

Zverev's slump continues in Rome

● Alexander Zverev's clay-court horror show continues with Italian Open exit

● Rome's Berrettini upsets Zverev for milestone win

● Goffin, Kyrgios advance in Rome

AFP | Rome

Germany's Alexander Zverev crashed out of the Italian Open yesterday with a 7-5, 7-5 loss to Italian wild card Matteo Berrettini in the second round.

"The match that I played was horrendous," said Zverev after the game which took 1hr 48min on the red clay of the Foro Italico.

Zverev, the 2017 winner and runner-up in Rome last year to Novak Djokovic, has had a terrible start to the clay-court season with the French Open starting on May 26.

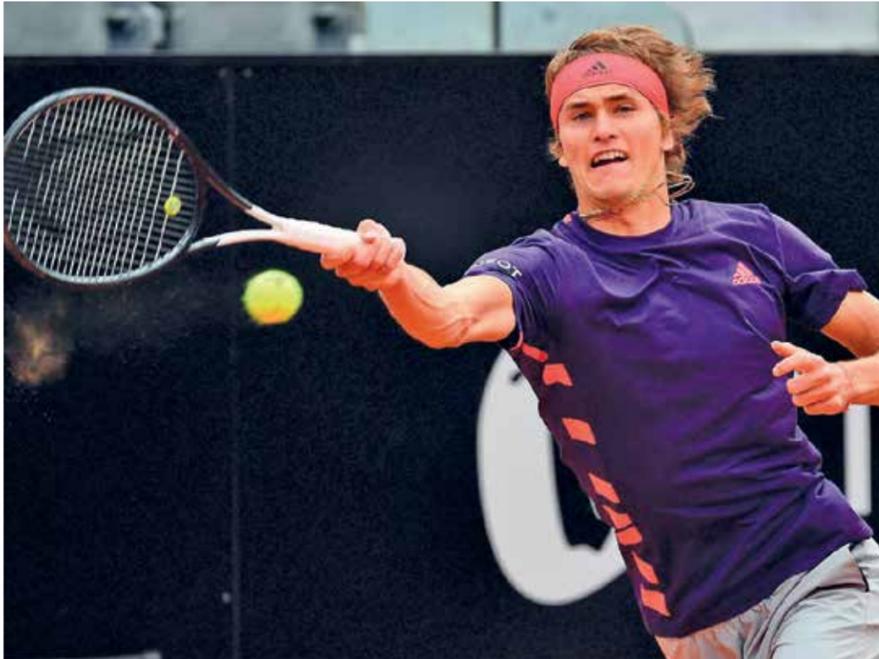
The 22-year-old lost his Madrid Open title last week, falling in the quarter-finals of both Madrid and Munich to Stefanos Tsitsipas and Cristian Garin respectively.

The German has yet to win a trophy this season and stands 4-6 on clay this spring.

Zverev had been seeded fourth in the final clay-court warm-up before Roland Garros, and was playing his first game having received a first-round bye.

Last year, Zverev reached the final in Rome beating Berrettini there in their only previous meeting.

But the 33rd-ranked Italian has been on form capturing his



Germany's Alexander Zverev returns the ball to Italy's Matteo Berrettini



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second ATP title on clay in Budapest last month, and reached the final in Munich.

Zverev started with a break in the second set, but lost this advantage immediately.

The 33rd-ranked Italian sur-

vived four break points, breaking the German in the twelfth game to close 7-5 to the delight of the home crowd.

Berrettini will play Argentine Diego Schwartzman, who eased past Yoshihito Nishioka 6-1, 6-4 in 73 minutes.

Wawrinka Woes

Belgian David Goffin rallied from a set down to beat former French Open champion Stan Wawrinka in three sets and advance to the second round.

The 28-year-old Goffin won through 4-6, 6-0, 6-2 in 1hr 55min against the three-time Grand Slam winner to set up a meeting with Argentine seventh seed Juan Martin Del Potro for a place in the third round.

Ninth seed Marin Cilic beat Italian wild card Andrea Basso 6-1, 7-5 as Australian Nick Ky-

rgios needed three sets to get past Russian 12th seed Daniil Medvedev.

"I knew it was going to be tough today because I haven't played much on clay," said Kyrgios, who next plays Norwegian qualifier Casper Ruud.

Portugal's Joao Sousa saved four match points in the deciding set to battle past American Frances Tiafoe 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/4).

Sousa, who also trailed 1/4 in the deciding set tie-break, will play third seed Roger Federer in the second round.

Eight time Rome winner Rafael Nadal will open his tournament against Jeremy Chardy in the second round after the Frenchman beat compatriot Richard Gasquet 6-1, 4-6, 6-3 in a match suspended overnight on Monday.

