

Ljubicic gets revenge on Darcis - Karlovic also wins in Hamburg

Ivan Ljubicic needed a full workout to get revenge on Steve Darcis in the first round of the Hamburg Masters while star players Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal were training lightly.

The Croatian Ljubicic, a former top five player now ranked 29th, fought from 5-2 down in the second set to beat the Belgian world number 49, 6-7 (6-8), 7-5, 7-6 (7-4) here Sunday.

Darcis, who beat Ljubicic in two close sets last Monday in Rome, overcame a 4-2 deficit in the final set, but Ljubicic eventually prevailed in the tiebreak with his 16th ace after 3 hours 2 minutes of play under sunny German skies.

There was more joy for Croatia as Ivo Karlovic edged German Mischa Zverev, 7-6 (7-4), 7-6 (7-3). Rising French Gilles Simon defeated Xavier Malisse of Belgium 6-4, 7-5 in the day's other first-round match.

It was the first time that Hamburg saw main draw action Sunday as the event was stretched to eight days in what could be its last edition in this form.

The men's tennis body ATP wants to strip Hamburg of its elite Masters status and the May date in a tournament calendar reform from 2009 onwards. The German tennis federation has filed a lawsuit against the ATP in the US which is due to be decided in August.

Leading players have come to the support of Hamburg, led by the Swiss star Federer and Spain's Nadal, who were both training Sunday in their bid to overcome Rome setbacks.

Federer, who has just one title from the small Estoril event this year, hopes that Hamburg will bring him luck again after a quarter-final defeat on Friday in Rome against Czech Radek Stepanek.

'I hope I can bounce back strong in Hamburg. I hope it will not affect my confidence,' Federer said in Rome.

But the Swiss has been in love with Hamburg ever since he won in 2002 for his first clay and Masters title. He famously lifted a fourth trophy in the northern German port city last year by beating Nadal.

Nadal aims to bounce back from a second-round defeat in Rome against fellow-Spaniard Juan Carlos Ferrero, partly due to blisters in his foot. It was only his second loss in 105 clay matches since 2005.

Nadal went on the attack against the ATP boss Etienne de Villiers afterwards, calling for a better scheduling of the clay season in the lead-up to the French Open Grand Slam which starts in a fortnight.

World number three Novak Djokovic of Serbia shared Nadal's criticism before winning his second Masters title of the year in the injury-marred Rome event. The Australian Open champion could further close the gap on the leaders with a good showing in Hamburg.

The eight top seeds have a bye into the second and will not play until Tuesday or Wednesday.

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