

Hsieh upsets Pliskova

Hsieh Su-wei won the quarter final match in Dubai to face Petra Kvitova in her first Premier-level semi-final

● Kvitova cruises past Kuzmova in last six

AFP | Dubai

Hsieh Su-wei won the last six games to beat fourth seed Karolina Pliskova 6-4, 1-6, 7-5 yesterday in Dubai and will face a woman she has never beaten, Petra Kvitova, in the semi-finals.

Second seed Kvitova, winner of the event in 2013, left nothing to chance as she crushed Viktoria Kuzmova 6-4, 6-0.

Double Wimbledon winner Kvitova has won all four of her meetings with Hsieh, most recently in January's Sydney International second round.

Yesterday, Hsieh staged a remarkable fightback to beat another Czech. Pliskova had looked in command serving for the set at 5-1 and then 5-3.

The persistent Hsieh kept up the pressure, narrowing the gap and levelling with a second straight break at 5-all.

Hsieh then held for 6-5 and clinched the upset a game later on a second match point after



Petra Kvitova of Czech Republic returns the ball to Viktoria Kuzmova of Slovakia

two hours.

"I'm so excited, I was screaming like a baby when I won," Hsieh said in victory. "It was a tough comeback."

"She had a lot of aces (nine), I'm just happy I was able to make it back."

The third-set recovery by the 31st-ranked Hsieh from Taiwan was eerily reminiscent of a similar fightback from Pliskova herself as she beat Serena Wil-



Petra Kvitova was the winner of the Dubai Tennis Championships in 2013

liams in their Australian Open quarter-final from a similar disadvantage in the third set.

"I was obviously tired today, my legs were not doing much," Pliskova said.

"It was a tough match. To play against her, you need to be ready on the legs a lot, which I was not."

Pliskova had reached at least the semi-final at her previous three Tour events, dating to the



Taiwan's Hsieh Su-wei returns the ball to Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova

Singapore ATP Finals last October.

Kvitova, winner of the event in 2013, beat Kuzmova in just 62 minutes.

"I am pleased, I didn't give her any time to do her job, maybe turn the match her way," Kvitova said.

"I do feel my muscles, for sure, especially on the legs. I need a treatment and massage again. I played two long matches before,

and I'm still fine, which is great."

Kvitova said she felt her game was on the rise again after losing the Australian Open final to Naomi Osaka and winning just one match a week later.

"Today was the first day of the better days on the court, off the court. It's been tough since I came from Australia and St. Petersburg.

"I'm glad that it's on the way up."

Late South African strikes spoil Sri Lanka's day



South Africa's Quinton de Kock bats during the second test cricket match between South Africa and Sri Lanka

AFP | Port Elizabeth, S Africa

Three late strikes by South Africa's fast bowlers yesterday helped atone for a poor batting performance on the first day of the second Test against Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka were 60 for three at the close at St George's Park after bowling out South Africa for 222.

Earlier, Vishwa Fernando and Kasun Rajitha both took three wickets as Sri Lanka followed up their surprise win in the first Test in Durban with a disciplined bowling performance on a slow but well-grassed pitch.

Some of their good work was undone after Dimuth Karunaratne and Lahiru Thirimanne gave the Sri Lankan innings a reasonable start, putting on 25 for the first wicket.

Captain Karunaratne was caught behind off Kagiso Rabada for 17 in the 12th over. Duanne Olivier then bowled Oshada Fernando and had Kusal Mendis caught behind.

South Africa, needing a win to share the series, made a poor start after winning the toss, losing three wickets with the total on 15, two of them off

successive balls from Vishwa Fernando.

They never recovered fully despite three half-century stands, two of which involved top-scorer Quinton de Kock, who made 86.

Aiden Markram and captain Faf du Plessis put on 58 for the fourth wicket but it was 73 for four when captain Du Plessis was bowled by opposite number, part-time bowler Karunaratne, with the last ball before lunch.

The hosts seemed to be recovering when Markram and De Kock put on 57 at almost a run a ball for the fifth wicket before Kasun Rajitha took three wickets in successive overs.

South Africa, first innings	
D. Elgar b V. Fernando	6
A. Markram lbw b Rajitha	60
H. Amla b V. Fernando	0
T. Bavuma run out (Rajitha)	0
F. du Plessis b Karunaratne	25
Q. de Kock b De Silva	86
W. Mulder lbw b Rajitha	9
K. Maharaj c Dickwella b Rajitha	0
K. Rabada c Dickwella b De Silva	22
D. Steyn not out	3
D. Olivier c Dickwella b V. Fernando	0
Extras (b1, lb6, nb4)	11
Total (61.2 overs)	222

Albon keeps Toro Rosso on top

Reuters | Barcelona

Thai racer Alexander Albon kept Toro Rosso on top of the Formula One testing timesheets at lunchtime yesterday while champions Mercedes unlocked a little more pace and finally went faster than Ferrari.

British-born Albon, one of three Formula Two graduates making their F1 race debuts when the season starts in Australia on March 17, lapped the Circuit de Catalunya with a best time of one minute 17.637 seconds on the softest and fastest tyres.

He also completed another 44 laps after an impressive 132 on Tuesday, with the Honda engine showing good gains in both performance and reliability after



Toro Rosso's Thai driver Alexander Albon drives during the tests

the problems of recent years. Albon's Russian team mate Daniil Kvyat had produced the fastest lap on Wednesday, a 1:17.704 but also on softest of tyre compounds.

Australian Daniel Ricciardo

slotted in with the second fastest time for Renault, a 1:17.785 also on the softest tyres on a cold but sunny morning.

Five-times world champion Lewis Hamilton was third for Mercedes, who had said on

Wednesday they planned to focus a bit more on performance, and just under the 1:18 barrier with a 1:17.977 on harder tyres than the top two.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was fourth on the timesheets in 1:18.046, but on a harder compound than Hamilton.

The Monegasque did the most laps, however — his 75 before lunch comparing to Hamilton's 58. Frenchman Romain Grosjean did 64 in the Ferrari-powered Haas.

Poland's Robert Kubica was also on track for Williams, who only started testing on Wednesday afternoon, and did 48 laps. He was still 10th and slowest, more than a second and a half off Canadian Lance Stroll for Racing Point.

Ferrari seem to be ahead of Mercedes: Bottas

Reuters | Barcelona

Ferrari are looking stronger than Mercedes in testing and the Formula One champions have work to do before next month's season-opening race in Australia, Valtteri Bottas said yesterday.

The Finn, team mate to five-times world champion Lewis Hamilton at Mercedes, gave his assessment on the final day of the first four-day pre-season test at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya.

Ferrari were fastest on the first two days and the Italians have also covered an impressive amount of mileage in their new SF90 car while Mercedes have been working through their programme without setting any eye-catching times.

"They do seem very strong,"



Mercedes' Finnish driver Valtteri Bottas takes part in the tests

Bottas said of Ferrari, Mercedes' closest rivals last year.

"No matter which kind of fuel load or engine modes they are running, whatever you try to correct that for, in any case they are quick on short runs and long runs.

"I think we feel at this point

they are maybe a bit ahead, but obviously it's impossible to make detailed calculations. It is very early days. With the new rules its going to be a big development race."

Bottas said the cars would be very different by the time of the Melbourne race on March 17

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In the team, (there is a) kind of ... excitement to discover more about the car and really try to improve it because at this point it looks like we are not miles ahead of everyone. It seems like Ferrari are in a better place

VALTTERI BOTTAS

and Mercedes had new parts coming before then.

The Finn warned, however, that even with the upgrades Mercedes still needed to make the car better and quicker, with work to do on the balance.