

At year-ender, Federer ends 4-yr. wait

Beats World no 2 Djokovic for the first time since 2015 to qualify for the last four of the ATP Finals

REUTERS
LONDON, NOVEMBER 14

ROGER FEDERER lit up the O2 Arena with a dazzling 6-4 6-3 defeat of Novak Djokovic to hand the Serb an early ATP Finals exit and wreck his bid to end the year ranked number one on Thursday.

In the 49th meeting between the two great rivals, Federer snapped a five-match losing run against Djokovic and gained some consolation for his heartbreaking Wimbledon final defeat.

After both men had been beaten by Dominic Thiem earlier in the group, their eagerly-anticipated duel was a straight shoot-out to join the Austrian in the semi-finals.

Cheered on by the majority of the 17,000 fans in the arena, Federer produced an astonishing display of power, grace and precision and Djokovic simply had no answer.

Djokovic's first defeat by Federer for four years means Rafael Nadal will end the year as world number one for the fifth time even if the Spaniard fails to reach the semi-finals.

Federer, Djokovic and Nadal have all achieved the feat five times. Pete Sampras managed it a record six times.

Nadal takes on Stefanos Tsitsipas in the other group on Friday and should he win and Alexander Zverev lose to Daniil Medvedev, it would set up a Nadal versus Federer semi-final. Federer had played down talk of seeking revenge when asked about his impending clash with Djokovic this week, but his victory celebration showed exactly what it meant.

"I felt from the get-go I had good rhythm off the baseline and on the serve and that I felt like he was living dangerously if he was not going to play great tennis," Federer, who at 38 continues to mock the ageing process, told reporters.

"I got what I kind of expected, and it was a great feeling at the very end. The reaction showed."

Djokovic, who had needed to win the title to stand any chance of overhauling Nadal, said it had been a "bad match" from his side but admitted Federer had done everything right. "He was the better player in all aspects," the 32-year-old said. "I have the utmost admiration for him. What he's still showing on the court is phenomenal."

England's soccer team was playing across the city at Wembley on Thursday, but when



Roger Federer beat Novak Djokovic 6-4, 6-3 in a must-win match on Thursday. Reuters

Federer and Djokovic share a tennis court it is always the hottest ticket in town.

Djokovic had reached the final on his last six appearances at the ATP's most exclusive event in London while six-time champion Federer had only once failed to reach the semi-finals in his 16 previous appearances.

Something had to give and from the moment second seed Djokovic double-faulted twice in the third game to invite an early break for Federer, he was never really in contention.

Federer was seeing the ball like a melon, timing his groundstrokes to perfection while his serve was unplayable.

He dropped only three points on serve in the opening set and Djokovic's only chance was that Federer would cool off.

Djokovic dug deep to fend off break points in the opening game of the second set, then had his one and only break point in the fourth game but Federer whipped a huge forehand into the corner before pouncing on a volley.

NUMBER PLATE

6 Number of times Novak Djokovic and Federer have faced each other on the circuit since 2015, including Thursday's match. This was Federer's 23rd win overall against the Serb who still leads the head-to-head wins 26-23.

(The ghosts) were never really there. There (were) some press guys that made it up. So from my standpoint, I also didn't know I hadn't beaten him in a few years, actually. Didn't feel that way because it was so close in Paris and in Wimbledon against him.

ROGER FEDERER
ON DEFEATING DJOKOVIC

Federer was relentless and surged 0-40 ahead in the next game. Djokovic saved one break point with a backhand pass but hit a forehand long on the next.

With crowd roaring Federer on, the end came quickly.

Serving to stay in the match, Djokovic was broken to love as Federer sent a dipping backhand to his feet.

Resilient Nadal

For the second time in three days Rafael Nadal fought off one of the game's rising powers, beating Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-7(4) 6-4 7-5 to stay alive at the ATP Finals on Friday. However, the 33-year-old Spaniard will not know until later on Friday whether his Herculean effort was in vain.

The world number one needs Russian Daniil Medvedev, who can no longer reach the last four, to beat Germany's Alexander Zverev in the concluding round-robin match to secure top spot in the group and a semi-final clash with Swiss rival Roger Federer.

Should Zverev win, Nadal will finish third in the group despite having two round-robin wins with Tsitsipas finishing top and going on to play Federer.

England seal Euro berth in style; Ron hits hat-trick

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
LONDON, NOVEMBER 15

ENGLAND MANAGER Gareth Southgate revelled in his side's ruthlessness as a 7-0 thrashing of Montenegro sealed qualification for Euro 2020 in style in the Three Lions' 1,000th match. Even without Raheem Sterling, who was dropped by Southgate earlier in the week after a physical altercation with teammate Joe Gomez, England displayed the firepower that will make them one of the favourites for next year's European Championship.

Harry Kane moved into sixth in the all-time list of England goalscorers with a first half hat-trick to take his tally for the qualifying campaign to 11 in seven games.

Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, Marcus Rashford, Aleksandar Sofranac's own goal and Tammy Abraham's first at international level rounded off the scoring as Southgate's men sealed top spot in Group A with a stunning record of 33 goals in seven games.

"In the past we have maybe struggled against lower ranked teams who defend in numbers, but we have players who can open those teams up and a style of play that can do that," said Southgate.

"We have qualified and done it clinically." After an unexpectedly turbulent week for Southgate as his decision to go public with the sanction for Sterling was criticised, there was some relief as once again his side tore apart mediocre opposition. "The quality of our attacking play was excellent," added Southgate.

"We expected to win the group but we've totally taken teams apart." However, there was still time for the clash between Sterling and Gomez to take the shine off a fine performance as the Liverpool defender was booed by some of the 77,000 in attendance when he entered for a late substitute appearance. "It was hard for me to see my teammate get booed for something that was my fault," Sterling tweeted.

"Joe hasn't done anything wrong and for me to see someone who keeps his head down and works hard, especially after a difficult week for him, to be booed when he came on tonight was wrong."

Ronaldo leads the way

Faro (Portugal), Nov 15 (AFP) Cristiano Ronaldo scored his ninth international hat-trick as Portugal moved to the brink of qualifying for Euro 2020 with a 6-0 thrashing of Lithuania in Faro on Thursday.



Kane scored a hat-trick in England's 7-0 win over Montenegro. Reuters

KEY RESULTS

England	7-0	Montenegro
Portugal	6-0	Lithuania
Turkey	0-0	Iceland
Albania	2-2	Andorra
France	2-1	Moldova
Serbia	3-2	Luxembourg

The reigning European champions were made to wait for qualification however as Serbia battled to a 3-2 win over Luxembourg in the other game in Group B. Ronaldo had been substituted in his last two club games by Juventus coach Maurizio Sarri, with the Italian claiming the striker had been struggling with a knee injury. He reportedly left the stadium before the final whistle after being taken off by Sarri during Juve's 1-0 Serie A win over AC Milan at the weekend. "I knew he (Ronaldo) was able to play," Portugal coach Fernando Santos told Portuguese TV channel RTP.

"His match put an end to the doubts about his physical condition, for those who had doubts. I personally had none, and I said that." Portugal sits second in the standings behind Ukraine, who have already qualified, and one point clear of Serbia, but can secure their spot at next year's finals with victory in Luxembourg on Sunday.

Ronaldo has now scored 98 international goals and will be hoping to become the second-ever player to reach 100 this weekend.

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