

'I'm still a work in progress': Rutuja Bhosale has feet on the ground despite 'breaking barrier' in ITF Women's Open

The draws haven't been kind to Rutuja Bhosale. She has been pitted against some of the higher-ranked players in the early rounds of the tournaments she participated since the start of this year. In Pune and the W25 event in Bengaluru, Bhosale lost in the Round of 16 against the top-seeded players in the tournament - Tatjana Maria and Valentini Grammatikopoulou respectively. The 26-year-old knew that by being the last on the acceptance list for the KPB Trust ITF Women's Open, hosted by the Karnataka State Lawn Tennis Association (KSLTA), fate would have similar plans. The difference for Rutuja was self belief and mental strength and that is what she mustered to respond in the Bengaluru event last week, where she did not just beat Valentini in a three-setter in the Round of 32, she later defeated eighth seeded Eden Silva in the quarters to make her maiden semis in ITFs since Thailand in June last year. And although the right-hander lost to compatriot Ankita Raina in the semis, she is happy to have "broken the barrier". Rutuja also made it to the semis of the doubles event alongside Jacqueline Cabaj Awad.

In an exclusive interaction with Hindustan Times Digital, Rutuja talks about her "good run" in the ITF Women's Open, the upcoming Billie Jean King Cup 2023 competition and her goals this year. Here are excerpts...

Q) How would you describe this run in Bengaluru where you defeated two seeded players?

A) Definitely a good run for me because in the first round itself I played the second seed, to whom I had lost in the second round in a tournament in just the previous week. I was the last one to enter into the competition. It was a tough draw but I feel I showed some resilience and came out on the winner's side because the last couple of months I have been playing against those ranked higher than me and lost to them in three-setter ties. So yes, I feel like that barrier is broken.

Q) You lost to Valentini last week in the W25 event, also a three-setter match, what did you change in your strategy?

A) That was actually the first time I played against Valentini. I was almost close to beating her that week as well. I was 3-0 up in the final set, but ended up losing focus a little bit. Since the court conditions were a little bit different, the strategy was



just to stay with her and remain aggressive because she is a counter-puncher. The mindset and strategy was simple - stay with her and attack whenever given opportunity - which is what I did and it really worked.

Q) You have been up against some of top players in the last couple of months and you have sort of finally broken the barrier in this Bengaluru event. What is the mental routine that you follow...what did you tell yourself heading into these matches?

A) I have played some of the higher-ranked players now and I feel that I have been playing good tennis. I came close to beating most of them. The played three-setter with all of them. So I knew I was there, mentally I knew that I could beat them. But somehow I would lose

focus...something was just not working out right. In Bengaluru, I went in with the mindset that since I was the last person on the acceptance list to get in, I knew any player I would go up against would be a higher-ranked player than me. So I had to be men tally ready as well. I guess, I fought really hard with eventually helped me through the matches. It wasn't like I played one of the best tennis but yes I played with my heart with really helped.

Q) You are in the Billie Jean King Cup squad again but this time India won't have Sania Mirza and Vihshal Uppal. Thoughts on the team and on the event, how are you looking forward to it?

A) It is going to be a huge difference because I have had Sania and Vihshal sir almost since I have come back from

college and been on the team. So yes, it will be a huge transition. But I feel like Ankita, Karman and I, we have played in the team for quite sometime now and we know how the situation is during this tournament. And with the new members of the team (Sahaja Yamlapalli, Vaidehi Chaudhari), it will be a good mix. Having Shalini Thakur (captain) and Radhika ma'am (coach)...it is an all-women squad. It will be a new challenge for with the old and the new faces we are up for the challenge.

Q) What do you identify yourself as - a doubles or singles player? Has a thought of focussing on just one ever crossed the mind like we have seen as a trend in Indian tennis?

A) Both. I don't want to put a tagline on me which says I play better singles or doubles. I am working on both the aspects of the game and I want to do both until I can do it and lets see where it takes me.

