

SPORTS

Serena confirmed for Australian Open

Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray will also compete in the tournament in Melbourne

● Williams returned from giving birth to her first child to reach the 2018 Wimbledon and US Open finals

● Federer will be back to defend his title, along with long-time adversary Novak Djokovic

AFP | Melbourne

Serena Williams will make her return to the Australian Open for the first time since winning in 2017 when eight-weeks pregnant, it was confirmed yesterday, with virtually all the world's top 100 players due at Melbourne Park. That includes injury-prone Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray. Williams returned from giving birth to her first child to reach the 2018 Wimbledon and US Open finals, but suffered upset



Serena Williams plays a shot during a US Open match

losses in both to leave her stuck on 23 major wins.

Australian Open organisers said she was among the entries for the opening Grand Slam of the year as she attempts to equal Margaret Court's record of 24.

Her appearance will mark her

first major since her controversial rant at an umpire during the US Open final loss to Naomi Osaka, which overshadowed the Japanese star's biggest ever win.

In the aftermath, Roger Federer said Williams "went too far".

"Serena Williams, currently

ranked 16, will make her highly anticipated return to Melbourne for the first time since winning in 2017 when eight-weeks pregnant with baby Alexis Olympia," said tournament organiser Craig Tiley.

The evergreen Federer will



The world's top 102 women and top 101 men have confirmed they will be playing in Australian Open

be back to defend his title, along with long-time adversary Novak Djokovic. Caroline Wozniacki defends the women's crown.

Organisers said the world's top 102 women and top 101 men have all confirmed they will be playing.

The only top-100 absentee from the women's draw is 74th-ranked Agnieszka Radwanska of Poland who recently announced her retirement.

Modric rewarded for 'wonderful year', says Solari



Luka Modric kisses the trophy after receiving the award

AFP | Madrid

Croatia midfielder Luka Modric was a deserved winner of the Ballon d'Or award after a "wonderful year" for both club and country, Real Madrid coach Santiago Solari said yesterday.

The 33-year-old Modric won a third straight Champions League title with Real and was the driving force in a Croatia team that reached the World Cup final.

"It's Modric's year. The focus has to be on him. He's had a wonderful year and he's given everything to Real Madrid and his national team," said Solari.

"It comes at a time of maturity in his career. It seems to me that at that age it's more beautiful because he can truly value it. We're all very happy with his prize."

Shaikh Khalid directs to form boxing team

TDI | Manama

HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa has directed to form a national boxing team under the umbrella of KHK Boxing Organisation.

The move comes within the initiatives of the First Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports and Honourary President of Bahrain Mixed Martial Arts Federation to support the local sports movement, and is a clear reflection of HH's concern about improving boxing sport in Bahrain and enabling it to take part in intercontinental and international competitions.

On the occasion, HH Shaikh Khalid stated: "We aim to create a strong base in Bahrain for this sport and achieve our vi-

sion to develop it and promote it internationally, similarly to the success achieved in MMA sports. We look forward for launching more initiatives to continue the efforts to leave a Bahraini impact on the international sports arena, in line with the directives of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, the King of Bahrain."

The team will act as a platform for local and international athletes to showcase their talents and abilities, to strengthen the Bahraini presence in international competitions and championships

HH Shaikh Khalid added: "We have set several goals by launching the National Bahraini Boxing Team, as we aim at making it the starting point for the Bahraini youth who are interested in this sport."

Wilder wants Fury rematch 'ASAP'

● Deontay Wilder said he is determined to give Tyson Fury a rematch ASAP after their heavyweight thriller in Los Angeles

AFP | Los Angeles

Deontay Wilder on Tuesday called for an immediate rematch with Tyson Fury, dismissing claims from his British rival he would attempt to avoid a return bout after their epic heavyweight duel in Los Angeles.

Wilder retained his World Boxing Council heavyweight crown on Saturday after a thrilling 12-round battle ended in a split decision draw at the Staples Center.

Fury, who many observers believe did enough to win despite being knocked down twice during the fight, said on Monday he feared Wilder would seek to duck a rematch "at all costs."

However the 33-year-old Wilder on Tuesday rejected that claim in the strongest possible terms, saying a rematch with Fury was his priority rather than a unification bout with WBA, IBF and WBO champion Anthony Joshua.

"I'm ready to do it again," Wilder told reporters on a conference call.

"My main goal is Tyson Fury. I'm looking forward to giving



Tyson Fury (L) taunts Deontay Wilder in the ninth round fighting in their WBC Heavyweight Championship fight (file photo)

him the rematch as soon as possible.

"This is the biggest fight still in the heavyweight division, this is the most exciting fight in the heavyweight division and we're ready to give the fans what they

want to see."

Wilder snatched a draw on Saturday after Fury somehow recovered from a devastating 12th round knockdown by the American champion to finish the fight on his feet.

Wilder said Tuesday he would make no mistake in any possible rematch.

"He woke up from hell -- I want to put him back there," Wilder said.

Fury, who only returned to boxing this year after nearly three years out of the ring as he struggled with depression, drink and drug problems, had said Monday he doubted Wilder would grant him a return.

"I've got a funny feeling he's going to get his running shoes

out and stay away from me at all costs," Fury said.

Rematch inescapable

However Wilder said a rematch was all but inescapable.

"Both sides definitely want (a rematch) to happen. I don't see why we wouldn't. It's a great fight and the build-up has already started. We can't get away from this fight."

"It's only right for us to go back in and do it again. I don't want no other fights to happen between him or I before then. I want to give Tyson Fury the rematch ASAP."

Wilder, who on Saturday had spoken enthusiastically about a possible unification fight with Joshua, meanwhile poured cold water on the idea on Tuesday.



• Um al Hassan +973 17728699 • Seef District +973 17364999