

Monte Carlo Masters - Overview

The first big European clay court event of the year heralded the start of the build up to the French Open. Always a well-contested event this year's field included all the familiar names.

A field of 56 meant that the top eight seeds received a bye through to R2 but the quality of the draw ensured a number of competitive match-ups right from the start of the event.

Of the seeds who had to play in R1, No.'s 9-16, we lost several at the first hurdle. Gael Monfils (No.9), was beaten in straight sets by Janko Tipsarevic, Radek Stepanek (No.15) lost out to Nicolas Lapentti and there was also a loss for Nicolas Almagro (No.16) to a fellow Spaniard, Albert Montanes.

Two former world No.1's met as Marat Safin defeated Lleyton Hewitt - the Aussie had just arrived having won the week before in Houston - and we saw a couple of great fightbacks as Chela beat Kunitsyn from 3-5 down in the third set and Ljubicic rallied from 1-4 in the decider to beat Kristof Vliegen.

Good wins also came for Kohlschreiber (over Gulbis), Granollers (Acasuso), Monaco (Chardy) and, the Italian, Simone Bolelli (Soderling).

And so the 'big names' entered the fray in R2 with each of the big four - Nadal, Federer, Djokovic & Murray - winning in straight sets. None was even pushed in recording their opening wins.

However, a couple of top players departed as Juan Martin Del Potro (No.5) fell to Ivan Ljubicic and Gilles Simon (No.6) was a loser to the German qualifier, Andreas Beck. We also saw Robredo (No.11) fall to Juan Monaco and Marin Cilic (No.14) trounced by Fabio Fognini in just 69 minutes.

Comeback (or cock-up) of the round came in the Safin/Lapentti match as the Russian led 4-0 and then 5-2 before blowing three match points and letting the Ecuadorean to come back from the brink of defeat to win the marathon match which last 3'29" in total.

R3 produced several cracking matches, noen better than the all-Swiss affair between Stanislas Wawrinka and Roger Federer. The No.2 seed, Federer, had got married the week before and only entered the event as a wild-card. This may have accounted for a lack of focus or match-fitness on behalf of Federer - but Wawrinka still played very well to defeat his far more illustrious compatriot in straight sets and so record his first ever win over the former world No.1.

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Elsewhere in the draw Rafael Nadal breezed past Nicolas Lapentti but both Murray and Djokovic struggled. Murray was 0-5 in the first set to Fognini before battling back to win and Novak Djokovic was taken to the deciding set in his match with Albert Montanes - although he duly took that 6-0.

Good wins came for Davydenko over Nalbandian, Verdasco who blitzed Ferrer and Andreas Beck who again punched above his weight in taking out the Argentine, Juan Monaco in a tight three-setter.

The QF's saw all four matches go pretty much according to the formbook. It was no great surprise to see Nadal see of Ivan Ljubicic in two, comfortable sets and Wawrinka finally ended the dream run of Andreas Beck in taking out the unseeded German.

The other two matches were better contests as Andy Murray edged out Nikolay Davydenko in a close 2'10" encounter and then Djokovic overcame the stubborn resistance of Fernando Verdasco. The Spaniard made the No.3 seed fight all the way before claiming his SF spot.

The first of those SF's saw the No.1 seed, Rafael Nadal, face the No.4 seed, Andy Murray. The first set proved rather one-sided with the four time defending champion taking it easily but the second was more competitive as the Scot battled back from 1-3 down to level things up at 5-5 before Nadal squeezed through to his fifth straight Monte Carlo final by virtue of a tie-break.

In the final he would meet Novak Djokovic who won his third consecutive three set match when coming from behind to defeat Wawrinka - he was also a break down at the start of the deciding set before the Swiss player missed his chance for a 3-0 lead allowing the Serb to launch a fightback.

The final, another three-setter, went to Nadal. The Spaniard began well before Djokovic hit back to level the match, only for Nadal to power clear in the third.

This was Nadal's fifth title here (one shy of the record) and one which moved him to 34:9 in championship matches (23:1 in clay finals). After the match he said - *'to win another time here is more than a dream. It is unbelievable, a fifth title here in Monte Carlo. It is one of the most important tournaments in the world, a really historic tournament'*.

Take nothing away from Djokovic, he played very well - *'I think I've played a very good match, actually one of the best I have played against him on this surface'*, he said. This defeat dropped him to 12:8 in deciders.