I haven't really thought about it. I feel there is a huge advantage of playing both singles and doubles - if you lose the singles event, you still have doubles and vice versa, implying that you have something that keeps you part of the tournament. I feel

I am physically fit to do both the events. But eventually if my body doesn't support it, I will have to think about it, but yes, not now.

Q) Your tennis bucket list? Any ranking goals?

A) I want to finish the year inside top 250 or even higher if I can. I obviously want to play a full calendar year which I have not been able to do in the past. So I want to see how many matches I can play and stay injury free. Fingers crossed!

Q) What is that one thing you feel you need to improve to make that big leap forward?

A) I am still a work in progress. There are a lot of things I am working on - there is strengthening, my net game. I want to become an all-rounder but it is still a long way to go. But as long as I fight with my heart and keep the work ethic and keep working hard I can definitely make the big leap. Now that I have a team on whom I can rely on, with Kedar sir who has shown so much of belief in me and always keeps telling me to keep working hard. That team is building up and they know where I stand at the moment and where I need to improve and hopefully we can keep building on this.

Princeton's scores first victory in 25 years as Tigers roar into NCAA Tournament with upset win over Arizona



Tigers used a late-game run to earn their first NCAA Tournament win in 25 years, topping No. 2 seed Arizona 59-55 on Thursday

Princeton's basketball team has etched its name into the record books with an incredible upset victory over the No. 2 seed Arizona in the NCAA Tournament. The Tigers have not won a tournament game in 25 years, but they proved to be more than capable against the Pac-12 Tournament champions. Ryan Langborg's heroics lifted Princeton to a 59-55 victory, securing their first NCAA Tournament win in over two decades.

Princeton Tigers guard Matt Allocco (14) shoots against Arizona Wildcats center Oumar Ballo (11) and guard Kerr Kriisa (25) during the first half at Golden 1 Center.(USA TODAY Sports)

Princeton Tigers guard Matt Allocco (14) shoots against Arizona Wildcats center Oumar Ballo (11) and guard Kerr Kriisa (25) during the first half at Golden 1 Center.(USA TODAY Sports)

Langborg hit a jumper and then a layup to give the Tigers their first lead of the game with just over two minutes remaining. The team rallied in the final minutes to score nine straight points, holding Arizona scoreless for the last four minutes and 43 seconds of the game.

The win has significant historical significance for Princeton, which was last victorious in the tournament in 1998. The iconic Mitch Henderson's victory leap that punctuated Princeton's famed upset over UCLA in 1996 has become a legendary moment in the school's history. Henderson, now the coach of the Princeton team, has seen his current players author their own story, and the victory over Arizona will undoubtedly be celebrated for years to come. The Tigers' gritty performance and determination did not surprise guard Matt Allocco, who said, "When we're at our best, then I think we can beat anybody in the country." The team has a lot of confidence in each other and believes that they are a really good team.

Seattle Seahawks secure backup plan, re-sign Drew Lock for 1 year in \$4 million deal



The Seattle Seahawks secured their backup quarterback on Thursday, agreeing to re-sign Drew Lock to a one-year deal. The Seattle Seahawks have made another move to solidify their quarterback roster, agreeing to re-sign Drew Lock to a one-year deal. This news was reported by NFL Media, which stated that Lock's new contract would be worth \$4 million in 2022, with incentives that could raise it to \$7.5 million for next season.

Schneider later confirmed the news on his Seattle radio show, stating that the team is excited to have Lock back as their backup quarterback. "We have a lot of confidence in Drew's abilities, and we believe he has a bright future ahead of him," Schneider said.

Lock was acquired from the Denver Broncos in a blockbuster trade involving Seahawks all-time passing leader, Russell Wilson. Last summer, he battled veteran Geno Smith for Seattle's top QB spot, but Smith won the job and took every snap at

the position. Lock's only action with the Seahawks on the field was during the preseason, where he went 24 of 39 for 273 yards with three touchdowns and three interceptions.

