

FEDERER: Is 6-1 alltime against finals opponent Marin Cilic

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breaking a record he already held.

Just weeks from turning 36, and a father of four, Federer continued his resurgent season and unchallenged run through this fortnight at the All England Club by conjuring up just enough brilliance to beat 2010 runner-up Tomas Berdych 7-6 (4), 7-6 (4), 6-4 in the semifinals Friday.

"It's great, but it doesn't give me the title quite yet. That's why I came here this year," Federer said. "I'm so close now, so I just got to stay focused."

He has won every set he's played in six matches, and while he did not exactly dominate against the 11th-seeded Berdych, Federer was never in much trouble. On Sunday, Federer will face 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic, who reached his first Wimbledon final by eliminating 24th-seeded Sam Querrey of the U.S. 6-7 (6), 6-4, 7-6 (3), 7-5 with the help of 25 aces and some terrific returning.

"This is his home court," Cilic said about Federer, "(the) place where he feels the best and knows that he can play the best game."

Since equalling Pete Sampras and William Renshaw (who played in the 1880s) with a seventh trophy at Wimbledon in 2012, Federer has come this close before to No. 8. But he lost to Novak Djokovic in the 2014 and 2015 finals.

Here comes another chance.

Federer would be the oldest man to win Wimbledon in the Open era, which dates to 1968; as it is, he's the oldest finalist since Ken Rosewall was 39 in 1974.

"I mean, I don't see anything that would indicate really Roger is getting older or anything like that," said Berdych, who wore sneakers with a silhouette of Djokovic's face on the tongue because his own usual shoes were uncomfortable. "He's just proving his greatness in our sport."

Also noteworthy: This is Federer's second major final of 2017. After losing in the



Croatia's Marin Cilic celebrates after beating Sam Querrey of the United States at the end of their Men's Singles semifinal match on day eleven at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in London, Friday, July 14, 2017.

AP Photo/Alastair Grant

Wimbledon semifinals last year, he took the rest of 2016 off to let his surgically repaired left knee heal. He came back fit and refreshed and won the Australian Open in January for his record-extending 18th Grand Slam title and first anywhere in 4½ years.

"Giving your body rest from

time to time is a good thing, as we see now," Federer said. "And I'm happy it's paying off because for a second, of course, there is doubts there that maybe one day you'll never be able to come back and play a match on Centre Court at Wimbledon. But it happened, and it's happened

many, many times this week."

And most of the 15,000 or so people in attendance were pulling for him. That was evident throughout Friday, from the cries of "Go, Roger!" to the roars of approval and thunderous applause that greeted some of his best efforts on a day when he was not necessarily at his vintage, wondrous best.

The down-the-line forehand passing winner that landed right on the opposite baseline in the second set, leaving Berdych slumping his shoulders. Or the no-look, flicked backhand winner several games later that not many players would even try, let alone manage to do.

Or the way he extricated himself from a sticky situation down 3-2 in the third, facing break points at 15-40: 107 mph (173 kph) ace, 116 mph (187 kph) ace, 120 mph (194 kph) service winner, 119 mph (192 kph) ace. In the very next game, he surged to a 4-3 lead by breaking Berdych. That was pretty much that.

"I was able to come

up with the goods when it mattered," Federer said.

The No. 7-seeded Cilic was not able to do that in the opening tiebreaker against Querrey, the first man from the U.S. in any major semifinals since 2009.

At 6-all, Cilic seemed distracted by a delay of a couple of minutes when a spectator who appeared to feel ill was helped from her seat and out of the stands. When action resumed, Cilic flubbed two backhands to cede the set.

But from there, he steadied, handling Querrey's big serves rather well. A trio of superb returns earned a key break in the fourth set, the last a massive forehand off a 79 mph (127 kph) second serve that drew a shanked backhand and a yell of "No!" from Querrey.

The next test for Cilic is the toughest of all: beating Federer at Centre Court. They met in the Wimbledon quarterfinals last year, when Cilic took the opening two sets and even held a match point before Federer came all the way back to win, improving to 6-1 head-to-head.

WILLIAMS: Muguruza beat Serena Williams for French Open title in 2016

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"I'm definitely in the position I want to be in," Williams said. "It's a long two weeks. Now, knocking on the door for a title. This is where I want to be."

Williams has quite a history at the grass-court major, winning her first Grand Slam title in London in 2000. The last of her seven majors came at the same place in 2008.

Shortly after that, in 2011, Williams announced she had Sjogren's disease, an energy-sapping illness that also can cause joint pain. She missed some big tournaments, and made several early exits at the majors.

But she has bounced back, playing some of her best tennis over the last 12 months. She reached the Wimbledon semifinals last year, and the Australian Open

final this year.

On Saturday, she'll be playing for the Venus Rosewater Dish for the ninth time in her 20th Wimbledon appearance.

"There's still a lot to be done. I have one more match that I'd like to be the winner of," Williams said. "I have to go out there and take it and play well."

The person on the other side of the net also has experience playing in the last weekend on Centre Court. The 23-year-old Muguruza played for the title in 2015, losing to Venus' little sister, Serena Williams.

Serena isn't at Wimbledon this year because she is pregnant and taking the rest of the season off. But Venus will likely be checking in with her for some advice ahead of Saturday's match.

"Serena did play her



Spain's Garbine Muguruza returns to Slovakia's Magdalena Rybarikova during their Women's Singles semifinal match on day nine at the Wimbledon Tennis Championships in London Thursday, July 13, 2017.

AP Photo/Tim Ireland

in a final," Venus said. "I definitely will ask her. I'm sure she's going to give me hopefully some things that will make a difference for me in the match."

Muguruza, however, beat Serena to win the French Open title in 2016. And she's expecting the same kind of atmosphere despite the unfamiliar opponent.

"I don't think it's going to be different. A final is a final," Muguruza said. "Only one's going to win. ... The racket has to talk."

Besides her experience on the court, Muguruza will also have some experience behind her off it. She has been working with 1994 Wimbledon champion Conchita Martinez recently.

"I think she's helping me to deal with the stress of the tournament, because it's a long tournament," Muguruza said. "So she just knows how to prepare, how to train, what to do."

"Not that I'm doing something different, honestly. But to have her by my side gives me also this little confidence on having someone that has won before."

Williams and Muguruza have played each other four times before, and the American has won three of them.

They have never before played on grass, though.

"It's good that she's played her before, and that she's beaten her. So she knows what's to come," Martinez said of Saturday's match. "She just has to play tennis, and not worry about who's favored or who isn't favored. She needs to think about the next point and nothing else."

When Martinez won at Wimbledon for her only major, she beat 37-year-old Martina Navratilova in the final. Williams is the oldest Wimbledon finalist since then.

Age, however, seems to be an advantage for Williams.

"I think it's wonderful to have the opportunity to play well and to be strong and have experience," Williams said. "So I think experience can either work against you or for you. I like to think it's working for me."

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