

# Federer Breaks Connors' Record

**DUBAI, UAE, Feb. 27**--Roger Federer struggled to a first-round victory at the Dubai Open on Monday, the day he broke Jimmy Connors' streak of consecutive weeks at No. 1.

According to AP, Federer, who broke Connors' 30-year-old mark with his 161st successive week at the top of the ATP rankings, defeated Kristian Pless of Denmark 7-6 (2), 3-6, 6-3 after a monthlong break since winning the Australian Open.

Federer's reign began more than three years ago, taking over No. 1 on Feb. 2, 2004, after winning his second career Grand Slam title at the Australian Open. Federer believed he came closest to losing the top ranking when he had to defeat Andy Roddick in the 2004 Wimbledon final, "a huge moment for me."

"I raised my game at just the right time," the Swiss star said during a conference call. "That's one of the reasons I've been No. 1 for so long." Connors set his record from July 1974 to August 1977.

Connors won eight Grand Slam titles in his career, which lasted more than 20 years. "I haven't heard anything from Jimmy," Federer said, laughing. "I haven't read any quotes. It's a great record to break, he's had it so long."

Federer struggled against the 86th-ranked

Pless, but extended his career-high winning streak to 37 matches.

"It's always rough here for some reason," said Federer, who won three straight Dubai Open titles before losing to

Federer considers Connors' 109 titles an even bigger accomplishment. So far, Federer has 47.

"He played until he was 40," Federer said. "That's an incredible

"Scheduling has been a very important factor to my success," Federer said. "It helps me to heal from injuries and mentally get away." Since taking over the No. 1 spot, Federer's record



Roger Federer

Rafael Nadal in last year's final. "It can happen sometimes when you have not played for a long time."

In other matches, sixth-seeded Tomas Berdych rallied to defeat Mohammed Al Ghareeb of Kuwait 3-6, 6-3, 6-2, and fourth-seeded Tommy Robredo lost to French veteran Fabrice Santoro 7-6 (6), 6-4.

The 25-year-old

effort. He's one of the great all-time tennis players." Federer has been relatively injury-free during his consecutive weeks at No. 1, with only a twisted ankle "about three or four years ago." The 10-time Grand Slam champion takes a month off three times during the year--at the end of the season and after the Australian Open and Wimbledon.

was 247-15 (.943) with 34 titles in 49 tournaments. He's won six of the last seven Grand Slam titles.

Federer is fifth in the all-time list of most overall weeks at No. 1. Pete Sampras leads with 286 weeks, followed by Ivan Lendl with 270, Connors with 268 and John McEnroe with 170. The ATP rankings began in August 1973.

## FIFA Dragged Into Canadian Row Over Hijab

**MONTREAL, Feb. 27**--A young girl's expulsion from a tournament this weekend for wearing a hijab will be upheld by Quebec soccer officials, they said Monday, unless the world soccer federation FIFA changes gear rules.

Asmahan Mansour, 11, was ousted from a tournament on Sunday in a Montreal suburb after refusing to take off her hijab, the head scarf many Muslim women wear under religious principles.

Brigitte Frot, executive director of the Quebec Soccer Federation, told AFP she was not allowed on the field for safety reasons, not religious objections.

"It's unfortunate," she said. "I believe FIFA will have to rule, yes or no, whether hijabs are permitted on the soccer field. Whatever they decide, we'll abide by the rules."

Until then, however, Mansour and other Muslim women would not be allowed to play soccer in Canada's French-speaking Quebec province while wearing a head scarf, she said. The incident that sparked a national outcry occurred about five min-

utes into a game Sunday, when the Nepean coach wished to substitute Mansour, who was not in the starting line-up, for another player. Media reports said the referee, who is incidentally Muslim himself, feared Mansour could be choked if the scarf were tugged on.

"Based on FIFA rules, the referee asked the young girl to remove her hijab, fearing it posed a danger to her and other players. She refused," Frot said.

Mansour's Nepean Hotspurs Selects team quit the tournament to show solidarity with their teammate. Four other teams also joined the boycott.

Rules of the Zurich-based FIFA, which governs international soccer play, do not specify a ban on head scarves. But Frot insisted local players are covered by FIFA's strict dress code, which bans any equipment or wear, including jewellery, that could be dangerous to players.

The Quebec federation had previously disallowed players who wore piercing rings or medical bracelets, she noted.

