

Wimbledon

To appreciate Nadal, watch what Murray endured

By **HOWARD FENDRICH**
Associated Press

LONDON — To appreciate fully just how outstanding Rafael Nadal is at the moment — 28 consecutive completed sets won in Grand Slam play — consider what Andy Murray went through at Wimbledon on Friday.

Murray's title defense appeared to be on shaky ground in the third round, particularly through a stressful stretch at Centre Court against Fabio Fognini, the 28th-seeded Italian who won their most recent encounter and had five set points to force this one to a fifth.

No telling whether the No. 1-ranked Murray, or his vocal backers, could have handled that test. Didn't need to find out, because Murray was steady enough to grab the last five games and beat Fognini 6-2, 4-6, 6-1, 7-5 as the sunlight faded.

"The end of the match was tense," Murray said, in his typically understated way. "It was a very up-and-down



Britain's Andy Murray celebrates after winning against Italy's Fabio Fognini after their Men's Singles Match on day five at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in London Friday, July 7, 2017.

AP Photo/Alastair Grant

match. I didn't feel like it was the best tennis at times."

The set he did drop was

the first ceded so far this week by the Big 4: Roger Federer, Novak Djokovic, Nadal and

Murray. That all-conquering quartet combined to win the past 14 Wimbledon champi-

onships — half by Federer, three by Djokovic, two apiece by Murray and Nadal. Ah, yes, Nadal.

He is coming off a record 10th French Open title, claiming all 19 full sets he contested in Paris with as overpowering a performance as can be (one opponent quit because of injury in the middle of the second set). Tack on the nine collected at the All England Club, including a 6-1, 6-4, 7-6 (3) victory over 30th-seeded Karen Khachanov on Friday, and Nadal's set streak in majors equals the third-longest of the Open era.

"I mean, if you don't hit hard and fast, he's going to destroy you," the 21-year-old Khachanov said. "If he has time, he's dominating with his forehand. And he can play all the angles."

With his friend Sergio Garcia seated in the Royal Box, wearing the green jacket earned as Masters champion, Nadal put on quite a show. He whipped that big forehand of his; managed to dull serves that topped 130 mph (210

kph) enough to earn 15 break points, converting four; and played skillfully at the net, winning the point on 17 of 21 approaches, 4 for 4 when he decided to serve-and-volley. The closest Nadal has come to conceding a set over his past 10 matches came in the third. Facing a set point while down 6-5 and serving at 30-40, Nadal produced a brilliant power-and-touch combination, hitting a 122 mph (197 kph) serve followed by a well-disguised drop shot winner.

In Monday's fourth round, Nadal faces No. 16 Gilles Muller, who beat Aljaz Bedene 7-6 (4), 7-5, 6-4, while Murray meets unseeded Benoit Paire, a 6-2, 7-6 (3), 6-3 winner against Jerzy Janowicz. Other matchups: 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic against No. 18 Roberto Bautista Agut, and unseeded Kevin Anderson vs. No. 12 Jo-Wilfried Tsonga or No. 24 Sam Querrey, whose match was suspended Friday night in the fifth set because of darkness.

At 37, Venus Williams tops one teen, faces a second in next round

By **HOWARD FENDRICH**
Associated Press

LONDON — Venus Williams beat one 19-year-old opponent at Wimbledon on Friday. She'll face another on Monday.

Both of those players were born months after Williams made her debut at the All England Club.

Think about that for a minute.

Williams' 7-6 (3), 6-4 victory over Naomi Osaka of Japan made the 37-year-old American the oldest woman to reach the fourth round at Wimbledon since Martina Navratilova was that age when she was the tournament's runner-up in 1994.

"I've had to step it up. I imagine that's going to continue," Williams said. "All I can do is try to be my best."

This is the 20th appearance at the grass-court major for Williams, who has won the championship five times since her first match at the All England Club in 1997. Next

up for Williams on Monday, with a quarterfinal berth at stake, is another foe not yet 20: Ana Konjuh of Croatia.

Osaka spoke about growing up admiring Williams and her younger sister, Serena.

She also acknowledged that these sorts of important rounds at important tournaments are much newer to her. That sort of thing can make a difference at crucial moments, such as the opening tiebreaker Friday. Osaka led it 3-0, before Williams claimed the next seven points.

"I actually feel like it's better that she beat me, because I can learn more from her, and there's something more I can look forward to," the 59th-ranked Osaka said. "There's more of a goal for me to practice every day and stuff."

As for all of the chatter about gaps in, um, experience?

Williams said she didn't focus on that at all when it came to Friday's match.



Venus Williams of the United States returns to Japan's Naomi Osaka during their Women's Singles Match on day five at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in London Friday, July 7, 2017.

AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth

because she is pregnant, and Maria Sharapova recovering from a leg injury, Williams was one of only two past Wimbledon winners in the women's field when the tournament began. After a second-round loss by Petra Kvitova, Williams is the lone champ standing.

The 27th-seeded Konjuh had never been past the third round until upsetting 2014 Australian Open runner-up Dominika Cibulkova 7-6 (3), 3-6, 6-4 on Friday.

Also advancing were French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko, No. 2-seeded Simona Halep, No. 4 Elina Svitolina, No. 6 Johanna Konta, No. 21 Caroline Garcia and two-time Australian Open champion and former No. 1 Victoria Azarenka.

