

SPORTS
sports

BIC set to host sensational Saturday of on-track thrills



Clio Cup cars during a race

TDT | Manama

Bahrain International Circuit (BIC) is set to host a packed programme of exhilarating track activities tomorrow for motorsport fans of all kinds to enjoy at the world-renowned Sakher facility.

"The Home of Motorsport in the Middle East" has lined up its most popular offerings the entire day, starting from early in the morning and continuing until late at night.

These include the Ultimate Track Experience, Open Track Night and Jaguar Experience.

From 8am to 4pm, fans will be able to choose from a series of drives and passenger rides

that fall under the umbrella of the Ultimate Track Experience and enjoy the thrills around BIC's 2.55-kilometre Inner Track.

Then, from 4pm to 11pm, speed lovers will have a chance to drive their very own cars or ride their motorbikes along BIC's 5.412km Grand Prix Track in Open Track Night, during which the hugely exciting Jaguar Experience can also be enjoyed.

The Ultimate Track Experience activities include drives in a Clio Cup sports car and in a Radical SR1 prototype, as well as passenger rides in a Clio Cup and an ultra-quick Radical SR3.

Serena handed tough draw in quest for record 24th Slam

AFP | Melbourne

Serena Williams has been handed a challenging draw in her quest for a record-equaling 24th Grand Slam title at the Australian Open, starting with Germany's Tatjana Maria in the first round.

The American, seeded 16, is gunning to match Margaret Court's record of singles majors and claim an eighth Australian Open crown.

But Williams is in a tough half of the draw and could meet world number one Simona Halep in round four, and if she gets through that Karolina Pliskova in the last eight.

Before those potential ties, either Chinese wildcard Peng Shuai or Canadian Eugenie Bouchard would await Williams in the second round.

Halep, who enters the tournament having played just one game in four months after a back injury, was handed a chance to avenge Estonia's Kaia Kanepi, who beat her in



Serena Williams of the US plays a forehand shot during a practice session in Melbourne

the first round of the US Open in August.

If she comes through that dangerous opening showdown, she could meet Venus Williams in round three.

Defending champion and third seed Caroline Wozniacki starts against Alison Van Uytvanck of Belgium and could meet 2008 champion Maria Sharapova in round three.

Kvitova topples Kerber

Petra Kvitova beat defending champion Angelique Kerber to book her semi-final spot against Aliaksandra Sasnovich

● **Veteran Seppi, homegrown star Barty cruise into Sydney semis**

● **Australian teen Alex De Minaur continued his strong start to the season with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 victory over Jordan Thompson**

AFP | Sydney

Petra Kvitova sent defending champion Angelique Kerber packing from the rain-affected Sydney International yesterday to book a semi-final spot and get an edge over her rival heading into the Australian Open next week.

It was always going to be a tight match with the pair tied 6-6 in 12 previous meetings.

Play was suspended early in the first set due to rain. They returned several hours later but the drizzle soon began falling again and it was back to the locker room for the two tournament drawcards.

They eventually resumed at 10:30pm and Czech fifth seed Kvitova, who won the title in 2015, took charge, quickly racing through the first set to put the German world number two on the back foot.

Kvitova kept the pressure on and got a crucial break in game four of the second set and there was no way back for Kerber who meekly surrendered 6-4, 6-1.

"The weather has not been great and it's not easy to wait in the locker room, but I was glad I could come back out and play so well," Kvitova said after reaching the semi-finals in Sydney for a fourth time.

Her reward is a clash with Belarusian qualifier Aliaksandra Sasnovich, who beat Switzerland's Timea Bacsinszky -- on the comeback trail after a 14-month winless spell -- 6-3, 6-3.

Australia's Ashleigh Barty followed up her giant-killing wins over world number one Simona Halep and former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko by easily accounting for 10th seed- e d

Belgian Elise Mertens 6-3, 6-3.

The 22-year-old is now on a six-match win streak, dating back to her career's biggest title at the WTA Elite Trophy in Zhuhai.

"Nice and solid today, I was pretty happy at the way I was able to come out and play," said Barty, ranked 15 in the world.

She will play seventh seed Kiki Bertens who blasted past Yulia Putintseva 6-2, 6-2 for a place in the final.

Seppi derails Tsitsipas

In the men's draw, veteran Andreas Seppi derailed top seed Stefanos Tsitsipas' title hopes.

Seppi, 14 years older than his 20-year-old Greek opponent, has only won three ATP titles in his career, but called on all his

play a bit more aggressive and it worked out in the end."

Australia has been a home away from home for the Italian in recent years.

In a trio of round-of-16 appearances at the Australian Open, he pulled off upsets against Marin Cilic in 2013, Roger Federer in 2015 and Nick Kyrgios in 2017.

Defeat was a blow for world No.15 Tsitsipas' preparations for the opening Grand Slam of the year in Melbourne next week.

He was one of the sport's most improved players last year, climbing from 91 after reaching finals in Barcelona and Toronto, losing both to Rafael Nadal, and was angling for the perfect start ahead of the Australian Open.

Seppi will now play third seeded Argentine Diego Schwartzman, who needed to fight hard to beat Japanese qualifier Yoshihito Nishioka 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (7/1)

In other quarter-final action, fifth seeded teenager Alex De Minaur continued his strong start to the season with a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 victory over fellow Australian Jordan Thompson.



experience as he battled back for a gutsy 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 win.

"For some reason I always play my best tennis in Australia, so I really enjoy being here," said Seppi, who broke immediately in the second set after losing the first.

"It was very important to start well in the second set. Good to have an early break so I could

Djokovic faces qualifier, Federer takes on Istomin

● **Second seeded Nadal begins against Australian James Duckworth while fourth seed Alexander Zverev faces Slovenian Aljaz Bedene**

● **Champion Roger Federer, seeded three, is gunning for a seventh Melbourne title at the Australian Open**

AFP | Melbourne

World number one Novak Djokovic will start his bid to win a record seventh Australian Open title next week against a qualifier following yesterday's draw.

The Serb had a magnificent 2018, making an astonishing climb back from outside the world's top 20 in June, winning Wimbledon and the US Open on the way to reclaiming the number one ranking in November.

He will start his drive to make

history against a yet-to-be-decided qualifier and could meet France's Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in the second round.

Champion Roger Federer, seeded three and also gunning for a seventh Melbourne title, starts his title defence against world number 99 Denis Istomin and could meet Rafael Nadal in the semi-finals.

"He (Djokovic) continues to challenge me. I played him in his prime when he was virtually unbeatable. It was important not to get frustrated by it. I always enjoy my matches against him," 20-time Grand Slam winner Federer said at the draw.

"We are both natural attacking players. We are aggressive.

He is up there with Nadal and Hewitt they make me rethink my game. I like to play attacking tennis, so I've come full circle."

Second seeded Nadal begins against Australian James Duckworth, fourth seed Alexander Zverev faces Slovenian Aljaz Bedene while last year's runner-up Marin Cilic

has a tricky encounter with Australian Bernard Tomic.

A highlight first round clash will see Australia's unseeded Nick Kyrgios up against

Canada's big-serving 16th seed Milos Raonic, with the winner facing either Stan Wawrinka or Ernests Gulbis.

Three-time Grand Slam winner Andy Murray has a tough clash with 22nd-seeded Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut as he returns from a hip injury.



Petra Kvitova has won the Sydney International title in 2015



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Australian Open titles have been won by both Novak Djokovic and current champion Roger Federer