

Murray wins forfeit; Sharapova rallies

By AJ Mazzolini

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

MASON, Ohio — Novak Djokovic watched Andy Murray return a strike over the net, a floating entree ready to be devoured. The usual Djokovic, who reeled off 43 straight wins to capture the world's top ranking earlier this year, would have crushed the ball off the court for a point.

Yesterday though, the Serb's forehand put the ball into the net and left a grimace on his face.

Soon after, Djokovic opted to retire from the match due to a right shoulder injury, handing Murray the championship at the

Western & Southern Open. Murray was up a set, won 6-4, and was leading 3-0 in the second when play ended.

"I would have obviously liked to have won by finishing the match," said the fourth-ranked Murray, who won the tournament in 2008. "But sometimes it happens."

The loss was only Djokovic's second of the season, dropping his record to 57-2, a mark that's earned him nine titles on the year, including two Grand Slams. He had been a perfect 33-0 on the hard court before yesterday.

"I apologize to the tournament; I apologize to the people

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who came here today to watch the match," said Djokovic, 24, who had been experiencing shoulder pain for about 10 days.

Between the first and second sets, trainers used an injury timeout to massage and stretch the player's arm. But without a full-strength attack, Djokovic looked sluggish. His serves — normally blistering above 130 mph — were clocked in the 90s and his average service speed dropped 15 mph as play moved to the second set.

Down by three in the second

set, the decision became clear.

"I could have maybe played another couple of games, but what for?" he said. "I cannot beat a player like Murray with one stroke."

It was safer to take the loss and look forward to the U.S. Open, which begins next Monday in Flushing, N.Y., than risk further injury. Djokovic said he was confident he would be full strength for its opening rounds.

Murray took advantage of Djokovic's weakened strikes in the upset, breaking serve four times while Djokovic committed 31 unforced errors. The win was Murray's second of the year and

improved his season record to 34-10.

Sharapova outlasts Jankovic

Maria Sharapova knocked off Jelena Jankovic in the women's final 4-6, 7-6 (3), 6-3. It was Sharapova's second victory of the year.

The Russian-born Sharapova, who lost last year's final here to Kim Clijsters, is likely to be No. 4 when the rankings come out today.

Sharapova used five straight points to win the second-set tiebreaker and get back in the match.

"I forced her to make those mistakes, hitting the ball deeper

than I was (before)," Sharapova said.

The championship match featured 16 break points, with each player breaking the other's serve eight times. The third set started with six straight breaks, three from each player.

The 14th-ranked Jankovic said her struggles to defend service were her main downfall, keeping her from putting Sharapova away for good in the second set.

"Unfortunately, when I had a lead... that serve never happened," she said. "When I needed it the most, it kind of gave up on me."

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