in the qualifiers, Oliver Marach of Austria, in three sets 3-6, 7-6 (5), 6-4.

"This is probably one of the toughest matches I've had on the Tour as I reached the club just half an hour before the start of the qualifiers.

"I barely had time to warm up when I was told I had to start playing my first round match," Zimonjic said.

Another four qualifying matches will be held starting at 12 noon today, with the winners entering the main draw getting under way at the Dubai Tennis Stadium from tomorrow.

RESULTS

Ivo Klec bt George Bastl 6-3, 6-1; Nenad Zimonjic bt Oliver Marach 3-6, 7-6 (5), 6-4; John Van Lottum bt Jean-Rene Lisnard 6-4, 6-3; Paolo Lorenzi bt Abdullah Magdas 6-4, 6-2; Lars Uebel bt Karim Alayli 6-2, 6-3; Janko Tipsarevic bt Massimo Dell'Acqua 7-6 (9), 6-2; Giorgio Galimberti bt Mahmoud Nader 6-3, 6-2; Younes Al Aynaoui bt Victor Bruthans 6-2, 6-2.

Order of Play (Qualifying for Sunday): Court 1 (start at 12 noon): John Van Lottum vs Lars Uebel; Younes Al Aynaoui vs Giorgio Galimberti. Court 3 (Start at 12 noon): Nenad Zimonjic vs Ivo Klec; Janko Tipsarevic vs Paolo Lorenzi.