A second-round pick in 2019 out of Missouri, Lock showed promise by going 4-1 in five rookie starts for Denver, throwing seven touchdown passes while getting intercepted just three times. However, he lost 12 of his 16 starts over the following two seasons as his play was marked by inconsistency. He threw 15 passes picks in 2020, tied with Carson Wentz for most in the league.

Despite Lock's struggles, the Seahawks believe that he has the potential to become a top quarterback in the league. With veteran Geno Smith returning on a three-year, \$75 million deal after his surprising Pro Bowl campaign in 2022, Lock will continue to develop his skills as Seattle's backup QB. In 24 career games, Lock is 8-13 as a starter and has completed 59.3 percent of his passes for 4,740 yards with 25 TDs and 20 interceptions. With a new contract in hand, Lock is ready to continue his journey in the NFL and prove that he has what it takes to succeed at the highest level.

Swiatek sets Rybakina rematch at Indian Wells, Sinner ends Fritz title defense

Swiatek, in her 50th week at number one, is vying to become just the second woman after Martina Navratilova in 1990-91 to win back-to-back titles in the combined WTA and ATP Masters 1000 event in the California desert. But men's defending champion Taylor Fritz's hopes of a repeat were ended by 13th-ranked Italian Jannik Sinner.

World number one Iga Swiatek swept past Sorana Cristea 6-2, 6-3 on Thursday to line up an Indian Wells semi-final grudge match against Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina. Mar 16, 2023; Indian Wells, CA, USA; Iga Swiatek (POL) hits a shot as she defeated Sorana Cristea (ROU) in her quarterfinal match in the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. Mandatory Credit: Jayne Kamin-Onceca-USA TODAY Sports(USA TODAY Sports) Mar 16, 2023; Indian Wells, CA, USA; Iga Swiatek (POL) hits a shot as she defeated Sorana Cristea (ROU) in her quarterfinal match in the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden. Mandatory Credit: Jayne Kamin-Onceca-USA TODAY Sports(USA TODAY Sports) Rybakina, who stunned Swiatek in the fourth round of the Australian Open before falling to Aryna Sabalenka in the final of the year's first Grand Slam, out-

lasted 76th-ranked Czech Karolina Muchova 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 6-4.

"She's playing really well and in semi-finals you always are going to play against the top players, so I'll be ready," Swiatek said. "Last time we played was in Australia. Totally different conditions. So I'll just prepare the same as before any other match and I'll do 100%." Swiatek, in her 50th week at number one, is vying to become just the second woman after Martina Navratilova in 1990-91 to win back-to-back titles in the combined WTA and ATP Masters 1000 event in the California desert.

But men's defending champion Taylor Fritz's hopes of a repeat were ended by 13th-ranked Italian Jannik Sinner, who out-gunned the fifth-ranked American 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 in a pulsating Stadium Court clash. Sinner, winner of a title this year in Montpellier, seized the initiative with a service break in the opening game. It proved all the opening he needed as he saved a break point in the next game and went on to pocket the set.

Fritz, who rose to fifth in the world with a title at Delray Beach this year, responded in the second, losing just four points on his serve and converting the only break point in the final game when he slipped a low forehand up the line past the Italian.

Hamilton says he plans to stay and fight at Mercedes

Speaking ahead of Sunday's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, the seven-time champion explained that he was not seeking a move to another team and was fully committed to staying with the former dominant champions.

Lewis Hamilton said on Thursday that he has no intention of leaving struggling Mercedes but admitted his choice of words had created unnecessary problems for the team in the aftermath of the Bahrain Grand Prix.

Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton of Britain speaks to media ahead of the Formula On Saudi Arabian Grand Prix in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Thursday, March 16, 2023. (AP Photo/Hassan Ammar)(AP)

Mercedes driver Lewis Hamilton of Britain speaks to media ahead of the Formula On Saudi Arabian Grand Prix in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Thursday, March 16, 2023. (AP Photo/Hassan Ammar)(AP)

Speaking ahead of Sunday's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, the seven-time champion explained that he was not seeking a move to another team and was fully committed to staying with the former dominant champions.

