

Nadal, Federer plough on

Maria Sharapova upsets defending champion Wozniacki to sweep into the Australian Open last 16

● **Cilic saves match points to advance in late-night drama**

● **Kvitova starting to click as Open last 16 looms**

AFP | Melbourne

Maria Sharapova stunned defending champion Caroline Wozniacki to sweep into the Australian Open last 16 yesterday and join ice men Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer, who clinically disposed of their opponents.

The Russian five-time Grand Slam winner, who has struggled since returning from a drugs ban in 2017, was at full throttle in ending the Dane's dream of a

second major title.

Sharapova won 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 with the roof closed on Rod Laver Arena and will next play informal local hope Ashleigh Barty, who bounced Greece's Maria Sakkari, for a berth in the quarter-finals.

"I thought the level was quite high. I knew it would be a tough match," said the 2008 champion, who has been in sizzling form at the tournament as she chases her first Slam title since Roland Garros in 2014.

"These types of matches are what I train for and it was really rewarding to win that last point," added the 30th seed.

Second seed Nadal called young Australian Alex de Minaur "one of the best in the world" ahead of their evening clash, then proceeded to hand him a tennis lesson, dismantling the teenager 6-1, 6-2, 6-4.

"I hit a good serve and played a solid game," said the 2009 champion who is searching for an 18th Grand Slam title.

He paid tribute to De Minaur, who saved six match points.

"He's a big fighter and super quick. Alex has an amazing future."

Nadal's reward is a meeting with Tomas Berdych, who rallied to beat Argentine 18th seed Diego Schwartzman 5-7, 6-3, 7-5, 6-4.

The Czech veteran reached the semi-finals in 2014 and 2015 but is unseeded this year as he returns from a back injury that almost forced his retirement last year. Swiss great Federer was also on fire in taming big-serving American Taylor Fritz 6-2, 7-5, 6-2 to stay on track for a third successive title at Melbourne Park and a 21st Grand Slam crown.

100

matches have been played by Roger Federer on Rod Laver Arena (centre court in Melbourne)

On a rain-affected day that delayed play on outside courts, the 37-year-old showed no mercy to the 21-year-old in his 100th match on the centre court in Melbourne.

"I had a really good feeling out here today against someone who can be dangerous," said Federer after reaching the Melbourne fourth round for the 17th time -- more than anyone else ever.

"Taylor played really well. He is going to have many more years on tour playing at this level."

The double defending champion is gunning for a record seventh Australian title. If he goes on to win the tournament, he will become the first man ever to claim seven or more crowns at two Slams, having already won eight Wimbledons.

Next up for him is fiery Greek 14th seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, who beat Georgia's 19th seed Nikoloz Basilashvili 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (9/7), 6-4.

The man who lost to Federer in the final last year, Marin Cilic, battled back from two sets down, surviving two match points to beat Spain's Fernando Verdasco in a 4hr 18min epic.

My brand of tennis

Barty beat Greece's Sakkari



Russia's Maria Sharapova serves against Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki

7-5, 6-1, with the 15th seed yet to drop a set in her best performance at Melbourne Park.

She has won seven of eight matches this month to back up a title victory in Zhuhai late last year to shape up as a dangerous opponent for Sharapova.

"It's getting to the point now where I'm feeling more and more comfortable on the court and can play my brand of tennis, which when I execute I know it works against the best in the world," said a confident Barty.

No Australian woman has won the season-opening Grand Slam at Melbourne Park since Christine O'Neill in 1978.

Germany's second seed Angelique Kerber, the 2016 title winner, steamrolled Australian youngster Kimberley Birrell 6-1, 6-0 as the Wimbledon champions continued her under-the-radar progress.

Meanwhile, unseeded American Amanda Anisimova continued her dream run, ousting 11th seed Aryna Sabalenka in straight sets. The 17-year-old will play eighth seed Petra Kvitova for a place in the quarter-finals.

Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova also advanced, crushing Aliaksandra Sasnovich for a showdown with fifth seed Sloane Stephens.



Switzerland's Roger Federer hits a return against Taylor Fritz of the US

Konta slams 'dangerous' Australian Open late start



Spain's Garbine Muguruza (L) shakes hands as she celebrates after victory over Britain's Johanna Konta

AFP | Melbourne

Britain's Johanna Konta lashed her late-night Australian Open match against Garbine Muguruza "dangerous" and unhealthy yesterday, saying they should not have had to play in the early hours of the morning.

Konta was eliminated early yesterday after contesting the latest women's match ever held at the Australian Open, starting at 12:30 am and ending two hours and 42 minutes later at 3:12 am.

An exhausted Konta said the situation should never have arisen.

"I don't agree with athletes having to physically exert themselves in the wee hours of the morning," she told the BBC after the 6-4, 6-7 (3/7), 7-5 second-round defeat to Spaniard Muguruza.

"I don't think it is healthy -- in fact it is quite dangerous. "However, Garbine and I were both in the same position and, with the circumstances, we really put on a great match and it's just a shame more people couldn't enjoy it."

The start was delayed when the men's match between Alexander Zverev and Jeremy Chardy on the same court turned into 3hr 46min epic.

Impey makes his move in Tour Down Under

AFP | Adelaide, Australia

South Africa's Daryl Impey surged into contention to defend his Tour Down Under title with a thrilling win ahead of race leader Patrick Bevin in Adelaide yesterday.

The Mitchelton-Scott rider claimed the fourth stage to move to second overall just seven seconds behind New Zealand's Bevin (CCC Team) with two stages left in the UCI season-opening world tour event in South Australia.

Impey gave his hopes of becoming the first rider to go back-to-back in the race's 21-year history a massive boost with his stage victory.

Astana's Leon Luis Sanchez went early but was caught by Impey and Bevin in the last 20 metres to finish third on the



South African rider Daryl Impey (R) from Team Mitchelton-Scott celebrates after crossing finish line

129.2-kilometre (80-mile) stage through the Adelaide Hills from Unley to Campbelltown.

"I'm so stoked to have done something like this, it's so special," Impey said.

"I knew if I lined up Paddy Bevin, I'd have a good shot at winning, so I'm super-happy to win today."

The stage featured the challenging Corkscrew Road ascent as a final test some six kilometres from the finish.

Wout Poels (Team Sky), George Bennett (Team

Jumbo-Visma), Richie Porte (Trek-Segafredo) and Michael Woods (EF-Education First) attacked on the final climb. But they were caught by the chasing bunch, led by Impey and Bevin, on the descent resulting in an exciting 20-rider finish.

Poels, Bennett, Porte and Woods announced themselves as the top climbers ahead of Sunday's challenging final stage at Willunga, where the Tour winner will be anointed.

"It's (points lead) still not a

huge buffer," Bevin said.

"Those four (Porte, Bennett, Woods and Poels) showed themselves as the best pure climbers in this race, but this race fortunately is about being an all-rounder.

"Basically you've got to sprint better than the climbers and climb better than the sprinters."

Australia's Jason Lea (UniSA-Australia) retained the King of the Mountain jersey after stage four from Bennett and Italy's Manuele Boaro (Astana Pro Team).

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DARYL IMPEY