

Djokovic defies injury in Australian Open win but Murray bows out

Aryna Sabalenka storms into last-16 Melbourne showdown with Belinda Bencic

Banana power puts Rublev into Rune clash

AFP | Melbourne

Novak Djokovic's hamstring just about held up as the hot favourite battled into the Australian Open last 16 yesterday, but Andy Murray's heroic run is over.

Hard-hitting Aryna Sabalenka meanwhile burnished her title credentials as she barrelled through, along with several other women's seeds.

An ailing Djokovic had heavy strapping and needed treatment twice on his troublesome left hamstring before defeating Grigor Dimitrov 7-6 (9/7), 6-3, 6-4 on Rod Laver Arena.

The Serb will face home hope Alex de Minaur for a place in the quarter-finals as he closes on a 10th Melbourne Park crown and a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title.

"Obviously, I didn't know how I'm going to feel physically, it was going up and down," said Djokovic.

"It was an incredible battle, three sets over three hours. Let's rest up and prepare for the next



Novak Djokovic in action during his third round match against Grigor Dimitrov

round.

Djokovic's fellow 35-year-old Murray will not join him in the next round, however, as the Briton's 4:05 am finish eventually caught up with him.

Former number one Murray was clearly feeling the effects of his epic five-setter in round two, which started on Thursday but ended in the early hours of Friday.

The 24th-seeded Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut won 6-1, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3, 6-4 and faces un-

seeded Tommy Paul of the United States.

"I gave everything that I had the last three matches -- I'm very proud of that," said Murray.

"But I'm also disappointed because I put loads of work into the beginning of this year and was playing well enough to have a really good run, have a deep run."

Also in the men's draw, fifth seed Andrey Rublev surged into a clash with Holger Rune -- then thanked his beaten opponent Dan Evans for giving him a ba-

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nana mid-match.

The Russian crushed the Briton 6-4, 6-2, 6-3 to make the fourth round for a third time.

He will face Danish teenager Rune for a place in the quarter-finals after the ninth seed survived a nasty fall to sweep past unseeded Frenchman Ugo Humbert 6-4, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5).

His friend and 25th seed Evans threw a banana to Rublev at a changeover when he ran out. "I didn't ask him, I asked the ball boy, but Danny asked for bananas earlier and he had two so he just said 'take it', and I caught it," said Rublev.

In two all-American matches, Jeffrey Wolf strolled past Michael Mmoh in three sets while



In a heartwarming act of mid-match sportsmanship, Dan Evans shared a banana with rival Andrey Rublev in the first set of their Australian Open third-round encounter on Margaret Court Arena

Paul made equally light work of Jenson Brooksby.

Ominous Sabalenka

Sabalenka is building a head of steam in her pursuit of a first Grand Slam title.

The Belarusian fifth seed blew away 26th-seeded Elise Mertens 6-2, 6-3 to set up a clash with Olympic champion Belinda Bencic.

Thirtieth seed Karolina Pliskova and 23rd seed Zhang Shuai also went through in straight sets on day six at Melbourne Park, and will clash in the fourth

round.

Sabalenka is trying not to get carried away.

The Minsk-born 24-year-old teased the Margaret Court Arena crowd for supporting Belgium's Mertens over her, but said she was enjoying the ride into the second week.

"About the favourite, that I am on that favourite list... I mean, it's really good that I'm there," said the Belarusian, who is yet to drop a set.

"But I better focus on myself, on my game, make sure that my dream will happen."

Bencic has also not dropped a set in Melbourne. The Swiss 12th seed eased past unseeded Italian Camila Giorgi 6-2, 7-5.

Also into the fourth round is the 17-year-old Linda Fruhvirtova, who beat her fellow Czech Marketa Vondrousova in three sets. She faces Donna Vekic of Croatia.

"It feels pretty surreal," the teenager told reporters.

"It's an incredible feeling. I'm just so happy and excited to be able to say: 'Hi second week!'"

French fourth seed Caroline Garcia fought back after a disastrous first set to beat world number 158 Laura Siegemund 1-6, 6-3, 6-3.

Zhang wishes WTA could return to China

AFP | Barcelona

Chinese number one Zhang Shuai hopes the WTA tour can return to her country this season as it opens up after abandoning the "zero-COVID" policy but said the Peng Shuai issue was out of

her control.

Former WTA player Peng accused a senior Chinese government official of sexual assault in 2021 in a post on social media that was soon removed from the country's internet.

She later denied having made

the accusation.

Peng's post caused an international outcry over her safety and led the WTA to suspend tournaments in China - a decision expected to cost the women's tour hundreds of millions of dollars in broadcasting and sponsorship.



Zhang Shuai

'Nothing changes' for Allegri despite Juve points deduction



Juventus' coach Massimiliano Allegri reacts next to Leandro Paredes (L)

Italy's Juventus docked 15 points for transfer deals

Reuters | Turin

Massimiliano Allegri said yesterday that nothing had changed for his Juventus team despite the Serie A club being hit with a massive points deduction for using transfers to artificially boost their balance sheet.

Juve were docked 15 points by the Italian Football Federation on Friday evening, pushing them down from third to 10th in Serie A and greatly compromising their chances of making next season's Champions League.

Allegri's team face Atalanta on Sunday night 12 points from the top four as the season reaches its halfway point, and the coach tried to deflect questions on the impact Friday's ruling would have on their

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campaign, and players.

"We need to close the first half of the season in the best way possible, after yesterday we need to stay tight as a group, keep our heads down and work... we can only think about what happens on the pitch," Allegri told reporters.

"Nothing changes, we need to get points, tomorrow will be difficult because Atalanta are playing well and in good shape... We need to take it one step at a time."

Rohit lauds pace bowlers as India clinch ODI series

AFP | New Delhi

Skipper Rohit Sharma yesterday hailed India's seam bowlers after the hosts hammered New Zealand by eight wickets to clinch the series in the second one-day international.

Pace spearhead Mohammed Shami returned figures of 3-18 to help dismiss the Black Caps for 108 after India elected to bowl first in Raipur.

Rohit made 51 as India romped home in 20.1 overs to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

And the captain said his bowlers had made an impression with their seam movement at home since the recent ODI sweep of Sri Lanka when Mohammed Siraj led the charge with nine wickets.

"These last five games (including three against Sri Lanka), bowlers have really stepped up," Rohit said after the win.

"You expect that kind of bowling, that kind of seam movement outside India. But these guys have got a lot of skills, they have been working on that for all this while and you could see the re-



Mohammed Shami takes a return catch to dismiss Daryl Mitchell

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ROHIT SHARMA

ward."

Indian pitches are known to be spin-friendly, in contrast to wickets in Australia and England where fast bowlers have a bigger role.

At the toss Rohit took a while to announce his decision to field, and told the presenter he "forgot" about the team call.

But things soon turned serious when Shami struck in the first over and with his fellow quicks had the tourists reeling



Indian pitches are known to be spin-friendly, in contrast to wickets in Australia and England where fast bowlers have a bigger role

at 15-5 by the 11th over.

"I feel that the more you work with the ball in practice, the more success will come," said man of the match Shami.

"As a new-ball bowler, it's important to assess the conditions and pass the message quickly to the other bowlers as well."

Glenn Phillips made 36 as he combined with the middle- and lower-order batsmen including Michael Bracewell (22) and Mitchell Santner (27) to take the total past 100, but the innings lasted only 34.3 overs.