"In hindsight, it probably wasn't the best choice of



words," said Hamilton, referring to his complaint that the team had not listened to him when reviewing their performance and car last year, when they won only one race.

"But no...There are, of course, times where you are not in agreement with certain team members, but what's important is that we continue to communicate, we continue to pull together.

"I still have 100 per cent belief in this team. It is my family and I have been here a long time, so I don't plan on going anywhere else.

"But we all need a kick. We all need to get on. And the proof is in the pudding.

"We have seen where the performance is and how people are extracting the performance and we have got to now start making some bold decisions, some big moves, in order to close the gap to these guys."

Red Bull cruised to a crushing one-two victory with world champion Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez in Bahrain where 41-year-old two-time champion Fernando Alonso marked his debut for the Mercedes-powered customer team, Aston Martin, by finishing a charging third.

"They [Red Bull] will run away with it most likely this year unless Ferrari stops them," said Hamilton. "At some point during this year, we are hopeful we can close the gap - but by that point, it will probably be too late to fight for a championship."

Hamilton finished a distant fifth in Bahrain and last year completed the first season of his career without winning a race.

His disappointment and post-race comments led to claims that he was set to seek a move elsewhere in pursuit of a record eighth title.

Michael Jordan considers a new game plan, in talks to sell majority stake in Charlotte Hornets



NBA legend and Charlotte Hornets owner Michael Jordan is in talks to sell a majority stake in the basketball franchise according to ESPN.

Michael Jordan, retired NBA legend and current owner of the Charlotte Hornets, is reportedly in discussions to sell the majority stake in the basketball franchise, according to ESPN. While no deal is imminent, the potential sale would see Jordan sell the largest stake in the club to a consortium led by Gabe Plotkin, minority owner of the Hornets and founder of Melvin Capital Management LP, and Rick Schnall, minority owner of the Atlanta Hawks. Jordan is expected to keep a minority stake in the Hornets if the deal goes through.

Retired NBA legend Michael Jordan is in talks to sell his majority stake in the

NBA's Charlotte Hornets. The Hornets, who are valued at \$1.7 billion by Forbes, were ranked 27th out of the 30 teams in the NBA as of last October. Jordan purchased the controlling interest in the franchise in 2010 for \$275 million after being a minority shareholder in the ownership group since 2006. The Hornets have never won a championship since they entered the NBA in 1988, and they have not won a playoff series since their debut as an expansion team called the Bobcats in 2004.

Despite the team's lackluster success, Jordan has been the league's only Black majority owner by virtue of owning the NBA club in his home state of North Carolina. The Hornets last reached the playoffs in 2016 and have not been able to make it to the postseason since then. This season, they are ranked 14th of 15 teams in the Eastern Conference at 22-49, on the brink of elimination from post-season play.

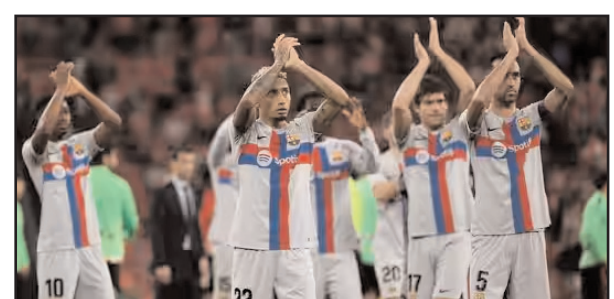
Barcelona can virtually clinch Liga title in decisive Clasico

Madrid won the first La Liga Clasico 3-1 in October but Xavi's side have vastly improved since then. The coach is desperate to win the league title to validate the team's growth, while for the club it would represent a swift return on their outlay last summer.

Xavi Hernandez and his Barcelona side can take a decisive step towards winning La Liga on Sunday - where a Clasico victory over Real Madrid would send them 12 points clear of the champions.

