

Djokovic beats Federer, to face Nadal in final

Saturday, 19 May 2012

With victories in today's semi-finals at the Italian Open, No. 1 Novak Djokovic and No. 3 Rafael Nadal are set to meet once again and renew the best rivalry in all of sports. It's a crucial last matchup between the two before the French Open begins on May 27 at Roland Garros.

2012 had been a disappointing season for this rivalry after that scintillating five-hour marathon finals match at the Australian Open that saw Djokovic outlast Nadal yet again. Their next match together wasn't until at the Monte Carlo Masters event, but Nadal's victory was muted by personal tragedy for Djokovic. Losing his grandfather a few days earlier took so much out of Djokovic that he had little left for the final and ended up getting pummeled easily (6-3, 6-1) by Nadal.

However, in this important final tournament before the French Open, Djokovic has played very well. Dominating Roger Federer (6-2, 7-6) for most of today's semi-final showed that. Last year it was Federer who ended Djokovic's amazing 43-match winning streak in the semi-finals at the French Open, blocking Djokovic from potentially winning the one Grand Slam he has yet to win. It was probably no small measure of revenge for Djokovic to defeat Federer in the first time they have met in 2012.

Djokovic also may have found inspiration by Nadal's reaction to his victory over him at Monte Carlo. Watching the match, it was clear that Djokovic wasn't the same player he had been over the past year and I felt at the time that Nadal should have realized that and muted his reaction to the victory. If Djokovic manages to defeat Nadal in the final on Sunday, expect a very strong reaction from him after the winning point.

Nadal, for his part, is playing excellent tennis himself right now. While he may have had difficulty with David Ferrer in the semi-final today in the first set, he quickly righted the ship with a thoroughly dominating second set to win 7-6, 6-0. He looked energetic and purposeful towards the end of the match, and that very positive mindset will do him well heading into the final on Sunday.