

Federer squeaks past Goffin

Roger Federer says fans inspired him to reach Shanghai Masters quarter-finals

● **Novak Djokovic powers past John Isner**

AFP | Shanghai

Roger Federer said that his devoted band of Chinese supporters helped pull him through a tough first set and into the Shanghai Masters quarter-finals yesterday.

The Swiss defeated David Goffin 7-6 (9/7), 6-4 after the 13th seed from Belgium squandered five set points in the first set.

The 38-year-old Federer plays either Germany's Alexander Zverev in the last eight.

"I never really felt like I had the upper hand against David today," said the 20-time Grand Slam winner, who looked unusually flustered at times.

Federer was left shaking his head in the first set and he suffered a rare inelegant moment in the 12th game, slipping on his own sweat -- "a bit embarrassing", he said.

The Swiss fell awkwardly and was then broken by Goffin, 14th in the world.

But the Belgian lost his nerve



Roger Federer of Switzerland hits a return against David Goffin of Belgium

despite going 3-1 up in the first tie break, and Federer roared back to turn the momentum in his favour.

Federer was regularly serenaded by chants of "Roger, Roger, go go go" by local supporters all sitting together in one part of the arena. All were decked out in red.

Federer, who failed to win a

Grand Slam this year, said their backing had been key to his revival.

"I know that if I am in trouble, they will be there to cheer me on," he said.

"If I look to them, or pump myself up, I know they will react to that.

"It's definitely very special here because they all sit in one

block, sort of like in football to some extent, which is highly unusual for tennis and a tennis tournament."

Perfect Djokovic

World number one Novak Djokovic made light work of American John Isner and plays promising 21-year-old Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece in the last



Novak Djokovic secured his 350th career match win at the ATP Masters 1000 level

eight.

The defending champion from Serbia dismissed the 16th seed Isner 7-5, 6-3 in 74 minutes after taming Isner's booming serve.

"It's always a big challenge returning the serve of Isner," said Djokovic, who is over the shoulder problem that curtailed his US Open defence.

"He's got one of the biggest serves of all time, he's one of the tallest guys ever to play tennis."

The 32-year-old Djokovic is looking imperious, having not dropped a set in claiming the title in Tokyo last week and continuing that perfect record in Shanghai.

Also in the last eight on Friday, colourful Italian Fabio Fognini faces red-hot Russian Daniil Medvedev.

The fourth-ranked Medvedev was forced to sweat -- and not just because of the Shanghai heat -- after being 5-2 down in the first set to Canadian qualifier Vasek Pospisil.

The 23-year-old Medvedev eventually squeezed through 7-6 (9/7), 7-5.

"I was down five set points and 5-2 also," said the US Open finalist, fast making a big name for himself as the man most likely to challenge Federer, Djokovic and Rafael Nadal.

"Usually the set is finished when it's like this, so just try to win every point I had to face, and finally it worked out."

Medvedev, who has been in eight finals this year, winning three of them, smashed his racquet as the frustration built and he threatened to boil over in the Shanghai sun.

"I usually don't like to break racquets because it's never beautiful," he said.

The Spaniard Nadal is not in Shanghai because of a wrist injury.

Agarwal hits ton as India dominate South Africa

AFP | Pune, India

Mayank Agarwal hit his second century in successive matches on the opening day of the second Test against South Africa yesterday and said his side should aim for a 500-run first innings.

The opener, who made a double century in India's opening Test win, scored 108 after the hosts elected to bat.

India were 273-3 when bad light forced an early end to play, with skipper Virat Kohli unbeaten on 63 and vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane on 18.

Kohli and Rahane put on 75 runs for the fourth wicket to thwart South Africa's determined bowlers who kept them under pressure as the gloom crept in.

Agarwal, 28, said he was thrilled with his performance.

"The team is in a good position, winning the toss, batting first and with one batsman short, it's a good thing to make runs... 450-500 would be nice," Agarwal said.

"Try and get big runs in the first innings... (that) could help us in case we don't want to bat again. It could really put pres-



A close-in fielder is airborne as Mayank Agarwal drives

sure on the South Africans."

