

● Andy Murray's competitive fires are burning again as he prepares to take on Edmund



Alix Ramsay

It is official: Andy Murray is back. There are caveats and riders, "what ifs" and some great imponderables but as he prepares for today's match against Kyle Edmund, Murray is back in business.

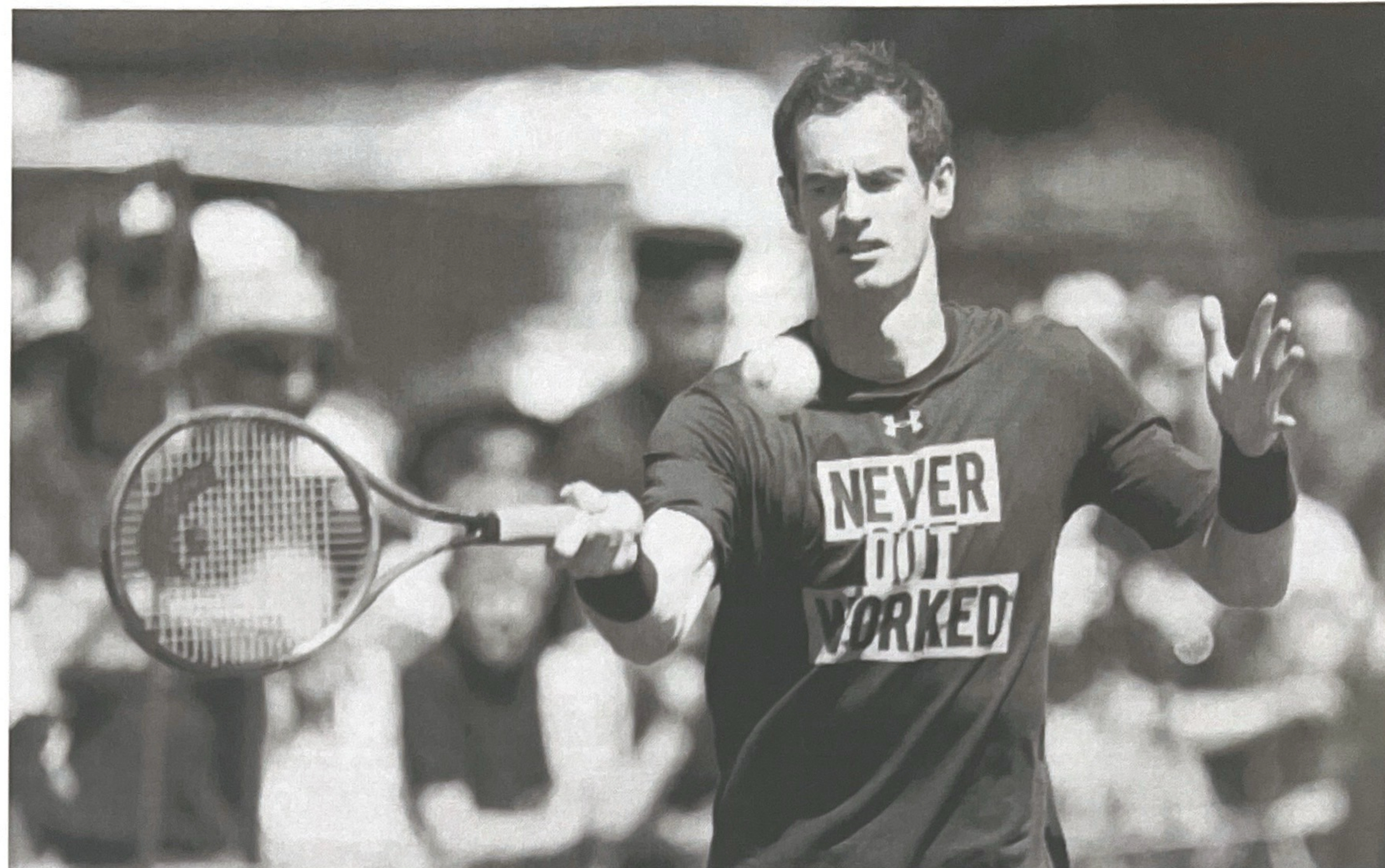
His return to the match courts last week against Nick Kyrgios at Queen's Club was good but he lost. And it took him more than two and a half hours to do so. The next day, he did not feel great. His first match in almost a year had taken its toll.

On Monday, he played better from the start against Stan Wawrinka at the Nature Valley International in Eastbourne and he won. Better still, he felt fine after 77 minutes of competition and was hoping that he would wake up in reasonable nick yesterday morning. That was a huge step forward.

Add into that mix the practice sets he has played in the past week and Murray feels like he is definitely on the right track.

"From the amount of practice that I have had and how I have played in the matches, I'm pretty positive that maybe not this week or next week, but given a bit of time I can still compete with the best players again," he said. "Now hopefully I'm back on the tour competing."

