



Nadal triumphs in Rome

Rafael Nadal beats Novak Djokovic to win ninth Italian Open title

● **Rafael Nadal's win gives him his first clay-court title of 2019**

● **The win gives Nadal a 26-28 lifetime record against Djokovic**

AP | Rome

Rafael Nadal is right back where he wants to be. After losing in the semi-finals of three straight clay-court tournaments, Nadal dominated for stretches against his long-time rival, Novak Djokovic, in a

6-0, 4-6, 6-1 win yesterday for a record-extending ninth Italian Open title.

It marked the first time in an Open Era-record 54 meetings, and in their 142nd set against each other, that Nadal won a set against Djokovic without conceding a game — otherwise known as a bagel.

The timing for Nadal's return to form could not have been more opportune, as he will seek a record-extending 12th title at the French Open next weekend.

"Winning a title is important but for me the most important thing is feel myself competitive, feel myself healthy," Nadal said. "Then with the feeling that I am

improving. I know if I'm able to reach my level you can win, you can lose, but normally I'm going to have my chances, especially on this surface."

Top-ranked Djokovic, meanwhile, appeared exhausted after spending more than 5 1/2 hours on court against Juan Martin del Potro and Diego Schwartzman the previous two days.

Djokovic was also coming off the Madrid Open title last week. "I don't want to talk about fatigue or things like that," Djokovic said. "Rafa was simply too strong today."

The Foro Italico crowd continually tried to encourage Djokovic with chants of "Vai Nole!"



Nadal overtakes Djokovic at the top of the list for Masters wins -- the pair were level at 33 each before yesterday's final -- in a timely boost ahead of his assault on a 12th French Open crown in a week's time

— Go Nole! — but the top-ranked Serb struggled with his overhead and drop shots.

Midway through the second set, Nadal chased down a lob with an over-the-shoulder shot and Djokovic's ensuing overhead landed in the net to conclude a long point.

Djokovic again netted an overhead in the next game and then kicked the ball in frustration when he missed a drop shot attempt late in the second.

But Djokovic hung around in the second and converted his first set point when a looping forehand from Nadal sailed wide for his first break of the match. As he walked to his chair after

winning the second set, Djokovic waved his arms to get the crowd behind him.

However, Djokovic didn't have much left in the tank.

When Nadal pushed Djokovic deep into the corner in the opening game of the third set and Djokovic's desperation lob sailed long to hand Nadal a break, Djokovic smashed his racket to the clay three times in frustration and received a warning from the chair umpire.

Djokovic won only 29 per cent of points on his second serve and committed 39 unforced errors to Nadal's 17. Also, Nadal won 23 of 31 rallies with nine or more shots.

Roglic rampage leaves Yates reeling at Giro

AFP | San Marino, San Marino

Slovenian ace Primoz Roglic set a serious marker on the Giro d'Italia yesterday, not only winning the stage nine individual time-trial, but damaging several key title rivals in the process.

European champion and world one-hour record holder Victor Campenaerts was second by 11sec on the day despite a late mechanical failure, while Dutch rider Bauke Mollema came third to boost his chances of an eventual podium shot.

Roglic, of Team Jumbo-Visma, who also won the opening day time-trial, finished the 34.8km rain-sodden run to San Marino in 51mins 52sec to win in impressive style.

It was a full 1min 05sec faster than Italy's two-time Giro winner Vincenzo Nibali, and a devastating 3min 11sec faster than Britain's self-declared pre-race favourite Simon Yates, who appeared to struggle on the final climb.

The notoriously wily Nibali, known as 'the shark' for his ferocious winning moves, appeared exultant after the stage.

"I believe that was a good time from me," said the Bahrain Merida leader.

"It's a great thing to have taken so much time off Yates and (Miguel Angel) Lopez," he said of the two men he would normally most fear in the mountains.

"Roglic took more than a minute off me but time-trials



Team Jumbo rider Slovenia's Primoz Roglic takes part in stage nine of the 102nd Giro d'Italia

It's a great thing to have taken so much time off Yates and (Miguel Angel) Lopez. Roglic took more than a minute off me but time-trials are his speciality

VINCENZO NIBALI

are his speciality," added the 34-year-old.

"There's a long way to go, but lots of people lost ground here and not just Lopez and Yates, and these people will now have to go on the attack.

"This is turning out to be a beautiful Giro."

Reigning Vuelta champion Yates led the Giro for over two weeks last year only to suffer a penultimate-stage meltdown, and has vowed to make up for it this year.

The win leaves Roglic, a 29-year-old former ski-jumper, in second place in the overall standings behind overnight leader Valerio Conti of Italy, who kept his promise to fight to keep hold of the pink jersey.

But above all it puts this season's form rider Roglic, who won the Tour of Romandie, the UAE Tour and the Tirreno Adriatico, firmly in the driving seat for a first ever victory in a three-week tour.

The Slovenian takes a 1min 44sec advantage over Nibali into the mountainous section of the Giro where the Italian's cut-throat tactics saw him claim overall wins in 2013 and 2016.

Pliskova sweeps past Konta to win Italian Open

● **Karolina Pliskova won her 13th career title in Rome**

AFP | Rome

Czech fourth seed Karolina Pliskova swept past Britain's Johanna Konta 6-3, 6-4 to win the WTA Italian Open yesterday.

Pliskova, the 2017 French Open semi-finalist, clinched her 13th career title, in the final major warm-up tournament on clay before Roland Garros starts on May 26.

A break in each set was enough for the former world number one to get past Konta, sealing victory on her third match point after 85 minutes on court.

"It was a great week for me

and my team," said the 27-year-old, now coached by former Rome champion Concita Martinez.

"There were a couple of tough matches so I was happy to fight through them. I was a little bit nervous today, but it was my first final in Rome, so that's to be expected."

She had never gone past the semi-finals in her four previous appearances in Rome.

Last year she exited in disgrace after smashing a hole in the umpire's chair in a temper tantrum after losing in the second round.

Pliskova, the highest remaining seed, got an early break in the final and swept 3-0 up in just eight minutes on the red clay of the Foro Italico.

A double fault when serving for the set handed Konta a break point but the British number one squandered the

chance with a smash into the net with the entire court open to her.

Konta then hit a weak forehand shot into the tape and the ball bounced wide, allowing Pliskova to wrap up the first set in 36 minutes.

Pliskova broke in the seventh game of the second set, despite Konta saving two break points, with the Czech world number seven powering through for the biggest title of her career since Cincinnati in 2016.

She becomes the first Czech woman to win the Rome tournament since Regina Marsikova in 1978.

For Konta, who has won three WTA titles, it was her second straight defeat in a final on clay after the Morocco Open earlier this month.

"It's always tough playing Karolina," said former world number four Konta, who has slipped to 42nd.

"There's rarely really a rhythm to the match. She plays with big shots, quite flat, and big serves.

"It can feel sometimes you're fighting an uphill battle. That was the case today."

"She didn't really have a let-down throughout the match.

"She played very consistently. I found it quite hard to get a footing into the match, which is credit to her.

The 28-year-old Konta, the first British woman in the Rome final since Virginia Wade in 1971, will now be seeded at the French Open later this month.



Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova returns a forehand to Britain's Johanna Konta