

# Djokovic knocked out as Nadal battles on in Monte Carlo

● Novak Djokovic was knocked out by Daniil Medvedev in quarters

● Rafael Nadal survives stern Guido Pella test to reach semi-finals

AFP | Monte Carlo

World number one Novak Djokovic was dumped out by Daniil Medvedev while Rafael Nadal survived a struggle to reach the semi-finals of the Monte Carlo Masters for the 14th time yesterday. Djokovic, twice a champion in the principality, lost serve five times in a 6-3, 4-6, 6-2 defeat by Russia's 10th seed Medvedev.

Nadal, an 11-time winner of the event, rallied from 4-1 down in his opening set before finally overhauling potential Argentine spoiler Guido Pella 7-6 (7/1), 6-3.

For Djokovic, who won a record seventh Melbourne title in January, defeat marked another premature exit after he crashed out in the early rounds at Indian Wells and Miami last month.

The Serb, who has won the last three



Spain's Rafael Nadal hits a return to Argentina's Guido Pella

Grand Slam events and could conclude a personal sweep with another title at Roland Garros in June, feels that all he needs is more court time and some extra polish.

"The French Open is the ultimate goal on clay. It's expected in a way for me to peak right at that tournament, because that's what I'm aiming for," Djokovic said.

"This is only the first tournament



Serbia's Novak Djokovic gestures as he leaves after losing the quarter final tennis match against Russia's Daniil Medvedev

on clay, and it's a long season. Let's see how it goes.

"Maybe I'm lacking the consistency with the top results in the last couple of years in the best tournaments.

"But I've been playing my best at Grand Slams and that's what I intend to do."

Djokovic was broken three times in the final set, clawing one back but exit-



Nadal has now won 18 matches in a row at Monte Carlo, 25 sets in a row and extended his win-loss record to 71-4

ing when Medvedev drove a backhand into the far corner on match point.

Nadal toiled away for two hours, 20 minutes to win for the 71st time in 75 matches at the tournament.

'Lucky to escape'

"It was a very tough match," Nadal said. "Luckily I was able to come back (from 4-1 down) in the first set. If he had gone 5-1 it may have been almost impossible.

"It was a physically and mentally draining set, especially losing my first three service games.

"I was lucky to escape, I'm happy to be through."

The first set featured eight breaks

of serve before Nadal won it in a tie-breaker.

He served for the match leading 5-2 in the second only to drop serve again, but recovered to take the win as Pella double-faulted.

"Reaching the semi-final again means a lot to me, I hope this win will help me."

Nadal will face off in the semis against either Italian Fabio Fognini of Borna Coric, the ninth seed.

Medvedev welcomed his defeat of Djokovic after losing in each of his three previous encounters with the Serb.

"This was the best match of my career, maybe not in the level of tennis but in beating the number one for the first time in my life," he said. "It's just amazing."

Medvedev will meet another Serb, Dusan Lajovic, on Saturday for a place in the final after the latter beat Italian qualifier Lorenzo Sonego 6-4, 7-5.

Medvedev totalled less than half of the 47 unforced errors which came off the Djokovic racquet in a three-set tussle in windy conditions.

"Novak played worse here than the times before," Medvedev said. "But I'm also getting more experience.

"I'm making the top guys realise it's not easy to play me."

## Kohli defends Dhoni, says loyalty matters most

AFP | New Delhi

India's Virat Kohli has gone to bat for his former captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni, saying it was unfortunate to see so many people going after the veteran player.

Dhoni, 37, led India to World Cup victory at home in 2011 but his patchy form in recent times has led critics to question the wicketkeeper-batsman's place on the side. Last week, selectors picked Dhoni in a 15-member World Cup squad ahead of the 21-year-old Rishabh Pant, triggering fresh debate about his cricketing skills.

But Kohli, who played under Dhoni before taking over the skipper's mantle, said defending him was a matter of loyalty.

"It's unfortunate to see so many people going after him.



Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli talks with teammate Mahendra Singh Dhoni (R) ODI cricket match between India and Australia (file photo)

For me, loyalty matters the most," Kohli told India Today TV channel Thursday.

"When I walked into the team he (Dhoni) had the option of trying someone else after few games, although I grabbed my chances, but for me to get that kind of backing, it was very

crucial for me."

Kohli, the world number one ODI and Test player, also praised Dhoni for giving him the rare opportunity to bat at number three when he was just starting out.

Dhoni earned a reputation as one of the deadliest finishers in 50-over cricket before struggling to make a mark in the crucial middle overs.

Kohli said Dhoni's input and experience were invaluable assets for the team.

"He is the one person who literally knows the game inside out. He understands the game from ball one to ball 300 (50 overs) on the field," said Kohli, 30.

"I won't say it's a luxury to have him, but I am fortunate to have a mind like that behind the stumps."

## Barty to face Azarenka in Fed Cup semi

AFP | Brisbane, Australia

World number nine Ashleigh Barty will face her doubles partner and two-time major winner Victoria Azarenka in Fed Cup semi-final between Australia and Belarus.

The pair will contest the second singles match on the opening day at Pat Rafter Arena in Brisbane as the home team targets Australia's first final since 1993.

Experienced former US Open champion Samantha Stosur was Australian captain Alicia Molik's surprise pick over Daria Gavrilova to open the tie against Aryna Sabalenka.

They play the reverse singles and a doubles on Sunday.

While Belarus are bidding to reach the final for the second time in three attempts, having been beaten by the United States in 2017, Australia haven't made the decider in 26 years.



Ashleigh Barty of Australia returns a shot to Karolina Pliskova of Czech Republic during the women's final of the Miami Open (file photo)

## Ronaldo committed to Juve despite Champions League flop: Allegri

AFP | Milan

Cristiano Ronaldo is committed to Juventus next season despite his bitter disappointment at the Italian giants Champions League flop, coach Massimiliano Allegri revealed yesterday.

Allegri's injury-hit side host Fiorentina on Saturday needing just a point to lift their eighth straight Serie A title, days after a shock home 2-1 defeat to the Dutch side that saw them eliminated 3-2 on aggregate.

"Cristiano is the future of Juventus. He has done very well this year and will do so next season, of course he is disappointed like all of us but he's calm about it," said Allegri.

"Cristiano has had an extraordinary season and will play tomorrow."

Five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo had been bidding for a sixth Champions League title to add to his four won with Real Madrid and one with Manchester United.

The 34-year-old joined Juventus from Real last summer in a 100 million-euro (\$117 million) deal which runs until 2022, with a reported annual salary of 31 million euros.

He scored six of his teams' 14 Champions League goals this season and has 19 so far in Serie A, four behind leading scorer Fabio Quagliarella.

"Ronaldo's arrival did not give us any certainty of winning the Champions League," continued Allegri.

"Barcelona play a semi-fi-

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MASSIMILIANO ALLEGRI



tacker Mario Mandzukic could also miss rest of the season.

"(Goalkeeper) Mattia Perin is out until the end of the season, as is Sami Khedira and maybe Mario Mandzukic," he said.

Meanwhile striker Paulo Dybala will be out for three weeks and Douglas Costa and Jose Caceres for 10 days each, while defender Giorgio Chiellini could be back for next week's trip to Inter Milan.

However with a 17-point lead over Napoli Allegri's side are almost certain to lift their 35th league title as they cement their domestic dominance despite continental disappointment.