

Kohli above peers, destined for greatness - Sangakkara

Reuters | New Delhi



India's Virat Kohli during nets (file photo)

India captain Virat Kohli is well ahead of his contemporaries and destined for greatness, former Sri Lankan batting stalwart Kumar Sangakkara has said.

Run-machine Kohli capped a memorable 2018 by becoming the first to win the International Cricket Council's (ICC) cricketer, test and one-day international (ODI) player of the year awards last month.

Considered part of the elite group also featuring Kiwi Kane Williamson, Australian Steve Smith and England's Joe Root, Kohli has surged ahead after a stupendous 2018 and is currently the top ranked test as well as one-day batsman.

"Everything about Virat's game stands out. I think he is head and shoulders above anyone else in world cricket today," Sangakkara told India Today news channel.

Wawrinka through as Paire switches off

Stan Wawrinka benefitted from a Benoit Paire collapse in tricky Rotterdam opener

Reuters | Rotterdam

Stan Wawrinka benefitted from a Benoit Paire collapse, with the Swiss carving out a 7-6(7/4), 6-1 win on Monday at the Rotterdam Open.

After fighting through a 45-minute first set the 33-year-old Wawrinka needed just 26 more minutes to salt away the first-round victory as the moody Paire had unleashed a trademark racquet smash after dropping the opening set.

The frustrated 58th-ranked Frenchman made little effort in the second set, phoning it in with apparent disinterest as Wawrinka took complete charge.

Breaking four times on his way into the second round Wawrinka made a date against either Milos Raonic, who beat him in four tiebreak sets at the Australian Open, or German Philipp Kohlschreiber.

"It's tough to play a friend whose game you know so well," Wawrinka said of Paire, "I didn't start well, but I lifted my level and got better and better."

"I'm happy to win this match."

"It's tough to play Paire but I was able to regain my focus. I



Switzerland's Stanislas Wawrinka plays a backhand return to France's Benoit Paire

fought hard to find my rhythm." Wawrinka said that his knee is no longer a problem.

"In general I'm training well and moving well. "I had a good

level in Melbourne against Raonic over almost four hours."

"The knee is good, I'm happy physically and have confidence in it."

The number 68 Swiss who claimed the title in Europe's major port city in 2015, has been working for more than a year to rehab completely following two



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STAN WAWRINKA

knee surgeries in summer, 2017. Victory over his French opponent leaves him with a 9-3 record in the series.

The field is headed by Asia's top player, Kei Nishikori of Japan, who opens in his tournament debut yesterday against Montpellier finalist Pierre-Hugues Herbert of France.

In other first-round results on Monday, Italian veteran Andreas Seppi outlasted Peter Gojowczyk of Germany 7-6(7/3), 3-6, 6-2 while Kazakh Mikhail Kukushkin beat Dutchman Robin Haase, a quarter-finalist here in 2018 who lost to Roger Federer, 6-2, 7-6(7/4).

Federer became the oldest man to return to the number one ranking through that victory one year ago here.

World number one Osaka in shock split with coach

AFP | Tokyo

World tennis number one Naomi Osaka has split from her coach Sascha Bajin just 17 days after completing back-to-back Grand Slam victories at the Australian Open.

"Hey everyone, I will no longer be working together with Sascha. I thank him for his work and wish him all the best in the future," the 21-year-old Japanese tweeted in a shock announcement.

Bajin, a former hitting partner to Serena Williams, responded: "Thank you Naomi. I wish you nothing but the best as well. What a ride that was. Thank you for letting me be part of this."

Osaka, who became the first Asian to hold the top ranking after beating Czech Petra Kvitova in the Melbourne final on January 26, had worked with the German for just over a year.

No reason was given for the surprise decision to part ways, but Japanese media cited Osaka's management company IMG in reporting that there had been a breakdown in the player's relationship with the coach since the start of the year.

According to Japan's Nikkan Sports, some practice sessions with Bajin at the Australian Open lasted just 10 minutes and she sometimes hit without him being present.

Osaka, who is scheduled to compete in Dubai next week, began sounding out potential replacements late last year, local media reported.

The Japanese player captured her first Grand Slam crown by stunning Williams at last year's US Open in a final remembered as much for the American's



Japan's Naomi Osaka with coach Sascha Bajin before her match against Latvia's Anastasija Sevastova (file photo)

astonishing rant at the chair umpire following a coaching violation.

Based in the United States, Osaka linked up with Bajin in late 2017 and enjoyed a breakthrough year, shooting from 72 in the world to the top of the women's rankings.