## Mavs Right at Home Again

**MEMPHIS, USA, Feb. 27**--Dirk Nowitzki has 27 points and eight rebounds, Jason Terry added 21 points, and the Mavericks extended their club-record home winning streak to 20 games with a 110-87 victory against the Atlanta Hawks last night in Dallas, said AP.

Josh Howard had 20 points before leaving in the fourth quarter with a sprained right ankle, and Jerry Stackhouse added 19 points and a season-high nine assists to help the Mavericks to their 12th straight win.

Howard was helped off the court with 6:11 to play after diving for a loose ball. Howard has been playing with a sore right ankle.

The Mavericks are the fourth team in NBA history with three winning streaks of 10 or more in a season, having already had runs of 12 and 13 games. The Milwaukee Bucks (1970-71), Philadelphia 76ers [team stats] (1980-81) and Los Angeles Lakers (1999-2000) are the other teams with three winning streaks of 10 or more games in a season.

Knicks 99, Heat 93--Stephon Marbury scored 18 of his 25 points in the fourth quarter, and Jamal Crawford stuck it to Miami again with 3-pointer in the closing seconds to lift host New York to a victory.

Shaquille O'Neal scored 20 points as Miami fell 1-2 without top scorer Dwyane Wade, out with a dislocated

shoulder.

The Knicks, swept by the Heat in three games last season, won this season series from the defending NBA champions 3-1.

Running the show by himself in the absence of fellow point guard Steve Francis, Marbury made four of six shots in the fourth--including two 3-pointers and four free throws midway through the frame that helped the Knicks erase a six-point deficit.

Eddy Curry, in his first matchup this season with O'Neal, scored 28 points and grabbed 11 rebounds.

Lakers 102, Jazz 94--Kobe Bryant made up for an off shooting night from the floor by making 21 free throws and

scoring 35 points, playing with a sore throat and leading Los Angeles over Utah in Salt Lake City.

Bryant was 21-for-24 from the line and just two away from tying his own team record. Bryant had skipped the shootaround Monday and struggled from the floor, going 7-for-21. But he had plenty of help from Smush Parker, who made six 3-pointers and finished with 24 points as the Lakers won their third straight.

All-Star Mehmet Okur returned for Utah after missing two games with back spasms, but he had just two points through three quarters and finished with nine. Okur was 1-for-4 on 3-pointers.

## Mirza Advances

**DOHA, Qatar, Feb. 27**--Indian heart-throb Sania Mirza stormed into the second round of the 1.34 million dollar Qatar Open with a 6-4, 6-3 win over Italian Romina Oprandi on Monday.

Backed by a strong crowd of expatriate Indians in Qatar, Mirza, who was trailing 3-0 in the second set, won six games in a row to complete her second victory over Oprandi this year after her triumph last month in Australia, according to AFP.

Both players carried niggling knee injuries and Mirza had to get on-court treatment for several minutes, but that didn't stop her from unleashing some sizzling shots that left the Italian rooted on the court on several occasions.

Mirza, who was the toast of the crowd during the Asian Cup last December, had to come from behind in the first set too, storming from 3-1 down to take a 4-3 lead and holding serve to consolidate her position further.

After Oprandi won the

next game, the Indian closed out the set with ease using her booming forehand to good effect. The Qatar Tennis Federation acknowledged

Mirza's tremendous crowd-pulling prowess, by opening the tournament with her match on center court and the response from the public more than justified their decision.

"I am quite happy with the way I played although I made some mistakes on big points," Mirza said referring to some easy volleys she missed at the net.

"I am also quite happy with the way I was received by the Indians living here, it's always good to have some support," Mirza said she will be trying to play the tournament in a relaxed manner after all the hype during the Asian Games.

"The Asian was different because I was expected to win some medals, but that is not the case here. Here there are so many good players that I just want to go out there and do my best." Meanwhile, two other Italians avoided Oprandi's fate by advancing into the second round. Francesca Schiavone, the eighth seed here, defeated Bulgarian Tsvetana Pironkova 6-2, 6-4, while Mara Santangelo ousted Germany's Sandra Kloesel 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

## Nafees Leads Bangladesh To Convincing Win

**ST. JOHN'S, Antigua, Feb. 27**--Opening batsman Shahriar Nafees hit his fourth One-day International hundred to lead Bangladesh to an eight-wicket victory over Bermuda in the first match of their three-nation series on Sunday at the Antigua Recreation Ground, reported AFP.

Nafees hit eight fours and three sixes in an undefeated 104 from 112, as Bangladesh successfully chased 206 for victory and reached their target with 12.3 overs to spare.

For the Bermudians, an ICC Associate side and one of the real minnows of Cricket World Cup 2007 which is being staged in the Caribbean for the first time, it was a reality check ahead of the competition which officially opens on March 11.

Ironically, Bermuda and Bangladesh have been drawn in Group B of the preliminary competition along with India and Sri Lanka.

After losing Tamin Iqbal for 11 early, Nafees added

58 for the second wicket with Aftab Ahmed and then on 134, unbroken, for the third wicket with Saqibul Hasan to take Bangladesh to victory.

Ahmed struck seven fours in 40 off 27 balls and Hasan collected two boundaries in 42 from 70 balls.

Earlier, several Bermuda batsmen got starts, but failed to carry on, after their side won the toss and chose to bat. Lionel Cann, batting at seven, hit the top score of 33, Saleem Mukuddem made 32, Janeiro Tucker got 31, and Oliver Pitcher 30.

No Bangladesh bowler had to extend himself, but Mohammad Rafique took two for 38 from his allotment of 10 overs. Bermuda face Canada, another ICC Associate that has qualified for CWC 2007, in the second match of the series on Monday at the same venue, where Canada meet Bangladesh on Wednesday.

Canada have been placed in Group-C alongside England, New Zealand, and Kenya.

## Czech Victorious in 10k Cross-Country Event

**SAPPORO, Japan, Feb. 27**--Defending champion Katerina Neumannova of the Czech Republic won the women's 10-kilometer cross-country event Tuesday at the Nordic World Ski Championships, according to AP.

Neumannova crossed the finish line with a time of 23 minutes, 58.4 seconds to give the Czech Republic its third medal of the championships. Russia's Olga Savilova took the silver medal 26.5 seconds back while Italy's Arianna Follis won the bronze medal with a time of 24:28.6.

Olympic champion Kristina Smigun of Estonia finished in ninth place with a time of 24:56.3 while Norway's Marit Bjorgen was a disappointing 22nd overall.

The 2007 championships mark the first time the meet is being held as an independent event in Asia. In 1972,



Katerina Neumannova of the Czech Republic powers through the snow during the World Nordic Ski Championships at Shirahatayama in Sapporo on Tuesday.

The Feb. 22-March 4 championships continue Wednesday with the men's 15-kilometer cross-country race.

## Eto'o Return Inspires Barca for King's Cup

**MADRID, Spain, Feb. 27**--The goalscoring return of striker Samuel Eto'o has given Barcelona the lift they need to overhaul Real Zaragoza in their King's Cup quarter-final, second leg on Wednesday, said Reuters.

The 24-times Cup winners trail last season's finalists 1-0 from the first leg in the Nou Camp, but will be a changed side in Zaragoza with the Cameroon international's input.

Eto'o made his first start for Barca after four months out with a knee injury, scoring one and setting up a second in a 3-0 win over Athletic Bilbao in the league on Sunday.

"His presence and style of play draws the attention of the opposition defense and creates space for the other players. When you control possession and don't have players like this it is more complicated," Barca coach Frank Rijkaard said.

The Primera Liga leaders have missed Eto'o's presence but will need to use the player sparingly as he regains match fitness.

"I'm shattered," said Eto'o after playing 66 minutes of Sunday's game. "I felt a little pain but will have to put up with this for about a year. I have to keep working but the injury is almost forgotten now."

Zaragoza, who knocked Barca out of the Cup 5-4 on aggregate at the same stage last season, have lost some of their early season sparkle and could only draw 0-0 with lowly Levante on Sunday.

Of Wednesday's other three matches only the Sevilla derby appears to be in the balance, after Sevilla and 2005 Cup winners Real Betis drew 0-0 at the Sanchez Pizjuan on Jan. 31.

Although Sevilla are second in the table, 20 points ahead of 14th-placed Betis, the city derby is a leveller as was proved in the league clash at Betis's Manuel Ruiz de Lopera stadium earlier this month, which also ended goalless. The possibility of penalties looms large. Both sides have drawn three of the four league games since the first leg, without scoring. Sevilla will also have an eye on Saturday's top-of-the-table clash with league leaders Barcelona.



Allen Iverson (1) of the Denver Nuggets drives the baseline on Erick Dampier of the Dallas Mavericks at the American Airlines Center on Monday.