Monte Carlo Masters

April 12-19, 2009

Outdoor, Clay - ATP Tour Masters 1000

R64 Rafael Nadal [1]		R64 Fernando Verdasco [7]	
R64 Bye		R64 Bye	
R64 Igor Kunitsyn	4 6 5	R64 Ernests Gulbis	1 3
R64 Juan Ignacio Chela	6 2 7	R64 Philipp Kohlschreiber	6 6
R64 Marat Safin	6 7	R64 Marc Gicquel	3 6 7
R64 wc-Lleyton Hewitt	4 5	R64 Eduardo Schwank	6 1 6
R64 q-Nicolas Lapentti	6 1 6	R64 Feliciano Lopez	2 3
R64 Radek Stepanek [15]	3 6 3	R64 David Ferrer [10]	6 6
R64 Gael Monfils [9]	3 1	R64 Nicolas Almagro [16]	6 6 6
R64 Janko Tipsarevic	6 6	R64 Albert Montanes	7 4 7
R64 Robin Soderling	4 6 3	R64 wc-Jean Rene Lisnard	6 6
R64 Simone Bolelli	6 1 6	R64 Christophe Rochus	2 2
R64 q-Kristof Vliegen	4 7 4	R64 Julien Benneteau	4 4
R64 wc-Ivan Ljubicic	6 6 6	R64 Oscar Hernandez	6 6
R64 Bye		R64 Bye	
R64 Juan Martin Del Potro [5]		R64 Novak Djokovic [3]	
R64 Andy Murray [4]		R64 Gilles Simon [6]	
R64 Bye		R64 Bye	
R64 Victor Hanescu	6 6	R64 q-Andreas Beck	1 7 6
R64 q-Alberto Martin	2 3	R64 Nicolas Kiefer	6 6 4
R64 q-Fabio Fognini	1 6 6	R64 Jeremy Chardy	2 5
R64 Tomas Berdych	6 3 3	R64 Juan Monaco	6 7
R64 q-Flavio Cipolla	3 2	R64 Rainer Schuettler	1 4
R64 Marin Cilic [14]	6 6	R64 Tommy Robredo [11]	6 6
R64 David Nalbandian [12]	6 3 6	R64 Stanislas Wawrinka [13]	6 6
R64 Paul-Henri Mathieu	4 6 3	R64 Viktor Troicki	2 3
R64 Jose Acasuso	6 6	R64 Igor Andreev	6 6 2
R64 Marcel Granollers	7 7	R64 Martin Vassallo Arguello	2 7 6
R64 Ivo Karlovic	6 6	R64 Andreas Seppi	6 6
R64 Florent Serra	4 4	R64 Jurgen Melzer	2 0
R64 Bye		R64 Bye	
R64 Nikolay Davydenko [8]		R64 wc-Roger Federer [2]	

	No. Matches	2 sets-3 sets	Ave. Sets/Match	Ave. Games/Match
R64	24 matches	14-10	2.41	22.75
R32	16 matches	12-4	2.25	20.18
R16	8 matches	5-3	2.37	23.25

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R32 Rafael Nadal	6 6	R16 Rafael Nadal	6 6
R32 Juan Ignacio Chela	2 3	R16 Nicolas Lapentti	3 0
R32 Marat Safin	6 6 6	R16 Simone Bolelli	5 6
R32 Nicolas Lapentti	7 2 7	R16 Ivan Ljubicic	7 7
R32 Janko Tipsarevic	5 3	R16 Andy Murray	7 6
R32 Simone Bolelli	7 6	R16 Fabio Fognini	6 4
R32 Ivan Ljubicic	4 6 6	R16 David Nalbandian	4 7 3
R32 Juan Martin Del Potro	6 1 4	R16 Nikolay Davydenko	6 5 6
R32 Andy Murray	6 6	R16 Fernando Verdasco	6 6
R32 Victor Hanescu	3 2	R16 David Ferrer	2 1
R32 Fabio Fognini	6 6	R16 Albert Montanes	1 7 0
R32 Marin Cilic	2 0	R16 Novak Djokovic	6 6 6
R32 David Nalbandian	4 6 6	R16 Andreas Beck	3 6 7
R32 Marcel Granollers	6 3 1	R16 Juan Monaco	6 2 5
R32 Ivo Karlovic	4 3	R16 Stanislas Wawrinka	6 7
R32 Nikolay Davydenko	6 6	R16 Roger Federer	4 5
R32 Fernando Verdasco	6 6	QF Rafael Nadal	6 6
R32 Philipp Kohlschreiber	3 4	QF Ivan Ljubicic	3 3
R32 Marc Gicquel	1 0	QF Andy Murray	7 6
R32 David Ferrer	6 6	QF Nikolay Davydenko	6 4
R32 Albert Montanes	6 6	QF Fernando Verdasco	2 6 3
R32 Jean Rene Lisnard	2 4	QF Novak Djokovic	6 4 6
R32 Oscar Hernandez	1 2	QF Andreas Beck	2 4
R32 Novak Djokovic	6 6	QF Stanislas Wawrinka	6 6
R32 Gilles Simon	5 1		
R32 Andreas Beck	7 6	SF Rafael Nadal	6 7
R32 Juan Monaco	6 6	SF Andy Murray	2 6
R32 Tommy Robredo	2 4	SF Novak Djokovic	4 6 6
R32 Stanislas Wawrinka	2 7 6	SF Stanislas Wawrinka	6 1 3
R32 Martin Vassallo Arguello	6 5 2		
R32 Andres Seppi	4 4	RU Novak Djokovic	3 6 1
R32 Roger Federer	6 6	W Rafael Nadal	6 2 6

