

# Froome helps Viviani to win

## Payerne

**I**talian sprinter Elia Viviani missed the cut for Sky's Giro d'Italia lineup yesterday but bounced back by winning stage three of the Tour of Romandie in Switzerland.

As the poor weather of recent days cleared Viviani was helped out in his win in the 187km run around Payerne by Sky leader and three time Tour de France winner Chris Froome, who led out the sprint team and is favourite to emerge as overall winner come Sunday.

After he snatched the overall lead in the prologue on Tuesday another Italian, Fabio Felline, maintained that lead again Friday ahead of Germany's Maximilian Schachmann and Spain's Jesus Herrada.

Saturday's race features four challenging mountain climbs and a summit finish but the final stage is an all-decisive go-for-bust individual time trial around Lausanne and Lake Geneva.

# Murray, Nadal enter semi-finals

## Barcelona

**A**ndy Murray saved match point in gaining revenge on Spain's Albert Ramos-Vinolas and nine-time champion Rafael Nadal cruised into the semi-finals of the Barcelona Open yesterday.

Ramos-Vinolas beat the world number one on Murray's return from an elbow injury in the third round of the Monte Carlo Masters last week.

He threatened to repeat that upset when he served for the match in the third set, but Murray battled back to edge out the world number 19 by 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/4) after three hours on court.

"It was obviously a very tough match," said Murray, who got his wish for match practice ahead of next month's French Open after taking a late wildcard to enter the draw in the Catalan capital. Ramos-Vinolas had the chance to serve it out when he broke for 5-4, but nerves seemed to get the better of him as three errors handed Murray the break back.

Murray raced out to a 4-0 lead in the tiebreak and saw it out as Ramos-Vinolas's efforts over the past two weeks finally began to take their toll. The Wimbledon champion faces Dominic Thiem in Saturday's semis after the Austrian ended Japanese lucky loser Yuichi Sugita's unlikely run to the quarters 6-1, 6-2.

Nadal also enjoyed a comfortable afternoon as his quest for a 10th Barcelona title continued unhindered with a 7-6 (7/1), 6-2 win over Korean qualifier Hyeon Chung.

# Sharapova into semis

## Stuttgart

**M**aria Sharapova eased into the semi-finals of Stuttgart's WTA tournament after seeing off qualifier Anett Kontaveit on Friday for her third-straight win on her comeback after a 15-month doping ban.

The 30-year-old five-time Grand Slam winner has yet to drop a set in Stuttgart and powered past Estonia's Kontaveit, ranked 73rd, for a 6-3, 6-4 quarter-final win in one hour, 23 minutes.

This was another impressive display from the Russian, who hit four aces, 28 winners and just two double faults, while she converted five of her six break points.

"I served quite well and held my serve which gave me confidence, so I'm happy," said Sharapova.

"We haven't played each other before, so the first six games were just about working each other out.

"I kept myself in good shape, because once you lose it, it's hard to get it back," she added when asked about her fitness on court after 15 months out.

In Saturday's semi-final, the former world number one will face France's Kristina Mladenovic, ranked 19th in the world, who beat Spain's Carla Suarez Navarro 6-3, 6-2.

"She is showing great

form at the moment, it's a semi-final, so I expect a really tough match," said Mladenovic on Sharapova.

The Russian only made the main draw for Stuttgart after being given a wild card as her ranking was wiped out after testing positive for meldonium at the 2016 Australian Open. Mladenovic was one of the players who criticised the decision to give Sharapova wild cards in Stuttgart, Madrid and Rome.

But Sharapova gave a terse answer when asked if her

opponent's comments would motivate her to reach Sunday's final: "not at all".

She has been in commanding form as she waits to learn on May 16 whether she will be granted a wild card for the main draw of next month's French Open. However, if she wins Sunday's final, Sharapova will rank approximately 125th in the world -- high enough to at least allow her a qualifying place at both Roland Garros and Wimbledon. (AFP)

## Results from 187km third stage:

1. Elia Viviani (ITA, Sky) 4hr 27min 42sec,
2. Sonny Colbrelli (ITA, Bahrain) same time,
3. Michael Schwarzmann (GER, Bora) s.t.,
4. Alexander Edmondson (AUS, Orica) s.t.,
5. Samuel Dumoulin (FRA, AG2R) s.t.,
6. Youcel Reguigui (ALG, Dimension) s.t.,
7. Max Richeze (ARG, Quick-Step) s.t.,
8. Moreno Hofland (NED, Lotto-Soudal) s.t.,
9. Viacheslav Kuznetsov (RUS, Katusha) s.t.,
10. Juan Jose Lobato (ESP, Lotto-NL) s.t.

## Overall standings

1. Fabio Felline (ITA, Trek), 12hr 40min 24sec,
2. Maximilian Schachmann (GER, Quick-Step) at 8sec,
3. Jesus Herrada (ESP, Movistar) s.t.,
4. Primoz Roglic (SLO, Lotto-NL) 0:09,
5. Ion Izagirre (ESP, Bahrain) 0:12,
6. Bob Jungels (LUX, Quick-Step) s.t.,
7. Jose Goncalves (POR, Katusha) 0:13,
8. Ruben Fernandez (ESP, Movistar) s.t.,
9. Michael Albasini (SUI, Orica) 0:14,
10. Jonathan Castroviejo (ESP, Movistar) s.t.

## Selected others

36. Chris Froome (GBR, Sky) 0:29,
46. Richie Porte (AUS, BMC) 0:33,
49. Tejay Van Garderen (USA, BMC) 0:34

