

# Nadal steamrolls to opening win

Rafael Nadal wins his second-round match at Monte Carlo in emphatic fashion

● Alexander Zverev eases past Felix Auger-Aliassime

AFP | Monte Carlo

Rafael Nadal charged out of the blocks yesterday to hammer Roberto Bautista Agut 6-1, 6-1 in his opening match at the Monte Carlo Masters.

The 11-time champion showed no sign of the knee problems which forced him to quit ahead of an Indian Wells semi-final against Roger Federer a month ago.

The 32-year-old had expressed pre-tournament caution regarding the health of his knee -- a worry which appeared to be groundless after a 76-minute masterclass.

Nadal collected the opening five games of the afternoon in 17 minutes as he set the tone for another dominant display in the principality.

He was equally in control during the second set, where he saved three break points in the fourth game and two more in the sixth.

"It was a great start, it's good to be back here," the 17-time Grand Slam winner said.

"I've had some great moments



Spain's Rafael Nadal hits a return to Spain's Roberto Bautista Agut

on this court, I really enjoy playing here.

"It's not easy to come back from injury, I had to do a lot of mental work as well to be prepared.

"I tried to play solid, dominate with my forehand when I had the chance."

Bautista Agut has now lost to his Spanish countryman in all three of their meetings, while

Nadal improved his incredible record here to 69-4 as he takes aim at a fourth consecutive title at the event.

Third seed Alexander Zverev rediscovered traces of his best



Bautista Agut has now lost to Rafael Nadal in all three of their meetings

form with a 6-1, 6-4 defeat of Felix Auger-Aliassime.

The German, locally based, reached the third round as he tamed the 18-year-old who broke through for a Miami semi-final last month.

**Upbeat Zverev**

The 21-year-old Zverev played the semi-finals in Monte Carlo a year ago but has yet to hit his stride this season. That may be starting to change.

"This is the first time this season I've felt really healthy," said Zverev, who lost prematurely at both Indian Wells and Miami, as well as in Marrakech last week.

"I've been training well but haven't been able to take that into matches.

"I live just 500 metres from here, I'm comfortable on this court. I'm starting to feel better about my game.

"I'm really ready for the clay season."

Canadian Auger-Aliassime has made a fast rise in the rankings from 175 a year ago to his current position of 33rd.

Zverev swept the opening set in 30 minutes but had to get through a series of three straight breaks of serve between him and his opponent before finally advancing in 78 minutes.

The third seed broke six times and will next face Italy's Fabio Fognini, who reached the third round when French opponent Gilles Simon was unable to play their match due to back problems.

Greek sixth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas moved ahead, defeating Mikhail Kukushkin 6-3, 7-5.

"I need to maintain my focus, my concentration, my aggressive mindset when I'm on the court," Tsitsipas said.

"If all these are combined, then I have nothing to fear and I have nothing to be afraid of when I'm on the court.

"This is the first big clay court tournament, not everyone is very well prepared for that. It's been a long hardcourt court season before the clay."

Britain's Cameron Norrie defeated Marton Fucsovics of Hungary 7-6 (7/3), 6-3, while Pierre-Hugues Herbert stunned 2018 finalist and fifth seed Kei Nishikori 7-5, 6-4.

## Solskjaer calls for squad rebuild

Reuters | Barcelona

After their slim hopes of another famous Champions League revival were stopped dead by Lionel Messi and a rampant Barcelona, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admitted his Manchester United side need a huge overhaul in order to return to Europe's elite.

Although United made a bright start to their quarter-final second leg at the Nou Camp with Marcus Rashford hitting the crossbar early on, they were soon outclassed by Barca, who eased to a 3-0 win on Tuesday for a dominant 4-0 aggregate victory.

"We were fighting against a great team and we know there's work to be done but I've said all along this isn't going to change overnight," Solskjaer told a news conference.

"The next few years are going to be massive to get to the level that Barcelona and other teams are at."

