

# Wozniacki's reign in Tokyo ends

AFP | Tokyo

Italian Camila Giorgi dashed Caroline Wozniacki's hopes of a winning a third consecutive Pan Pacific Open title with a stunning ambush of the top seed yesterday.

Giorgi, ranked 35 places below Wozniacki at 37th in the world, completed a 6-2, 2-6, 6-4 upset in Tokyo to set up a quarter-final with another former number one, Victoria Azarenka.

Azarenka thrashed Australia's Ashleigh Barty 6-4, 6-2 as the Belarusian seeks a return to the top echelons of women's tennis after becoming a mum in late 2016.

Giorgi reached the Wimbledon quarter-finals earlier this year and showed exactly why as she took just 38 minutes to take the first set with some brutal

hitting.

The Italian sealed the advantage with a looping forehand that nibbled the back edge of the baseline, wrong-footing Wozniacki, who cut a forlorn figure as she trudged back to her seat shaking her head.

Wozniacki hit back to take the second set, the Australian

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CAMILA GIORGI

Open champion levelling with a ferocious backhand that forced Giorgi into a wild shot.

But Giorgi dug in and broke for 4-3 in the decider with another murderous forehand before delivering the coup de grace in a little over two hours with a fizzing backhand that Wozniacki could only waft into the net.

"It was a good match, nice court, it was fun," said Giorgi, who will hope for more of the same against Azarenka on Friday.

"I'll just try to focus on my game plan as always and hope to play very consistently, like today."

## Custody battle

Azarenka, who has tumbled down the rankings following a lengthy custody battle over baby

Leo, will be the fresher of the two players.

Currently ranked 63rd and competing as a wildcard, she clinched the opening set with a thumping pass that was too hot for Barty.

Azarenka raced to a 4-1 lead in the second and closed out proceedings by jamming up Barty with a vicious kick serve into the ribcage on her second match point.

"That makes me feel a little old," said the 29-year-old when informed she had reached the quarter-finals for the first time since 2012.

"I'm just trying to look day by day and see what happens."

Czech Barbora Strycova won a tempestuous encounter with Estonian Anett Kontaveit 7-6, 3-6, 7-5 and next faces Japan's newly crowned US Open champion Naomi Osaka.

Eighth seed Strycova took the first-set tiebreak 7-5 but both players screamed in frustration at their wastefulness in a contest that lasted well over three hours.

Having used all her challenges, Strycova huffily staged a sit-down protest after Kontaveit saved one of eight match points with a passing shot that replays showed missed the line by some margin.

But the Czech returned to her task and closed out the match when Kontaveit whiffed a drive-volley long.

Elsewhere, Croatian Donna Vekic beat Britain's Johanna Konta 6-3, 7-5 to advance to the last eight, where she faces second seed Caroline Garcia of France.



Caroline Wozniacki

# Dembele, Messi partnership fuelling goal rush

Reuters | Barcelona

Lionel Messi's blossoming partnership with electric winger Ousmane Dembele has helped Barcelona to four straight wins at the start of the Liga season and the pair will be gunning for more goals at home to fellow Catalan side Girona on Sunday.

While some concerns remain about Barca's away performances, following scrappy wins at Real Valladolid and Real Sociedad, Ernesto Valverde's side have been frighteningly good at home this season, scoring 15 goals in three games at the Nou Camp.

Messi and Dembele have been the architects of their dominance.

Messi typically hogged the headlines after scoring a record eighth Champions League hat-trick in a 4-0 win over PSV Eindhoven on Tuesday but the bigger surprise was the performance of Dembele.

The Frenchman has enjoyed a superb start to the season and has already matched his goal tally from the whole of the last campaign by scoring five times in six games.

With his last campaign marred by injury problems and struggles to adapt to his new surroundings after a big-mon-



Lionel Messi celebrates with Ousmane Dembele

ey move from Borussia Dortmund, Dembele has been playing with renewed confidence and is having a huge impact this term.

The Frenchman's bursts of pace and his ability to dance past defenders have given Barca an outlet they have lacked since the departure of Neymar to Paris St Germain last year.

