

# Nadal overcomes Ferrer

Rafael Nadal sees off tearful David Ferrer to reach last eight in Barcelona

AFP | Barcelona

Rafael Nadal showed no mercy towards an emotional David Ferrer as he eased into the quarter-finals of the Barcelona Open yesterday with a straight-sets victory.

Ferrer is set to retire after the Madrid Open next month and made a tearful exit on what was his last appearance at this tournament.

But there was no room for sentiment for Nadal, who won 6-3, 6-3 to take one step closer to a record 12th Barcelona title.

Four of those triumphs came after beating Ferrer in the final and, at the end of this latest victory, Nadal's 37-year-old opponent saluted the crowd before placing his pink headband down on the service line.

Ferrer reached a career-high ranking of number three in the world in 2013,

the same year he went closest to winning a Grand Slam too, undone by Nadal again in the French Open final.

Nadal will be gunning for his 12th success at Roland Garros next month and this was more like the sort of form expected of the world number two, who had won 30 consecutive sets in Barcelona before falling one behind to Leonardo Mayer on Wednesday.

Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff or the talented 20-year-old Greek, Stefanos Tsitsipas, now await in the last eight before a potential semi-final meeting with Dominic Thiem, whom Nadal beat in the French Open final last year.

Nadal broke Ferrer for 4-2 in the opening set and was serving for it at 5-3 when rain delayed the match for almost an hour.

The stoppage could not change the momentum, with Nadal quickly wrapping up the frame upon his return be-



Spain's Rafael Nadal hits a return



The central court at Barcelona was renamed as 'Pista Rafa Nadal' in 2017 to honour the great clay court player

fore breaking again early in the second.

Ferrer offered some brief resistance, a backhand winner restoring parity at 2-2 but Nadal raced ahead as a forehand pass and half-volley put him 5-3 in front.

He missed three match points but converted the fourth before finally embracing an emotional Ferrer at the net.

# Bahrain triumph at Asian athletics meet

TDI | Manama

Bahraini athletes won 22 medals, including 11 gold, seven silver and four bronze medals at the 23rd Asian Athletics Championship that was recently concluded in Doha, Qatar.

Bahrain's Salwa Naser increased her gold medal total to four on the final day of the event.

Naser, the 2017 world 400m silver medallist, ran a spectacular anchor leg in the 4x400m relay, the penultimate event of the Championships in Khalifa Stadium which in five months' time will host the International Association of Athletics Federations' World Championships.

A distant fourth when she took the baton, Naser faced a deficit of some 20 metres as she went into the first bend, the IAAF reported.

But she moved gradually into contention before taking the lead in the home straight in passing India's Vismaya Velluva Koroth in a superb split time of 49.70sec.

That performance came two hours after she had earned gold in the women's 200m to go with the ones she had earned on previous days in the 400m and 4x400m mixed relay, along with her bronze from the 4x100m.

Naser had won her 200m final in 22.74sec after overhauling 100m winner Olga Safronova in the middle of the final straight.

Her time improved by 0.10 the Championship record of 22.84 she had equalled the day before.

To widespread media disappointment, Naser rushed through the mixed zone without stopping to speak.

In the 4x400m relay, Bahrain had clocked 3min 32.10sec, beating India by 0.11 with Japan taking the bronze.

Meanwhile, HH Shaikh Khalid bin Hamad Al Khalifa, First Deputy President of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, Chairman of Bahrain Olympic Committee, President of the West Asian Athlet-



Salwa Naser with Bahrain flag after winning the race

4

Gold medals were won by Bahrain's Salwa Naser in the event

ics Federation and President of Bahrain Athletics Association congratulated His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, HRH Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the Prime Minister, HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and First Deputy Prime Minister, and HH Shaikh Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Representative of HM the King

for Charity and Youth Affairs and President of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports on the occasion of the remarkable achievement of Bahrain National Athletics Team

HH Shaikh Khalid affirmed that the historic achievement came as a result of the continuous support provided by the Wise Leadership and HH Shaikh Nasser to the youth and sports sector in general and to athletics sports in particular, contributing to the efforts supporting the Bahraini sports in taking steady steps forward and achieving more regional and international accomplishments.

His Highness expressed pride in the national team's victory, surpassing strong competitors, such as China and India, and proving the Kingdom of Bahrain's competency of taking leading positions in sports and other fields.

# Osaka downs Hsieh in Stuttgart opener

AFP | Stuttgart, Germany

World number one Naomi Osaka defeated Hsieh Su-wei 6-4, 6-3 in her first clay court match of the season in Stuttgart yesterday.

US and Australian Open champion Osaka, who lost to Taiwanese veteran Hsieh in Miami last month, secured a place in the quarter-finals against Croatia's Donna Vekic.

Osaka, 21, broke Hsieh three times in total to beat Hsieh for the second time in three attempts this year, having also defeated her on the way to lifting the title in Melbourne.

"She's a really tricky opponent. You never really know what she's going to do," said Osaka.

Osaka needed 84 minutes to dispatch the unconventional Hsieh, a win that ensures she will hold on to top spot for at least another week.

She is less than 200 points ahead of Simona Halep in the WTA rankings, although the Romanian pulled out of this week's tournament with a hip injury.

Top seed Osaka fought off the only two break points she faced,



Japan's Naomi Osaka returns the ball to Taiwan's Su-Wei Hsieh

in a lengthy service hold for 2-all in the opening set, before breaking Hsieh in the following game.

That was sufficient to wrap up the first set, and a Hsieh double-fault handed Osaka a break to start the second before she closed out victory with another service break in a performance that featured 22 winners and just 16 unforced errors.

The Japanese star arrived in Stuttgart, where she last played

in Stuttgart as a qualifier in 2017, after suffering early exits in her last three tournaments.

"Definitely I've put a lot on pressure on myself and found it hard to deal with in the first few tournaments," said Osaka. "I'm really having fun now though."

Osaka will meet Vekic, a 6-1, 7-5 winner over Daria Kasatkina, for a spot in the last four, while Latvian seventh seed Anastasija Sevastova defeated Germany's Laura Siegemund 6-4, 6-3.

# Pogba odd man out in PFA team of the year

AFP | London

Manchester United's Paul Pogba is the only non-Manchester City or Liverpool player to be named in the Professional Footballers' Association's Premier League team of the year yesterday.

The 26-year-old French World Cup-winning midfielder's inclusion is a surprise after an indifferent season, although he hit a purple patch after Ole Gunnar Solskjaer arrived at Old Trafford as interim manager.

City and Liverpool have been locked in an enthralling duel for the title, with Guardiola's City going top again on Wednesday after beating United 2-0 at Old Trafford, with Pogba unable to inspire his side to a much-needed win.

City provide six of the 11 players -- goalkeeper Ederson, centre-half Aymeric Laporte, midfielders Bernardo Silva and Fernandinho and forwards Ser-

gio Aguero and Raheem Sterling.

The remaining four places are filled by Liverpool players -- full-backs Andrew Robertson and

Trent-Alexander Arnold, central defender Virgil van Dijk and forward Sadio Mane.

Van Dijk and Sterling are believed to be in the running for the player of the year award.

There is no place, though, for Liverpool's Egyptian star Mo Salah, who has scored 19 Premier League goals this season, Spurs pair Harry Kane and Son Heung-min or Chelsea playmaker Eden Hazard.

The PFA Team of the Year is voted for by members of the Professional Footballers' Association.

Manchester City had five players in the 2017/18 side but only Argentine star Aguero retains his place from the team of 12 months ago.



Paul Pogba