Herrera confident Solskjaer can restore United's lustre

AFP | London

Ole Gunnar Solskjaer possesses the qualities necessary to restore Manchester United as a genuine title contender, according to departing midfielder Anders Herrera.

The 29-year-old Spanish international -- who has been linked to a move to French champions Paris Saint-Germain -- believes the common decency of Solskjaer will be rewarded with better performances on the pitch.

Solskjaer's star faded almost as soon as he was given the job full-time after a terrific spell as caretaker manager following

the sacking of Jose Mourinho in December.

The former United striker guided them to 14 wins in 17 games but the end of the season has been nothing short of a disaster as they lost eight of their last 12 -- ending up 32 points off city rivals and champions Manchester City -- and missed out on Champions League football next term.

"He is one of the best people I have ever met in football," said Herrera, quitting United after the club declined to offer him a new contract when he demanded increased wages of £300,000 (\$388,000) a week.

Mahrez keen to stay at Manchester City despite limited minutes

Reuters | London

Winger Riyad Mahrez said he will not seek a move away from Premier League champions Manchester City in search of more playing time after helping Pep Guardiola's side win their second successive title over the weekend.

Mahrez, who became the club's record signing last year at a reported 60 million pounds (\$77.8 million), started only 14 league games this season as Guardiola opted for Raheem Sterling and Leroy Sané on the wings.

The Algerian has chipped in with seven league goals and four assists this season, including one in the 4-1 win at Brighton and Hove Albion that sealed the title, and said he would not shy away from the competition for a starting spot.

"I'm very happy here," Mahrez told reporters. "I'm not going somewhere else because I don't play."

"It's part of the game. I need to be strong, stay strong. It's part of my personality, I never

hide from things."

Mahrez, who was the Professional Footballers' Association player of the year when he led Leicester City to the

2015-16 league title, said he knew it would be difficult to earn his spot in Guardiola's record-breaking team.



Riyad Mahrez

Federer cramming in Rome practice ahead of French Open

AFP | Rome

Roger Federer insisted Monday his focus at this week's Italian Open was on getting more match practice on clay ahead of the French Open in two weeks time. The 20-time Grand Slam winner has not played on the red clay in the Foro Italico since his third round exit in 2016 having finished runner-up the previous year for the fourth time, losing to Novak Djokovic in the final.

"Regardless of what happens here, I just think it's good for me to play matches at this stage," said world number three Federer before his first match on

Wednesday.

He has a first-round bye as the number three seed, and will begin his tournament against Portugal's Joao Sousa, who battled past American Frances Tiafoe 6-3, 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/4) to reach the second round.

The 37-year-old's performance in the Madrid Open last week has boosted his hopes of winning the French Open, a decade after his only title there.

He fell in the quarter-finals on Friday to Dominic Thiem, but twice held match point and for a set and a half was dominant against a player considered among the favourites for Roland Garros after Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

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ROGER FEDERER

"There would be excitement, more excitement than me coming to a practice court in Switzerland."

"I think this week, then next week in Paris, it's going to be interesting to see how I play the points, how I do it all."

His arrival in the Italian capital has been a boost for organisers who doubled ticket prices after it was announced he would be

playing.

"That's obviously disappointing to hear," said Federer.

"They made it in a way like they rewarded the fans who bought tickets earlier, which is sort of strange."

"Look, I just really hope it doesn't take away the fact I'm really happy to be here."

"There's going to be good crowds hopefully, good atmosphere."

"I'm pumped up to play well. I mean, my excitement couldn't be bigger."

'New wave coming through'

Federer is in the same half of the draw as eight-time Rome winner Nadal, who is looking for his first clay title this season before his French Open title defence.

"I have other problems first getting there," said Federer, who could meet the Spaniard in the semi-finals.

A potential quarter-final awaits against either Stefanos Tsitsipas,

the eighth seed, who beat Nadal in the Madrid semi-finals, or Italian 10th seed Fabio Fognini, the Monte Carlo winner.

"I thought Stefanos was very impressive against him (Nadal) last week," continued Federer.

"I think it's going to be a good season. It's going to be interesting to see who is going to make the World Tour Finals, especially if so many guys have won especially big titles, like Fabio in Monaco."

"There is a bit of a new wave coming through with the one-handed backhand that can counter some of Rafa's spins and lefty play."

"But, again, this is maybe also just a moment in time. We'll see what happens for the rest of the year."

"It's announcing to be a very exciting season, even a more complicated one for the top guys next year, I believe, because this is the year where they truly are breaking through, truly are gaining a lot of experience."



Roger Federer