He has also proved decisive, scoring winning goals at Valladolid and Sociedad and in the Spanish Super Cup win

over Sevilla while striking the second goal which killed off PSV.

"Dembele is doing well and is scoring important goals but that comes from hard work," Barca coach Valverde said after the win over PSV.

"He's working hard, trying to help the team and is a player who is able to unbalance the opposition. He's got that continuity in the side now, which is helping, but he has earned that."

The form of Dembele and Messi is likely to make Girona wary of a repeat of the 6-1 thrashing they were subjected to on their last visit to the Nou Camp, although Eusebio Sacristan's side have made a strong start to the season.

Under former Barcelona player and reserve team coach Sacristan, Girona pulled off a spirited 3-2 win over Celta Vigo on Monday, having snatched a surprise 1-0 victory at Villarreal in their previous outing.



Cristiano Ronaldo reacts after getting a Red card

# Juve march on but Ronaldo faces further punishment for red card

AFP | Valencia, Spain

Cristiano Ronaldo should escape an increase on his one-match ban in the Champions League but Juventus' star summer signing might not get off so easily in the race for the Ballon d'Or.

Ronaldo is among the front-runners for the prestigious prize, which considers performances during the calendar year, as well as "overall behaviour on and off the pitch."

He was sent off against Valencia on Wednesday, after aiming a petulant kick at defender Jeison Murillo, before appearing to make contact with his opponent's head as he gestured to him to get up.

Despite playing for more than an hour with 10 men, Juve were comfortable 2-0 winners at the Estadio Mestalla as Miralem Pjanic converted a pair of penalties either side of half-time.

Ronaldo, however, is yet to discover the full consequences of his dismissal. The 33-year-old was perhaps unfortunate that German referee Felix Brych opted for a red, rather than a yellow, card but there was still risk in engaging with Murillo.

Journalists in charge of voting for the Ballon d'Or might also take note of Ronaldo's reaction, which saw him fall to the ground in disbelief and then yell in frustration.

It was a bad night in an otherwise stellar 2018 for the Portuguese, who won the

Champions League with Real Madrid in May and has scored 36 goals in 33 games this year. He has won the Ballon d'Or five times, the joint most with Lionel Messi.

This was Ronaldo's 11th red card, but first in the Champions League, with a suspension now set to reduce his scoring power in the group stages.

A one-match ban is guaranteed, meaning he will sit out Juve's game at home to Young Boys on October 2.

UEFA's Control, Ethics and Disciplinary Body can also increase the ban if they deem it a "serious offence", which could mean him missing the fixtures against Manchester United on October 23 and November 6.

AFP Sport understands, however, that an extension to the one-match ban is unlikely. Juventus would also be allowed to appeal.

The Italian side's coach Massimiliano Allegri lamented the lack of a Video Assistant Referee against Valencia, which he believes would have spared his key player.

UEFA's Executive Committee are due to meet in Lyon on September 27, where it is believed the issue of implementing VAR will be discussed.

"I can only say that VAR would've helped the referee make the right decision," Allegri said.

Juventus midfielder Blaise Matuidi urged UEFA to show leniency. "It was very harsh, I think if you saw replays, you could see it's an incomprehensible decision," Matuidi said.

# Pochettino won't rush Alli back despite Spurs slump

AFP | London

Mauricio Pochettino will wait until the last minute before deciding whether to bring Tottenham midfielder Dele Alli back from injury for Saturday's Premier League trip to Brighton.

Alli has returned to training after sustaining a hamstring injury on England duty that ruled him out of Tottenham's last two matches.

In his absence, Tottenham's losing streak has extended to three games after losses to Liverpool and Inter Milan, the first time the club have suffered such a sequence under Pochettino. That has piled extra pressure on Pochettino to rush Alli back, but the Totten-



Mauricio Pochettino (R) speaks with Dele Alli

ham manager is determined not to risk his key midfielder's long-term fitness.

"We need to wait until Friday to assess him, to see if he'll be part of the squad," Pochettino said.