Kohli, leading the Test side for the 50th time, reached his half-century with a boundary off fast bowler Vernon Philander.

But Agarwal took the lead role despite being hit on the helmet from a bouncer by debutant paceman Anrich Nortje. He went on to hit Nortje for three glorious off drives in one over before lunch.

The right-handed batsman put on 138 runs for the second wicket with Cheteshwar Puja-

ra, who made 58, to steady the innings after the fall of Rohit Sharma early in the day.

He was eventually caught in the slips by South African captain Faf du Plessis -- one of fast bowler Kagiso Rabada's three wickets for the day.

"There were periods where I was getting boundaries very easily, there were periods where they bowled very good line and lengths and were testing the bouncer as well," said Agarwal, who is playing his sixth Test since making his debut last year.



Rabada also claimed Sharma, who edged the ball into the gloves of wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock for 14 in the 10th over.

That was a disappointment for Sharma, who hit twin centuries in his first run as Test opener in Visakhapatnam where India took a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Rabada struck again to get Pujara, caught again by du Plessis, just before tea. Pujara, who was dropped by Temba Bavuma before he scored, hit a six and nine fours.

Rabada returned figures of 3-48 in 18.1 overs.

Victory for India in the series will see them beat the record of 10 straight home series wins they share with Australia.

Naomi Osaka picks Japanese citizenship with eye on Olympics



Naomi Osaka of Japan poses with the trophy after winning the China Open

AFP | Tokyo

Tennis star Naomi Osaka has decided to choose Japanese over American nationality with an eye on the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, public broadcaster NHK reported yesterday.

Osaka, who has a Japanese mother and a Haitian father, told NHK she has completed an administrative step to obtain Japanese citizenship ahead of her birthday next week.

Japanese law stipulates that a Japanese with more than one nationality must choose one before turning 22 years old.

"It gives me a special feeling to try to go to the Olympics to represent Japan," the two-time Grand Slam champion told the broadcaster in an interview in Tokyo.

"I think I will be able to put more of my emotion into it by playing for the pride of the country," she said, according to the article published in Japanese on the NHK website.

Osaka added she wants to

aim for the gold although she is also worried as expectations will be high.

The young tennis sensation is a household name in Japan, where her every move is followed feverishly by local media, particularly when she is in the country of her mother's birth.



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NAOMI OSAKA

She is the face of several leading Japanese brands, including the carrier ANA, and "Naomichan" -- as she is affectionately known -- was the main attraction at last month's Pan Pacific

Open in Osaka, which she won.

But she has faced controversies over her dual heritage in a nation that is fairly racially homogeneous, as well as scrutiny for her imperfect Japanese language skills -- though others insist they add to her charm.

Mixed-race children can often face prejudice in Japan, although attitudes among younger generations are changing.

England must tighten up at the back: Alexander-Arnold

AFP | London



Trent Alexander-Arnold says England must improve their defensive record if they are to stand any chance of winning Euro 2020.

Gareth Southgate's side can assure themselves of a place in next

Trent Alexander-Arnold

year's finals if they beat the Czech Republic in their Group A qualifier in Prague on Friday.

England are firm favourites to advance after a perfect start to the qualification campaign, including a 5-0 win over their next opponents at Wembley in March.

England have a wealth of attacking options including Harry Kane, Raheem Sterling and Jadon Sancho but have had defensive problems in recent matches.

A 5-3 win over Kosovo at Southampton last month did little to paper over cracks that showed when the Netherlands won 3-1 in the Nations League semi-final in June.

Individual errors accounted for many of the goals shipped across those two games as Southgate continues to strive for a settled back four.

"If we want to be regarded as one of the best teams in Europe and go far in the Euros, and try and win the competition, our

clean sheets and goals conceded must be fewer," Liverpool full-back Alexander-Arnold said.

"We have to concede fewer goals. As defenders, as a team and as a unit we know where to improve and where to work on.

"Some games, it just happens. We will analyse what went wrong and try and make sure it does not happen again."

Champions League-winning right-back Alexander-Arnold will battle with Kieran Trippier for a place in Southgate's team.