



Canada's Milos Raonic celebrates his victory against France's Gilles Simon

Fans of Canada's Milos Raonic cheer him

Raonic

Serena

last *into* eight



Melbourne

Third seed Milos Raonic charged home to claim a quarter-final with Rafael Nadal at the Australian Open yesterday, as Serena Williams accelerated towards a record title and the number one ranking.

Raonic had early problems before he recovered under a closed roof to win 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 6-4, 6-1 against the 13th-seeded Bautista Agut in two hours, 52 minutes on Hisense Arena.

The boom-serving Canadian trails the 14-time Grand Slam champion Nadal 6-2 in their previous meetings.

It is the third straight year Raonic has reached the quarter-finals in Australia, and it is also his sixth quarter-final at a major, the most by any Canadian player.

"I was very fortunate to get through today, (because) there were some moments where

it was not looking so good, so I'm happy to find a way to pull through," Raonic said.

A day after defending women's champion and top seed Angelique Kerber also fell by the wayside, Williams beat Barbora Strycova 7-5, 6-4 to set up a last-eight meeting with Johanna Konta.

The American great would gain much from winning in Melbourne, as she would overtake Steffi Graf's Open-era record of 22 Grand Slam titles and end Kerber's short reign as world number one.

In hot afternoon conditions, she fought off the Czech Republic's Strycova in two tight sets, following her sister Venus into the quarter-finals without dropping a set.

"I have absolutely nothing to lose in this tournament," said Williams, 35. "Everything here is a bonus for me. Obviously I'm here to win. Hopefully I can play better, I can only go better."

Britain's Konta, the ninth seed, also reached the last eight with a perfect record in sets after a convincing 6-1, 6-4 victory over Russia's Ekaterina Makarova.

Mirjana Lucic-Baroni wrote another chapter in her fairytale

career revival when she beat American qualifier Jennifer Brady 6-4, 6-2 to reach her first Grand Slam quarter-final in 18 years.

The former teen prodigy, now 34, won the 1998 Australian Open women's doubles with Martina Hingis but she fled her abusive father and suffered a series of injuries to put her career on hold.

Lucic-Baroni will play her quarter-final against US Open finalist Karolina Pliskova, who ended home hopes with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Australia's Daria Gavrilova.

In the men's draw, David Goffin put away Austria's Dominic Thiem 5-7, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2, 6-2 to become the first Belgian man to reach the Australian quarter-finals.

Goffin will next play Grigor Dimitrov, who halted the fairytale run of Denis Istomin, the 117th-ranked Uzbek wildcard who shocked defending champion Novak Djokovic in round two.

The bespectacled Istomin won the first set but injury problems set in and he went down 2-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-1 to the in-form Bulgarian. (AFP)



Serena Williams of the US

Results

Men's singles - 4th rd

David Goffin (BEL x11) bt Dominic Thiem (AUT x8) 5-7, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2, 6-2

Grigor Dimitrov (BUL x15) bt Denis Istomin (UZB) 2-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-1

Milos Raonic (CAN) bt Roberto Bautista (ESP) 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 6-4, 6-1
Rafael Nadal (ESP x9) bt Gael Monfils (FRA x6) 6-3, 6-3, 4-6, 6-4

Women's singles - 4th rd

Johanna Konta (GBR x9) bt Ekaterina Makarova (RUS x30) 6-1, 6-4
Serena Williams (USA x2) bt Barbora Strycova (CZE x16) 7-5, 6-4

Mirjana Lucic-Baroni (CRO) bt Jennifer Brady (USA) 6-4, 6-2
Karolina Pliskova (CZE x5) bt Daria Gavrilova (AUS x22) 6-3, 6-3

Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova