

Federer vies for fifth title in possibly last Hamburg Masters

Another dream final between Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal, big crowds and more sunshine are what local organisers hope for at the Hamburg Masters Series tennis tournament.

The possibly last edition of the event in its current form starts Sunday as the locals have added one day of main draw play.

If the men's body, Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP), and its controversial boss Etienne de Villiers, had its way Hamburg will lose the elite status and the May slot from next year on in a major restructuring plan.

But leading players have spoken out in favour of the tournament and the organising German Tennis Federation (DTB) has filed a lawsuit against the ATP at a Delaware court, citing contracts beyond 2009.

'The fight David vs Goliath continues. I expect justice from the United States of America,' said DTB president Georg von Waldenfels recently, who also hopes for big crowds 'to send a signal with their presence'.

Unlike previous ATP bosses, de Villiers has so far not come to Hamburg and is reportedly not expected to be there next week either.

Wet and cold conditions were one reason why leading players such as Andre Agassi liked to snub Hamburg in the past, but all stars should be present May 11-18, even though there is concern over Nadal.

Germans are not among the favourites as the crowd has long adopted the German-speaking Swiss world number one Federer as their hero.

Federer got the first of four Hamburg titles in 200, which was also his first on clay, and at the Masters Series in his rise to the top of the rankings.

Last year he famously beat Nadal 6-0 in the final set to end the Spaniard's unbeaten run on clay after 81 wins, saying: 'I have fallen in love with this tournament.'

This year's edition may come at the right time as Federer has just one 2008 trophy from the small Portuguese clay court event in Estoril.

Nadal, meanwhile, was plagued by a badly blistered foot as he lost Wednesday to compatriot Juan Carlos Ferrero in Rome (his record on clay since 2005 is now 103-2) and then expressed his fury over a crowded clay schedule.

Nadal had earlier said he was aiming for his first Hamburg title, but now could only say that he will 'try to go with my best feelings to Hamburg' after a few days of rest in Spain.

A possible Nadal absence would be good news for Federer, but the Swiss rather expressed his sympathy for the rival.

'It's tough for Rafa, I feel for him. He was on such a great streak for the last three years, but I'm sure he'll bounce back either at Hamburg or Paris (French Open) anyway,' said Federer.

Other Hamburg contenders include third-ranked Serbian Novak Djokovic, who beat Federer in the Australian Open semis en route to his first Grand Slam title in January, as well as other Spaniards such as world number five David Ferrer.

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