Solskjaer has restored United's confidence and overseen a vast improvement in results in his four months in charge since taking the job after Jose Mourinho was sacked in De-

ember, giving the team hope of a top-four finish in the Premier League.

He also led them to an historic comeback after a 2-0 first-leg defeat at home to Paris St Germain in the Champions League last 16, going through on away goals with a 3-1 win in the French capital.

Yet the scale of the long-term surgery his side needs was laid bare at the Nou Camp, where Barca walked all over United.

"We've got good players to work with and at the moment we've done really well to get to the quarters and challenge for top four, but we've got a rebuilding job. It starts with the coaches and players, and with one or two additions," added the Norwegian.

"We're on with the job and have spoken to the players we need to get the best out of each other, create an environment of top class attitude, world class attitude every single day."

Barca scored their third goal when Philippe Coutinho was left with plenty of space and time to curl a shot into the top corner.



Ole Gunnar Solskjaer embraces Lionel Messi after the match

## Careless United undone by Messi double

AFP | Barcelona

Lionel Messi pounced on two Manchester United mistakes to score twice and end their hopes of another comeback at Camp Nou as Barcelona breezed into the Champions League semi-finals on Tuesday.

After an excellent start, United were undone twice in four minutes by Messi, who first nicked the ball off the careless Ashley Young and then watched as a weak shot from distance squirmed underneath David de Gea.

Philippe Coutinho, in perhaps his best performance of the season, added a third with a curling effort into the top corner and by the end, an outclassed United might have been relieved the score was not more traumatic than 3-0, 4-0 on aggregate.

"We had five uncomfortable minutes because they came out strong," said Barcelona coach Ernesto Valverde. "But then there were another 85 minutes where we weren't bad."

A dizzying opening spell, in which Marcus Rashford had hit the crossbar, was long-forgotten, even if it could offer Barca's next opponents some encouragement.

Liverpool, who take a 2-0 lead to Porto, are now the most likely obstacle between them and their first Champions League final since they last won this tournament in 2015. Mohamed Salah and Sadio Mane might feel emboldened.

Instead, United's pair of early errors made this another night about Messi and ensured any faint hopes of repeating the comeback against Paris Saint-Germain, or even the fa-



David de Gea drops to his knees after allowing Lionel Messi's tame shot to squirm under his body

**"We had five uncomfortable minutes because they came out strong. But then there were another 85 minutes where we weren't bad"**

ERNESTO VALVERDE

mous 1999 rescue act against Bayern Munich, on this same pitch, were dashed.

"We said all along this was not going to change overnight," United's coach Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said. "In the next few years it is going to be a massive effort to get to the level of

Barcelona and these sorts of teams."

Messi now has his 109th and 110th Champions League goals and, potentially, three extra matches to reduce the gap on Cristiano Ronaldo's 126, after Juventus were dumped out by Ajax. Barcelona's fans celebrated that too.

Solskjaer had urged his strikers to be more lethal here but it felt ominous that even before kick-off, Rashford, Anthony Martial, Romelu Lukaku and Alexis Sanchez had hit 42 goals this season, while Messi on his own had 43.

Around an hour before kick-off, Alex Ferguson was on the side of the pitch, shaking hands with Ryan Giggs and sharing words with Solskjaer, the scorer of the winning goal

against Munich here 20 years ago.

They could have hardly have asked for a better start. United were brilliant for eight minutes and could have been ahead within 30 seconds as Rashford raced onto a curving Paul Pogba pass and toed away a shot, which Marc-Andre ter Stegen bravely left to graze his own crossbar.

Barca were flustered, so much so the crowd even cheered with relief when Arthur Melo played his team's first convincing pass.

Then, Barcelona had their own eight-minute flurry as United almost conceded a penalty, ruled out after Fred took the ball before bringing down Ivan Rakitic, and then did concede, twice, to Messi.