

Fifth Third Bank Tennis Championships

One Top Seed (Ward) Survives; the Other (Oudin) Falls

In First Round; Simmonds, Min, Scholl Pull Off Shockers

By Jim Durham, Lexington Challenger Media Director

Lexington, KY (July 20) - Both top seeds were on show simultaneously Wednesday evening at UK's Boone Tennis Center, but only one advanced into the Lexington Challenger second round – Great Britain's James Ward over the Tennessee Vol just-turned-pro Rhyne Williams, 6-4, 7-5.

Unseeded Chanel Simmonds of South Africa shocked Melanie Oudin, who at No. 100 had returned to the site where she won her first tournament ('08) in hopes of starting the climb back to her career high of No. 31 ('09). Oudin looked nothing like the American hope who went to the quarterfinals of the U.S. Open two years ago – losing the last four games of the match and appearing panicky as she dropped the final nine points of the match.

“No one expected me to win, so I could play freely,” said Simmonds with a huge smile afterwards. “It's nice to play with no pressure.”

At 5-foot-6, Oudin has to depend on foot speed and striking balls early for the equalizer against the many lanky women in the sport. But, against Simmonds – who's only 5-foot-5 – she was often slow to the ball and hit many shots that barely cleared the service line.

“No excuses,” said Oudin, denying that a sore shoulder that took her off the tour two weeks for rest affected her shaky serve or caused the short balls. “(Chanel's) lefty swing bothered me, though.”

Oudin hoped to raise her ranking enough this week to get closer to that No. 90 mark – the probable cut-off for U.S. Open entry. At No. 241, Simmonds had another confidence-builder like her win last year over then No. 85 Klara Zakopalova (now No. 38). “This over Melanie is my second best win,” she said.

Thursday afternoon, Simmonds faces a collegian who knows pressure – qualifier Lauren Embree, who recently won the clinching match for Florida against Stanford in the NCAA team tournament.

Ward seemed headed for a rubber set, but came back from 2-5 in the second set against the 2011 NCAA singles runner-up. “I was a little upset with the officiating, but that gave me more motivation,” the British Davis Cupper said. “I was just down a break, so I told myself to hold serve and since he’s a little inexperienced maybe he’d lose focus...which is exactly what happened. That was the time to push.”

He next faces Canada’s Erik Chvojka, who advanced in straight sets over Nicholas Monroe a day after upsetting No. 8 seed Amer Delic. Just last month, Ward had the experience of sidelining Stanislas Warinka and Sam Querrey en route to a semifinal finish at the Wimbledon tune-up Queen’s Club event in London.

Other seeds to move on were No. 2 Wayne Odesnik and No. 6 Michael Yani on the men’s side. And on the women’s, No. 4 Tetiana Luzhanska of Ukraine, No. 7 Heidi El Tabakh of Canada 7-6 in the third, and No. 8 Ling Zhang of Hong Kong.

Earlier, two women’s seeds gave way to teenage girls in the heat of the day – No. 6 Melinda Czink of Hungary to 19 year-old Chichi Scholl of Pompano Beach, FL, 6-4, 2-6-6-4 and No. 5 Julia Cohen to 17-year-old Grace Min of Lawrenceville, GA, 6-4, 6-2. And, both veterans had beaten their younger opponents the last time they met.

“(Czink) killed me at Indian Harbour (FL) two months ago – 1 & 2,” said the German-born Scholl, who decided to just focus on her game and not Czink’s, trailing 4-2 first set. “I just said ‘next ball, next ball.’”

At age 14, Min defeated Cohen, then lost to her the next year at 15. Wednesday, the diminutive Min said “I’ve improved a lot since then. Today I was patient, but I wouldn’t let her dictate with her changing the height of the ball.”

At No. 617 in the world, Min is 452 spots below Cohen (165) – but she said she is striving for a Top Ten ranking eventually. Although she’s not playing doubles in Lexington, Min claimed the Wimbledon Junior doubles title with Canada’s Eugenie Bouchard.