Barcelona's Brazilian forward Raphinha (C) and teammates celebrate victory at the end of the Spanish league football match between Athletic Club Bilbao and FC Barcelona at the San Mames stadium in Bilbao on March 12, 2023. - FC Barcelona won 0-1. (Photo by ANDER GILLENIA / AFP)(AFP)

Barcelona's Brazilian forward Raphinha (C) and teammates celebrate victory at the end of the Spanish league football match between Athletic Club Bilbao and FC Barcelona at the San Mames stadium in Bilbao on March 12, 2023. - FC Barcelona won 0-1. (Photo by ANDER



GILLENIA / AFP)(AFP) stage elimination, followed by a Europa League knockout by Manchester United, confirmed Barcelona still have a long way to go, but they have made significant progress.

Beating Real Madrid 3-1 in the Spanish Super Cup final in January in Saudi Arabia earned Xavi his first trophy as coach, and the performance was dominant.

By contrast, when the teams met earlier March in the Copa del Rey semi-final first leg, Madrid had the better of the game, but Barcelona still scraped a 1-0 win.

How the Catalans approach this Clasico is a key issue for Xavi to decide. Fans at Camp Nou may not react well to a similarly defensive performance, and will expect Barcelona to take

the initiative more. That will be significantly easier if midfield maestro Pedri is fit.

Without the Canary Islander, already essential for club and country at 20 years old, Barcelona seem virtually incapable of playing possession football.

Pedri has been missing with a thigh injury for six games across all competitions and in his absence, when Barcelona have won it has been by relying on their rock-solid defence.

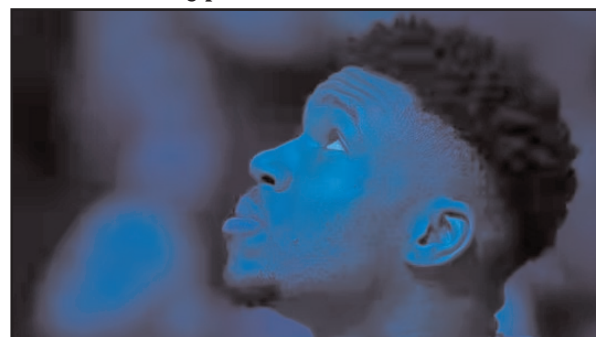
Karim Benzema and Vinicius Junior fired blanks at the Santiago Bernabeu in the Copa Clasico and the latter has been shackled by Ronald Araujo in recent battles with Barcelona.

Xavi tends to select the Uruguayan centre-back at right-back against Madrid so he can face off against the Brazilian winger.

Barcelona have found that by shutting down Vinicius, Madrid's attack is significantly less dangerous.

"For me he is the best in the world," said Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti after the Champions League win over Liverpool in midweek, backing Vinicius to the hilt.

'F*cking... it just changes', Giannis' MVP frustrations reach boiling point as NBA season winds down



As the 2022-23 NBA regular season starts to wind down, debate about the league's MVP award has only grown more contentious.

With the NBA regular season winding down, the debate over the coveted MVP award has heated up, and Giannis Antetokounmpo is not pleased. The Milwaukee Bucks star recently shared his frustrations about the lack of clarity surrounding the definition of the award in an interview with The Athletic's Sam Amick.

Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks (Getty Images via AFP) Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks (Getty Images via AFP) Antetokounmpo, a two-time MVP winner himself, questioned what it takes to be the MVP and admitted that he finds the criteria to be ambiguous. "Sometimes, the best player isn't the most valuable player on the team," he

said. "Like, I feel like [Bucks center] Brook [Lopez] is such a valuable player for our team. Like [the MVP criteria] just f*cking... sorry for my language - it just changes."

He further went on to say, "As I said again, I can't control that. I can control only how I prepare for the game and try to be ready for the game."

Despite the uncertainty, Antetokounmpo has been dominating the court this season, averaging a career-high 31.5 points per game on 54.1% shooting, while also contributing 11.9 rebounds and 5.5 assists per game. The 28-year-old has helped power the Bucks to a league-best 50-19 record with just 13 regular season games left to play. If the Bucks maintain their spot atop the Eastern Conference, Antetokounmpo may very well be in the running for his third MVP award as he chases a second NBA championship.