

Djokovic eyes ATP semis

Novak Djokovic beat Alexander Zverev in straight sets to maintain his strong start at the ATP Finals

AFP | London

Novak Djokovic moved closer to a place in the semi-finals of the ATP Finals as the world number one dispatched Alexander Zverev 6-4, 6-1 yesterday.

Djokovic is chasing a sixth ATP Finals title and his first in the prestigious season-ending event at London's O2 Arena since 2015.

In his 11th appearance at the Finals, the Serb will be guaranteed to reach the last four for the eighth time if John Isner beats Marin Cilic or if Cilic defeats Isner in three sets.

Djokovic, who beat Isner in his opening group-stage match, has enjoyed a remarkable renaissance in the second half of 2018 and lifting the trophy on the banks of the River Thames would be the perfect way to finish his year.

Djokovic faces Cilic in his last group match tomorrow, while Zverev, who defeated Cilic to kick off his Finals campaign, takes on Isner.

The 31-year-old was assailed by claims he had lost his hunger for success and was past his best after injury and personal issues threatened to derail his career in 2017.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns against Germany's Alexander Zverev

But Djokovic has banished his demons in spectacular style, winning the Wimbledon and US Open titles, returning to world number one and becoming the first player to win all nine Masters 1,000 tournaments.

Zverev is emerging as one of the Tour's brightest young

stars after climbing to fifth in the world and reaching the French Open quarter-finals this year.

The 21-year-old shocked Djokovic in the Rome final last year, but the Serb was on top when they met in a one-sided Shanghai semi-final last month and it

was the same story again in their third meeting.

Zverev was able to keep Djokovic at bay with his thunderous serve at the start of the first set.

He smashed a 143 mph ace to open his third service game and won over 90 percent of his first-

serve points.

Djokovic doesn't possess the same power serve as Zverev, but his precise delivery makes him just as dangerous.

Neither player faced a break point in the first eight games and even when Zverev earned the

first two in the ninth, Djokovic found a way to scramble out of trouble on both occasions.

It was a crucial escape for the 14-time Grand Slam champion, who stepped up the pressure on Zverev to steal a hard-fought first set.

Federer downs Thiem to keep bid alive

AFP | London

Roger Federer staved off elimination from the ATP Finals as the six-time champion eased to a 6-2, 6-3 win over Dominic Thiem on Tuesday.

After losing his opening match at London's O2 Arena against Kei Nishikori, Federer would have crashed out if he had been beaten by Thiem.

Only once before has Federer failed to qualify from his group for the knockout rounds in his 15 previous appearances at the prestigious season-ending event.

That lone flop came 10 years ago when the Finals were held in Shanghai and Federer is still in with a chance of avoiding that ignominious fate thanks



Switzerland's Roger Federer returns against Austria's Dominic Thiem

to his comfortable 66-minute dismissal of Thiem.

Bidding for a record seventh ATP Finals crown and a first in the tournament since 2011 -- which would be the 100th singles title of his glittering career -- world number three Federer must beat South Africa's Kevin Anderson in his last group match to make the semi-finals.

"It feels good. I am very hap-

py that I showed a reaction after the last match," Federer said.

"Against Kei, instead of seeing things positively, I thought negatively. It was disappointing but it happens.

"Today I was more positive and happy on the court. I love playing in London and I had to remind myself what a privilege it is. I hope I showed it."

Since winning his 20th Grand Slam title at Australian Open in January, Federer has been stuck in a prolonged slump by his sky-high standards.

A quarter-final exit at Wimbledon, blowing a two-set lead against Anderson, was followed by a stunning US Open last 16 defeat to Australian journeyman John Millman.

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