The matchups Monday: Halep vs. Azarenka, Ostapenko vs. Svitolina, Konta vs. Garcia.

Azarenka has played only five matches since returning to the tour after a hiatus to have her first baby.

Tour de France

Kittel ties German record for stage wins; Froome overall leader

By **ANDREW DAMPF & JOHN LEICESTER**
Associated Press

NUITS-SAINT-GEORGES, France — Another day, another victory for Marcel Kittel in the Tour de France.

Only this time, the German made his move nearly too late and edged Edvald Boasson Hagen of Norway only in a photo finish to win his third stage — and second in two days — in the race on Friday.

Provisional results awarded Kittel the victory but the photo of the finish left room for questions.

Kittel seemed sure he won, holding up three fingers to celebrate his three stage wins.

"It was super, super close," Kittel said. "When there's a photo finish, you have your doubts. I was lucky."

Three-time champion Chris Froome will wear the



Germany's sprinter Marcel Kittel, second left, crosses the finish line with a fraction of a second difference ahead of Norway's Edvald Boasson Hagen, right, to win the seventh stage of the Tour de France cycling race over 213.5 kilometers (132.7 miles) with start in Troyes and finish in Nuits-Saint-Georges, France, Friday, July 7, 2017.

AP Photo/Christophe Ena

yellow jersey into the mountains this weekend.

"Nothing really big happened today," Froome said. "The GC (general classification) riders are thinking of the mountains coming this

weekend."

It was Kittel's 12th career win in the Tour, tying him with Erik Zabel for the German record.

Kittel clocked slightly more than five hours over the

mostly flat 213.5-kilometer (132-mile) leg from Troyes in champagne country to Nuits-Saint-Georges in the heart of the Burgundy wine-making region.

Michael Matthews of Australia crossed third.

Boasson Hagen took over the leadership duties at Team Dimension Data after Mark Cavendish abandoned the race with a broken shoulder this week. World champion Peter Sagan was disqualified from the Tour for causing Cavendish's high-speed crash.

The victory helped Kittel take the green points jersey from French national champion Arnaud Demare, who finished 11th.

Kittel is aiming to wear green all the way to the finish in Paris on July 23.

Sagan won the green jersey in the past five Tours.

Froome remained 12 seconds ahead of Sky teammate Geraint Thomas and 14 seconds ahead of Fabio Aru of Italy.

Days like this look easy but are stressful, Froome said.

"Every kilometer you think about what can happen that could change the race," Froome said. "If you turn left or right or if there is wind. It was a day for staying in front."

The southeasterly route passed by the mustard capital of Dijon then concluded with a circuit through picturesque vineyards of Burgundy.

Like in the other three sprinting stages, an early breakaway — this one featuring Manuele Mori, Yohann Gene,

Dylan van Baarle and Maxime Bouet — was caught shortly before the finish.

Stage 8 from Dole on Saturday finishes at the Rousses ski station in the Jura Range, close to the border with Switzerland. Three climbs on the 187.5-kilometer (116-mile) route will serve as a warm-up for the extremely tough Stage 9 on Sunday, which has seven climbs, including three with the "hors categorie" or beyond rating.

Froome said, "It should be a big weekend of racing."

NASCAR

Busch earns Kentucky pole with track speed record

By **GARY B. GRAVES**
Associated Press

SPARTA, Ky. — Kyle Busch set a track record to earn his first Kentucky Speedway pole before thunderstorms shortened NASCAR Cup Series qualifying on Friday.

Busch, a two-time winner of Saturday night's 400-mile race, clocked 190.282 mph in the No. 18 Toyota for his third pole this season and 22nd of his career. Third in points, the Joe Gibbs Racing driver seeks his first Cup victory since last summer at Indianapolis.

Martin Truex Jr. will start second with Busch's JGR teammate Matt Kenseth third as Toyotas claimed four

of the top five spots in the 40-car field. Jamie McMurray (189.713) starts fourth in a Chevy with JGR's Denny Hamlin (189.687) next.

The pole was the second of two Busch claimed on Friday; he also earned the top spot for the Xfinity Series race.

Busch was preparing for the third and final round of qualifying before NASCAR officials abruptly cancelled the segment and postponed the Xfinity Series race to Saturday at noon because of the threatening weather system. He smiled as he climbed out of his car to a suddenly-free evening, rest that will certainly be needed to handle a double-duty Saturday for the second

weekend in a row.

The good news is he'll have a prime starting spot for both events in the latest chapter of his Kentucky dominance.

"The guys have done an amazing job this year at building faster race cars as we've gone on this year," Busch said of his JGR team. "We started out a little behind. Just right there, so close having an opportunity to win each and every week, we just need to bust through and get it to happen."

Contrasting Kyle Busch's good day was one that series points leader Kyle Larson would like to forget.

After having one of the fastest cars during both rounds

of practice, Larson didn't get to prove it in qualifying after his No. 42 Chevy failed inspection. He didn't know what the issue was and is left to prepare to start last in 40th.

"We will be fine from the back," Larson said. "Obviously, it will be hard to pass, but we also thought the same thing at Texas and we didn't get to qualify there and I cruised right to the front no problem. So, we will see."

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