	No. Matches	2 sets-3 sets	Ave. Sets/Match	Ave. Games/Match
QF	4 matches	3-1	2.25	21.50
SF	2 matches	1-1	2.50	23.50
F	1 match	0-1	3.00	24.00

Monte Carlo Masters - Bookmaker's Odds

Market Leaders	Odds
Rafael Nadal [1]	2/5
Roger Federer [2]	8/1
Novak Djokovic [3]	14/1
Andy Murray [4]	14/1
Fernando Verdasco [7]	28/1
Juan Martin Del Potro [5]	33/1
David Ferrer	33/1
David Nalbandian	40/1
Nikolay Davydenko [8]	50/1
Nicolas Almagro	66/1
Gilles Simon [6]	80/1
Gael Monfils	80/1
Tommy Robredo	80/1
Juan Monaco	150/1
Igor Andreev	200/1

Performance Of The Seeded Players

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2009	W	R3	RU	SF	R2	R2	QF	QF
2008	RU	W	SF	SF	QF	QF	R3	R2
2007	RU	W	R2	R2	R3	R3	R3	-
2006	RU	W	R3	QF	R1	QF	SF	QF
2005	QF	R3	R1	QF	R1	RU	R1	R1
2004	-	R1	W	RU	SF	QF	QF	R2

Recent Winners/Leading Performers

	Winner	Runner-Up	Losing SF's
2009	Rafael Nadal (2/5)	Novak Djokovic (14/1)	Murray-Wawrinka
2008	Rafael Nadal (8/11)	Roger Federer (9/2)	Davydenko-Djokovic
2007	Rafael Nadal (11/8)	Roger Federer (7/4)	Berdych-Ferrero
2006	Rafael Nadal (6/4)	Roger Federer (2/1)	Gaudio-Gonzalez
2005	Rafael Nadal (8/1)	Guillermo Coria (9/2)	Gasquet-Ferrero
2004	Guillermo Coria (5/1)	Rainer Schuettler (250/1)	Safin-Moya

Betting - Monte Carlo Masters

Pre-Tournament Briefing :-

Entering the European clay court season over the last few years, the same question is raised time and again - *should we expect Rafa clean up again?*

If the answer is 'Yes' then your betting strategy has to be one of blindly lumping on the best clay-courter around, albeit at 2/5, or scrabbling around for the best each-way value in the other half of the draw.

In the top half, each of Murray (14/1), Del Potro (33/1) and Davydenko (50/1) might have a sniff against Nadal on hard courts but on clay it was hard to back any with confidence. Murray lacked form in the book on the surface, Del Potro simply doesn't yet possess the quality of game and Davydenko, the best value of the three, was just returning back from an injury.

The best play was to focus in the bottom half and look to either Federer (8/1), Djokovic (14/1) or possibly Verdasco (28/1) as the most realistic challengers for a spot in the final.

Federer had got married the week before, which had to be off-putting, and Verdasco, despite much better recent form, remains good but not that good - hence the decision to back Djokovic at a double figure price had clear merit.

Post-Tournament Review :-

Rafa wins and only drops one set all week - in the final. Business as usual.

Elsewhere, Murray showed that he can compete on the surface and both Verdasco, Davydenko and Wawrinka (displaying a rare sign of his obvious talent) also played well during the week.

Federer has to be excused as he was *'just married'* which left Djokovic to battle through to a creditable RU spot - more so, as his fighting spirit has been questioned from time to time (e.g. after his Australian Open retirement).

Pointers for 2010 :-

Nadal, provided he remains fit, simply can't be opposed - he's now won here for five straight years. As a Masters Series event the competition is fierce, players must have Roland Garros form, past clay court success and ideally a high seeding. Djokovic has good form here, Murray can possibly build upon a first appearance. Of the rest, Federer's time has now passed and so, if pushed, look to an improving Juan Martin Del Potro as a possible option.