

Kvitova, Halep advance

Kerber capitulates as Pliskova, Halep and Kvitova blow into quarters in windy Dubai

● **Petra Kvitova relieved to win second straight match despite not playing her best tennis**

AFP | Dubai

Former winners Petra Kvitova and Simona Halep battled through brisk desert winds to advance into the quarter-finals of the Dubai Championships yesterday.

Second seed Kvitova outlasted American qualifier Jennifer Brady 7-5, 1-6, 6-3.

Crowd favourite and third seed Halep coped with the gusty conditions the Aviation Club as she beat Lesia Tsurenko 6-3, 7-5, breaking seven times.

Ukraine's Tsurenko managed just a single point over the last three games as former number one Halep demonstrated her superiority by taking a 7-0 lead in their head-to-head record.

Fourth-seeded Karolina Pliskova was tested by Alison Riske, with the Czech taking more than two hours to produce a 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/5) victory.

The 2015 finalist won a monster game late in the second set, holding for 5-5 after seven deuces plus two set points for her American opponent.

Pliskova broke a game later but dropped serve herself to force a tie-breaker; the decider ended on a first match point after Riske double-faulted.



Simona Halep of Romania in action against Lesia Tsurenko of Ukraine

Fifth seed Angelique Kerber, a semi-finalist on her last two appearances here, lost to Hsieh Su-Wei 5-7, 6-4, 6-0.

The German former world number one dropped serve seven times in the one-and-three-quarter hour contest.

Spain's Carla Suarez Navarro made quick work of Kristina Mladenovic, surprise conqueror of Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka, sending the Dubai-based Frenchwoman out 7-5, 7-5.

Suarez Navarro started on the back foot but rallied to over-

come a 5-1 deficit in the first set on the way to victory.

But she was not impressed with her own effort.

"I didn't play good today. I started badly," the world number 26 said. "Sometimes it's not easy to take the confidence back again."

"But, well, point by point, game by game, I just tried to fight, tried to relax a little bit."

"In the second set I felt tired -- I didn't enjoy the match at all."

Meanwhile, Kvitova, who won the Dubai trophy in 2013, had not played on the WTA Tour

since reaching the St Petersburg quarter-finals a fortnight ago.

"When I came here, I didn't really have many days of practice, to be honest," the two-time Wimbledon winner said.

"I had something different to do in my life. I wasn't really that prepared for this tournament."

"But I'm happy I was able to get two wins. It's great when you're not playing your best and you still find a way to win."

Halep delights Romanian fans

Halep, a finalist in Doha last week, was supported even in the



Petra Kvitova reached her fourth successive WTA quarter-final

middle of a workday by scores of chanting, enthusiastic local Romanian fans and her country's ambassador to the UAE as she rolled over Tsurenko in tricky conditions.

"The wind was difficult today. It didn't feel like last week," Halep said. "I know how she's playing, it's not my favourite style because she doesn't give any power (on the ball)."

"I've had many matches with her and won them. I feel confident when I play her."

The Romanian, who is without a coach, was more than pleased with her strong finish to the match.

"My mindset now is just to finish the points as quick as possible. I'm trying to be more aggressive."

"I'm more relaxed. I don't put pressure on myself. Also I have no expectations. I feel that my game is pretty strong."

"I feel close to my highest level."

Federer to play on clay at Madrid Open



Roger Federer hits a return during the Australian Open (file photo)

AFP | Madrid

Roger Federer's comeback on clay will feature a return to the Madrid Open for the first time since 2015, it was confirmed yesterday.

For the last two years, the 37-year-old has chosen to skip the clay-court season completely to preserve energy for tournaments on his preferred surfaces of grass and hard.

But Federer indicated in January that he would play at the French Open this year while the Madrid Open has announced he will be among those competing at the Caja Magica too.

"Federer is one of the best players in history, it's no secret," said Feliciano Lopez, the Madrid Open's tournament director.

"We are happy because his return to Madrid is a gift for the tournament but above all for the fans, because they will be able to see a player that is unique and unparalleled."

Southee, Taylor inspire Black Caps whitewash of Bangladesh

AFP | Dunedin, New Zealand

Tim Southee snared a six-wicket haul and Ross Taylor tore up the record books as New Zealand dominated Bangladesh to seal a 3-0 series whitewash with an 88-run victory in the final one-day international in Dunedin yesterday.

