

yesterday
family

Tennis // Dubai Duty Free Championships

'Murray has 700 lives'

Verdasco wary of world No 1 and rival ahead of the final showdown

Ahmed Rizvi

DUBAI // Andy Murray, the world No 1, will be looking to clinch his first title of 2017 when he takes on Spanish veteran Fernando Verdasco in today's final of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships.

A finalist in Doha earlier in the year, world No 1 Murray cruised past Frenchman Lucas Pouille 7-5, 6-1 to reach his second final in five visits to Dubai.

He lost to Roger Federer in the 2012 title-clash.

"I think the first three matches here, I played pretty well," said Murray, who had gone to bed around 3am yesterday after his sensational quarter-final win over Philipp Kohlschreiber.

"I don't think tonight was the best standard, really, but I played some good stuff this week.

"Obviously, you want to play your best tennis at the grand slams, but still, this is my third tournament, I'm in my second final, which is good.

"It would be nice to pick up a win tomorrow, keep the momentum going into Indian Wells and Miami, which is a couple of tournaments where, especially Indian Wells, I really want to try and have a good run," he added.

"It's one of the Masters Series I haven't done well at over the years. Really want to make sure that I do well there this year."

For the moment, though, Murray is focused on Verdasco – a man he has beaten in 12 of their 13 duels. The Scot is expecting a much tougher outing given the conditions here.

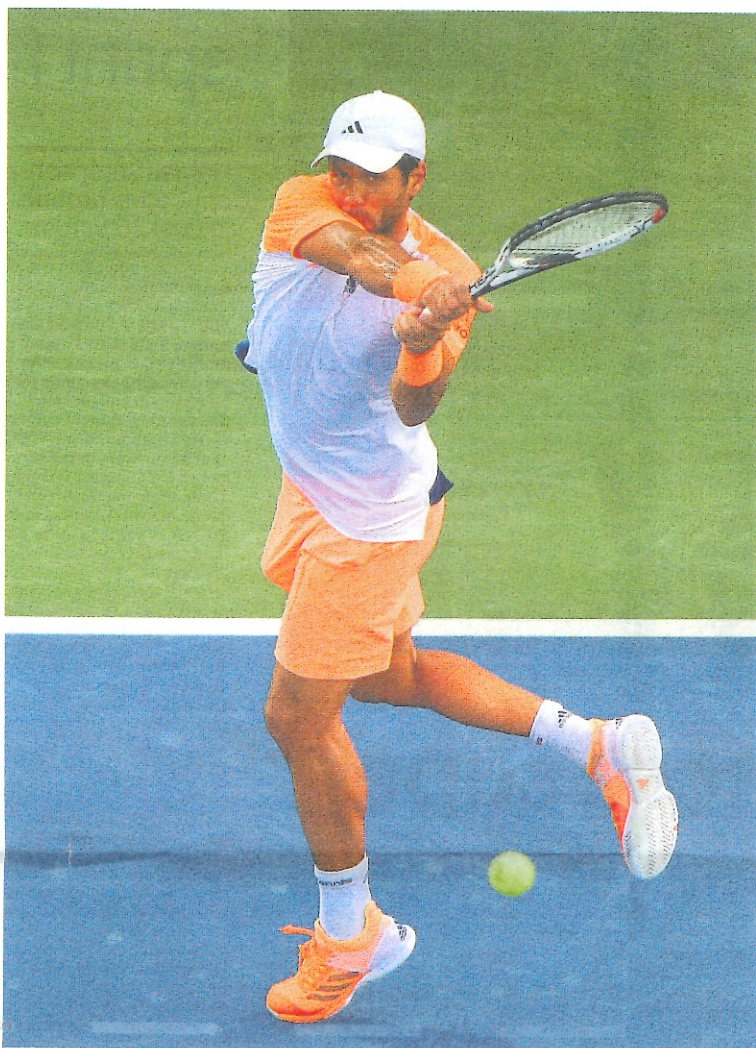
"I think where the balls are fairly heavy, here on a quick court, he can generate a lot of power, he can control the ball," the Scot said.

"And when he's dictating the points, he's one of the best in the world at doing that.

"So obviously, I need to try to stop him from doing that, which means dictating a little bit more myself, getting up on the baseline and, yeah, hopefully, be a little bit sharper at the beginning compared with today."

Busy as he has been over here, Murray has, however, still managed to find some time to check on how his peers, chiefly world No 2 Novak Djokovic, are doing in the tournament in Acapulco, Mexico.

Having survived a tense second round battle against Juan Martin del Potro in the second round, Djokovic was knocked out by Nick Kyrgios in the quarter-finals yesterday, with the Australian serving 25 aces in the match.



Fernando Verdasco beat Robin Haase 7-6, 5-7, 6-1 in the first semi-final. Tom Dulat / Getty Images

"I saw the results," Murray said. "I have seen bits and pieces of, like, highlights of the matches, but obviously haven't seen loads. Obviously, Novak got a pretty rough draw there.

"From what I heard, his match

with Delpo [Del Potro] was extremely good.

"Just from looking at the stats and stuff, it seems like Nick served extremely well.

"Guys of his height, that would be pretty rare to see somebody

serve 25 aces against Novak in a two-set match."

A former world No 7, Verdasco will be making his first appearance in an ATP World Tour 500 Series hard-court final and the Spaniard will be hoping he can improve on his head-to-head record against Murray.

"Andy is No 1 in the world – what can I say about him?," Verdasco, 33, said after his 7-6, 5-7, 6-1 win over Dutchman Robin Haase in the first semi-finals.

"I only beat him once. When we play tomorrow, hopefully, two. "He was unbelievable yesterday in the quarter-final against Kohlschreiber, [saving] seven match points.

"Unbelievable, but you know how Andy is. He has not seven lives, he has 700 lives. That's why he's No 1 in the world.

"I respect him so much, but I will try my 100 per cent to win the tournament."

* at a glance

Semi-final results

Singles 1-A Murray (GBR) beat 7-L Pouille (FRA) 7-5, 6-1; Fernando Verdasco (ESP) beat Robin Haase (NED) 7-6, 5-7, 6-1

Doubles R Bopanna (IND)/M Matkowski (POL) beat G Garcia-Lopez (ESP)/L Paes (IND) 6-3, 3-6, 1-0; 1-H Kontinen (FIN)/J Peers (AUS) vs 4-J Rojer (NED)/H Tecau (ROU) 7-6, 6-3

Order of play

Centre Court

Not before 5pm
R Bopanna (IND)/M Matkowski (POL) vs 1-H Kontinen (FIN)/J Peers (AUS) or 4-J Rojer (NED)/H Tecau (ROU)

Not before 7pm
1-A Murray (GBR) vs F Verdasco (ESP)

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