Disbelief

During that period she won the prestigious Indian Wells tournament before scooping her first major in New York, while Bajin was named WTA coach of the year.

Osaka's Twitter feed lit up in response to her announcement, with several memes expressing widespread disbelief -- including a shrugging Barack Obama, a confused Joey from American sitcom "Friends" and a Minions character screaming



Osaka melted hearts when she fought back tears after her emotional US Open win over her idol Williams as boeing echoed around the stadium

"WHAAAAT?"

Osaka, who grew up in the US and speaks little Japanese, melted hearts when she fought back tears after her emotional US Open win over her idol Williams as boeing echoed around

the stadium.

She won more fans with a nail-biting 7-6, 5-7, 6-4 win over Kvitova in the Australian Open final, after which Osaka sobbed tears of joy as the jeers were replaced by cheers.

Former greats Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert have all heaped praise on the new darling of women's tennis.

"Winning back-to-back Grand Slam tournaments is a rare and special achievement, and I'm thrilled these results have propelled Naomi to the top of the women's game," said Evert, the first ever WTA world number one. It's tough to play a friend whose game you know so well. I didn't start well, but I lifted my level and got better and better. I'm happy to win this match

Missing Reus a blow for injury-hit Dortmund against Spurs - Matthaeus

AFP | Berlin

With the absence of injured playmaker Marco Reus, Borussia Dortmund will face Tottenham in the Champions League without their best player, Germany legend Lothar Matthaeus said yesterday.

Reus has scored 17 goals and created 11 more for the Bundesliga leaders this season, but a thigh strain will keep him out of the last 16, first leg against Spurs at Wembley.

"Now he's also going to be missing for the important game against Tottenham - that won't make it any easier," said former Germany captain Matthaeus, now a Sky pundit.

"The third-best team in the Premier League against the best in the Bundesliga. I see the chances as 50/50."

"In Marco Reus, Dortmund are missing their best player."

However, it is not just Reus who will be missing against Spurs.

Right-back Lukasz Piszczek is out with a heel injury, stand-in centre-back Julian Weigl has flu and striker Paco Alcacer is sidelined by a shoulder injury.

Dortmund head coach Lucien Favre is struggling with the effects of flu and England winger Jadon Sancho forgot his passport, forcing a red-faced dash

home to retrieve the document before making the flight to London.

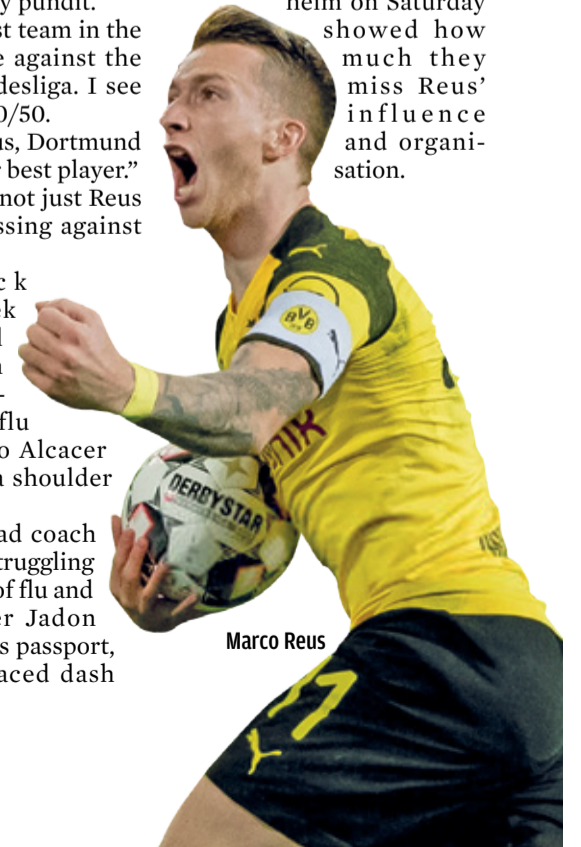
"Yes, we have a few dropped out, but we won't be going there just to wave," said Dortmund's director of sport Michael Zorc.

Reus injured his thigh last Tuesday while drilling home a direct free-kick against Werder Bremen, but Dortmund lost on penalties as the German Cup tie finished 3-3 after extra time.

Spurs are also without big names of their own as England forwards Harry Kane and Dele Alli are injured.

Matthaeus says Dortmund's 3-3 draw at home to Hoffenheim on Saturday

showed how much they miss Reus' influence and organisation.



Marco Reus