While he is paying great respect to his recovering hip, taking due diligence with his recovery and rehab after every outing, it would seem that the old competitive fire burns as bright as ever in Murray. That needs little attention or encouragement. After beating Wawrinka, he was pleased



← Andy Murray practises at Eastbourne ahead of today's second-round match with Kyle Edmund. A year ago Murray was the world No 1 and Edmund was No 48. Now the Englishman is No 18 while Murray is No 156.

PICTURE: STEVEN PASTON/PA WIRE

'Given a bit of time, I can still compete with the best players'

but his reaction was muted – and even Murray was a little surprised by that.

"I expected to be happier," he said. "I guess that's one of the problems with being sort of a professional athlete and having competed at the top of the game: you have kind of expectations and stuff. I always thought when I came back that I would be more pumped for every single win. But the reality was it's the first round of an event and it was obviously great to get through it, but you want to do more than that."

From having, in his own words, "zero expectations" last week at Queen's – and he is still refusing to set any targets for this week other than to remain fit and well – Murray's subconscious clearly has other ideas. A lifetime of com-



peting cannot be put on hold just because he has a gammy hip. It is that edge that won him three grand slam titles and two Olympic gold medals but today it will be tested again by Edmund.

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NEXT UP

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No 48. They had played twice and Edmund had not won a set. Today, the pale man from Yorkshire is well established in the world's top 20 (he is the No 18), he is a grand slam semi-finalist, he has replaced Murray as Britain's top player and he is improving month

by month. By contrast, Murray is the world No 156 and his main aim is to see if his body can withstand two matches in three days.

"Certainly a lot has changed since the last time we played in terms of the experience that he has and the results that he's had and how well he's been playing," Murray said. "So I'm sure he'll go into the match feeling very confident."

"For me it's another step in my recovery from the injury that I have had. It's a really good test for me. I would have played in the space of a week, ten days, three excellent players. Obviously Stan's had his injury problems as well but he's still a top player. So for me to get another match against someone as good as Kyle is a really positive thing for me. Hopefully I'm going to

go out and perform well and win the match and do my best to do that. But, yeah, it will be tricky."

If he does win, Murray will have to play again tomorrow which will be another big test for his hip. That, too, will affect his decision on whether or not to play at Wimbledon. A deep run in Eastbourne could leave him feeling stiff and sore and make the prospect of best of five-set matches in SW19 all the more daunting.

"If I feel like I'm in good enough shape, I'll do it," he said. "And if I don't, then obviously I won't play. But the last two matches that I have played have been positive in many respects."

The details of the immediate future are uncertain but one thing is for sure: Andy Murray is back.

But mum Judy warns against expecting too much too soon from double Wimbledon champion

By WILL JACKSON

Judy Murray has warned against expecting too much, too soon of her son, Andy, despite his impressive win over Stan Wawrinka on Monday.

Murray recorded his first win after almost a year out with a hip injury, beating three-time grand slam champion Wawrinka 6-1, 6-3 in just 77 minutes at Eastbourne.

The Scot made his long-

awaited comeback last week in a three-set defeat to Nick Kyrgios at Queen's Club but showed further signs that he is getting back to full fitness at the Nature Valley International on the south coast.

With Wimbledon set to start next week, the two-time winner at the All England Club has refused to commit himself as he continues to work his way back and Judy Murray was not reading too much into the win.

"I think he did really well on

Monday, but this is about him just dipping his toe back in the water and seeing how his body holds up," she said at the inaugural UK Coaching conference in Edinburgh. "It was great for him to have a win."

With Murray now through to the second round at Eastbourne – where he will face fellow Briton Kyle Edmund this afternoon – he could yet suffer an adverse reaction to the strains of being back on court.

He admitted to experiencing soreness and stiffness after the loss to Kyrgios and any further problems could see him pull out of Wimbledon next week, but Judy Murray says it is vital he gets match time under his belt if he is to get back to his best.

"The goal was always to try and play the grass court season and at some point you have to dip your toe back in the water to see where you are at," she said.



"Any athlete who has been out for a long time will tell you the same thing, you have to build up your physical fitness and your match fitness and you can only build that up by playing matches."

"I think for him it is about seeing how he is during the match, and how he is after the match."

"That is what tennis will demand of you; if you are playing in a tournament that lasts for a week and you get to the final, you have to play five matches in seven days."

"If you play a grand slam, you're playing seven matches across 13 days and the best of five sets, so you have to test yourself and see where you are at."

"I think he had a good match at Queen's last week and had a good match yesterday with Stan, so it's just baby steps."

● The inaugural UK Coaching Conference continues at Oriam in Edinburgh today, focusing on the next generation. For more information on #GreatCoaching, visit www.ukcoaching.org.