Sabbir Rahman's gallant maiden ODI century saved Bangladesh from total humiliation after they lost three wickets with just two runs on the board chasing New Zealand's imposing target of 331.

The tourists were 242 all out in 47.2 overs after the Black Caps were sent into bat and made 330 for six at University Oval.

It was final New Zealand outing before the Cricket World Cup and players were desperate to impress coach Gary Stead even though the fixture was a dead rubber.

Paceman Tim Southee, overlooked in New Zealand's past six ODIs, took six for 65 to guarantee himself almost certainly a berth at the tournament.

Henry Nicholls looks to have secured an opening batting slot with a sparkling 64, but out-of-form rival Colin Munro was dismissed for eight.

"Henry's shown he's a versatile player for us... he's a key component of our batting line-up," Black Caps coach Gary



New Zealand's Ross Taylor plays a shot

Stead said, adding that Munro might make the trip as injury cover.

Ross Taylor became New Zealand's highest-scoring one-day international batsman as his 69 off 81 balls took him past 8,000 runs in the 50-over format.



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GARY STEAD
BLACK CAPS COACH

His 47th ODI half-century saw Taylor reach 8,026 runs, overtaking Stephen Fleming's previous record of 8,007.

The 34-year-old, who made his ODI debut in 2006, reached his milestone in 203 innings with a superb average of 48.34.

'Got a few years left'

"I definitely would have taken that when I played my first match donkey's years ago," he said.

"If you play long enough I guess these records come along but it's nice to set the bar for the next guy."

"I'm still enjoying myself and hopefully I've still got a few years in me."

Tom Latham pressed his claim for a World Cup spot with a solid 59 while Colin de Grandhomme and Jimmy Neesham both scored 37 as they seek all-rounder berths.

Bangladesh made a horror start to the run chase when Tim Southee claimed a trio of top-order wickets in his opening two overs to leave the visitors reeling on two for three.

New Zealand	
M. Guptill c Iqbal b Saifuddin	29
C. Munro lbw Mortaza	8
H. Nicholls c Iqbal b Hasan	64
R. Taylor c Mamdullah b Rubel	69
T. Latham c Sarkar b Rahman	59
J. Neesham b Rahman	37
C. de Grandhomme not out	37
M. Santner not out	16
Extras: (lb 3, nb 2, w 6)	11
Total: (for 6 wickets; 50 overs)	330
Bangladesh	
T. Iqbal c Latham b Southee	0
L. Das lbw Southee	1
S. Sarkar b Southee	0
M. Rahim c Munro b Boult	17
Mahmudullah c Munro b de Grandhomme	16
S. Rahman c and b Southee	102
M. Saifuddin c Guptill b Boult	44
M. Mortaza c Boult b Southee	2
M. Hasan c Guptill b Southee	37
R. Hossain run out (Santner/Southee)	3
M. Rahman not out	0
Extras: (lb 2, w 18)	20
Total: (all out; 47.2 overs)	242

Raikkonen pushes Ferrari off the top of test timesheets



Alfa Romeo's Kimi Raikkonen in action during testing

Reuters | Barcelona

Alfa Romeo driver Kimi Raikkonen produced the fastest lap so far in Formula One's pre-season testing to push his previous team, Ferrari, off the top of the lunchtime leaderboard yesterday.

It was the first time since testing started on Monday at the Circuit de Catalunya that Ferrari had not led at the end of a session.

The Finn, returning to the Swiss-based team previously known as Sauber, lapped with a best time of one minute 17.762 seconds on the softest, and fastest, C5 tyre compound.

Ferrari's Sebastian Vettel, his team mate last season, was second fastest in 1:18.350.

Raikkonen's lap was also the first time a team had gone faster in 2019 than they managed in last year's pre-season testing.

Champions Mercedes continued to keep their powder dry, with Finland's Valtteri Bottas the slowest of the nine cars on track but doing more laps than anyone else — 88 to Vettel's 80, both on the same medium C3 tyre.

Renault's Nico Hulkenberg was third fastest in 1:18.800.

McLaren, whose performance has been encouraging over the first two days, missed the first two hours after what they described as "some overnight changes" to the car but managed to get Spaniard Carlos Sainz out for 27 laps before lunch.

Williams continued to be absent from the track but were expected to appear in the afternoon after their much-delayed car reached the track in the early hours after problems finishing building it on time.