

# Murray makes triumphant start to year at US Open tuneup

Andy Murray won in his first ATP match of the year in the US Open quarantine bubble in New York

● Murray defeated American Frances Tiafoe at the Western and Southern Open

AFP | New York

Britain's Andy Murray made a triumphant ATP comeback Saturday, defeating Frances Tiafoe 7-6 (8/6), 3-6, 6-1 in his first match of 2020 at the Western and Southern Open.

The 33-year-old Scotsman advanced in hot and humid conditions to a second-round date with German fifth seed Alexander Zverev at the COVID-19 quarantine bubble that will also be used for the US Open, which starts on August 31.

Murray won the 2012 US Open as well as the 2013 and 2016 Wimbledon titles plus the 2012 and 2016 Olympic gold medals.

Former world number one Murray, now ranked 129th, suffered a pelvic injury at the Davis Cup last November and that, combined with the pandemic shutdown, kept him out of competition until he faced 22-year-old Tiafoe in a meeting of wildcard entrants.

"I thought I moved well today," Murray said. "That was probably the thing I was most happy with and probably the thing I was most apprehensive about going into the match."

"My tennis could have been better. I did some things well at the end, but I could definitely improve in terms of my game."



Britain's Andy Murray hits a return

Murray broke Tiafoe for a 2-0 lead in the third set when the American missed a volley, broke again to 5-1 with a backhand return winner and held at love to finish matters after two hours and 28 minutes.

Murray was the 2008 and 2011 winner in this Grand Slam tune-up event, usually staged in Cincinnati but moved to New York due to the COVID-19 pandemic that wiped out much of the season, including Wimbledon.

Tiafoe, ranked 81st, forced the only break point of the first set in the 11th game with a lob winner but Murray dismissed it with a service winner up the middle and held to 6-5 on a second-serve ace.

In the tie-breaker, Tiafoe jumped ahead 5-2 before Murray roared back, saving a set point to reach 6-6 when Tiafoe sent a backhand wide and taking the set two points later on a passing forehand winner.

Tiafoe, whose only ATP title came at the 2018 Delray Beach Open, saved a break point with an ace in the fifth game of the second set and took the first break of the match for a 5-3 lead on a backhand drop volley winner before holding to force a third set.

The match was played on the National Tennis Center Grandstand court, the event's feature court with no matches until the US Open scheduled at Arthur

Ashe Stadium or Louis Armstrong Stadium.

## ATP back in action

Other men advancing Saturday included Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime, who defeated Nikoloz Basilashvili 6-4, 6-1 in the day's opening match -- the first ATP contest since the tour was shut down amid the coronavirus pandemic in March.

When Basilashvili buried a forehand in the net on match point, Auger-Aliassime was at something of a loss, with no crowd to acknowledge the moment.

"I actually threw a ball at my coach," said Auger-Aliassime, who usually tosses a ball to a fan



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after a win.

He said the unusual quiet on the court made him even more alert to any stray noise.

"The smallest noise or the smallest movement was even more of a distraction because there was no noise and you just heard every noise or every movement around," he said. "It was weird."

On the women's side, Greek 13th seed Maria Sakkari defeated US teen Coco Gauff 6-1, 6-3 in 64 minutes. Sakkari could face 23-time Grand Slam winner Serena Williams in the third round.

Sakkari said she didn't find the experience of playing in a large stadium with no fans was less off-putting than she expected.

"I thought it would be worse," she said. "Maybe on like a bigger match, like maybe a semi-final or final it's going to feel weird."

"But today I was already pumped by myself, and that was more than enough."

## India ready to host England Tests in February: Ganguly



Sourav Ganguly

AFP | New Delhi

India are committed to hosting England in February next year ahead of the 2021 Indian Premier League season, the country's cricket chief Sourav Ganguly said.

England's original white-ball tour to India in September-October was a casualty of the coronavirus pandemic.

According to the International Cricket Council's Future Tours Programme (FTP), India are scheduled to tour Australia in December and host England for their last five world Test championship matches in early 2021.

Ganguly, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, said in an email to state associations: "The BCCI and the Indian cricket team will continue to fulfil its FTP commitments."

"The senior Indian men's team will travel to Australia for its series starting in December this year, and will come back to the country for a series against England starting February next year," Ganguly said in the letter seen by AFP.

"This will be followed by IPL 2021 in April (the normal month for it to start)."

After many delays, the 13th edition of the IPL, the world's richest Twenty20 tournament, will now start on September 19 in the United Arab Emirates with the final on November 10.

## Smith admits he'll miss jeering English fans

AFP | Sydney

Steve Smith said he'll miss being jeered and heckled by English crowds during their upcoming limited-overs tour, admitting the booing motivates him to do better.

The master Australian batsman bore the brunt of the hostile English fans on their trip there last year after returning from a ban for ball-tampering.

But he thrived on the taunts and potshots, scoring an incredible 774 runs in four Tests, at an average 110.57, including twin centuries on his Test return at Edgbaston.

"I do like batting there, unfortunately there's going to be no crowd there to egg me on and give me a bit more motivation," he said at Sydney airport en route to Perth, from where



Steve Smith

the team will fly to England.

"Still, there's going to be plenty of eyes on the TV and it is going to be great to be back out there playing."

Australia's 21-man squad will initially quarantine in Derby due to the coronavirus pandemic before the first of three Twenty20s in Southampton on September 4 in empty stadiums.

They also play three ODIs at Manchester, with both venues having hotels attached so they can remain in bio-secure bubbles.

"I'm looking forward to getting back into it, obviously it's going to be a bit different than what we're used to being in a bubble and playing with no crowds," Smith said.

## Carey 'disappointed' to lose Australia white-ball vice-captaincy

AFP | Sydney

Alex Carey has admitted he was "disappointed" at losing the vice-captaincy of Australia's white-ball team for their series in England, but said he understood the rationale.

The wicketkeeper-batsman had shared the duties with pace spearhead Pat Cummins since Justin Langer took over as coach in 2018.

But a decision, backed by captain Aaron Finch, was made to streamline the leadership, with Cummins anointed sole deputy for next month's three one-day internationals and three Twenty20s in England.

"You're always going to be disappointed with that but I'm also really grateful and thankful for the opportunity I've had in that role in the past 24 months," Carey told cricket.com.au late Saturday.

"I would love to still have the title next to my name but it's not going to change anything from my end."

"I'm still going to rock up with a big smile on my face and try really hard around the group. It's going back to the old model, which has worked in the past."

Carey, who has played 26 ODIs and 28 Twenty20s, added: "The decision sits really comfortably



Australia's Alex Carey in action during a match (file photo)

with me now."

Finch, who captains both the ODI and Twenty20 teams, said having a single line of contact was important for him on Australia's first tour since the coronavirus pandemic brought sport to a halt in March.

"At times if you have seven or eight guys going to three or four people, sometimes it can feel a little bit clouded and

you just get to a point where you have so much advice," he said.

"So for Pat to be able to filter that out on the field will be a huge help."

The squad left from Perth for England yesterday.

Cricket Australia insist there are no captaincy succession plans in place for 33-year-old Finch, who recently said he



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ALEX CAREY

wanted continue until the one-day World Cup in 2023, or Test skipper Tim Paine, who will be 36 this year.

Travis Head and Cummins are the current Test vice-captains and are widely seen as leadership candidates along with Carey, former captain Steve Smith and Marnus Labuschagne.

Former vice-captain David Warner, a fixture in all three formats, is banned from holding a leadership position ever again for his part in the 2018 ball-tampering scandal.

# 774

runs were scored by Steve Smith in four Tests during the trip last year