

# Carlos Alcaraz, Aryna Sabalenka In Spotlight As Wimbledon Gets Underway

Carlos Alcaraz starts his bid for a third successive Wimbledon men's title, while volatile women's world number one Aryna Sabalenka will be in the spotlight as the grass-court Grand Slam gets underway on Monday. As the headline act in the 138th Championships, it is fitting that Alcaraz will open play on Centre Court when the world number two faces 38-year-old Italian Fabio Fognini. It would be a seismic shock if Alcaraz, who has never lost in a Grand Slam first round in 17 appearances, became just the third men's champion to suffer an opening match defeat at Wimbledon after Manuel Santana in 1967 and Lleyton Hewitt in 2003.

Having vanquished Novak Djokovic in the past two Wimbledon finals, Alcaraz arrives in south-west London looking to join an elite group of Wimbledon icons.

The 22-year-old Spaniard's clay-court credentials are firmly established but he is equally dynamic on grass.

Alcaraz has won 29 of his 32 Tour-level matches on the surface, with his last



defeat at Wimbledon coming against Jannik Sinner in the last 16 in 2022.

Alcaraz is bidding to become the fifth man in the Open Era to win at least three consecutive Wimbledon titles after seven-time champion Djokovic, Bjorn Borg, Roger Federer and Pete Sampras.

If he achieves that target, Alcaraz would be the second-youngest player in the Open Era to win six Grand Slam men's titles after Borg, who reached that

landmark in 1978.

"I'm coming here thinking I really want to win the title, I really want to lift the trophy. I'm not thinking about how many players have done it, winning three Wimbledons in a row," said Alcaraz, who fought back from two sets down in his epic French Open final victory against world number one Sinner in June.

"I'm just thinking that I want to prepare myself in the best way possible. Obviously I feel a lot of confidence right now."

'I completely lost it'

The latest edition of Wimbledon starts in the midst of a brief heatwave in London.

Temperatures at Wimbledon are expected to climb to a scorching 33C on Monday, making the weather a challenge for players and spectators alike.

Sabalenka will be determined to keep her cool when the top seed starts her campaign against Canadian qualifier Carson Branstine on Court One.

The 27-year-old Belarusian is a three-time Grand Slam champion, but has suffered agonising three-set defeats in this year's Australian Open and French Open finals.

Sabalenka was beaten by Madison Keys in Melbourne and Coco Gauff in Paris, with the latter defeat triggering a frustrated outburst from the loser.

She was heavily criticised for claiming the Roland Garros loss was due to her own mistakes rather than Gauff's performance.

Sabalenka later apologised for describing the match as the worst final she had played.

"I didn't really want to offend her (Gauff). I was just completely upset with myself, and emotions overcame me. I just completely lost it," Sabalenka said.

"It was a tough time for me. The lesson is learned. I was able to sit back and be open to myself, not just to ignore some things."

"I really hope it will never happen again."

Sabalenka, who has reached the final in five of

the past six Grand Slams she has contested, has yet to make the Wimbledon showpiece, losing in the last four in 2021 and 2023.

There are 23 British players in the men's and women's singles -- the most since 1984 -- and four have been given prestigious slots on Wimbledon's top two courts on Monday.

Katie Boulter meets Spanish ninth seed Paula Badosa on Centre Court, while Jacob Fernley faces Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca on Court One.

Former US Open champion Emma Raducanu takes on 17-year-old fellow Briton Mingge Xu on Court One.

Elsewhere on Monday, German third seed Alexander Zverev faces Arthur Rinderknech, while Italian fourth seed Jasmine Paolini, beaten by Krejčíková in last year's final, opens against Anastasija Sevastova.

Women's champion Barbora Krejčíková, recovered from a thigh injury, will start her title defence against Alexandra Eala of the Philippines on Tuesday.

## Predators acquire, sign Hague to 4-year deal in trade sending Scissons, Lauzon to Vegas: AP source



The Nashville Predators acquired defenseman Nicolas Hague in a three-player trade that sent center Colton Sissons and defenseman Jeremy Lauzon to the Vegas Golden Knights, a person with knowledge of the deal confirmed to the Associated Press early Monday.

In completing the trade, the Predators also agreed to sign Hague to a four-year \$22 million contract, the person added and spoke on the condition of anonymity because the trade has not been announced. TSN first reported the trade taking place.

The 26-year-old Hague was a pending restricted free agent who had the right to go to arbitration after completing his sixth season. At 6-foot-6, he's a hard-hitting, defensive-minded player who had five goals and 12 points in 68 games. Overall, he has 20 goals and 83 points in 364 games, all with Vegas.

The trade comes as teams shuffle their rosters ahead of the NHL's free agency signing period, which opens Tuesday.

The Predators are retooling their lineup after missing the playoffs for the second time in three years.

The Golden Knights essentially freed up salary cap space by removing the uncertainty of what they stood in having to pay Hague, for the cost-certainty of adding two players entering the final years of their respective contracts. Vegas has been mentioned as a potential landing spot for Toronto Maple Leafs forward Mitch Marner, who is regarded as the top free agent set to enter the market.

The 31-year-old Sissons leaves Nashville after spending his entire 11-season career with the Predators. He has one year left on his seven-year contract and represents a \$2.86 million cap hit.

## "Don't Think Pakistan Will Be Allowed": Hockey India Official Clears Asia Cup Stance



As Pakistan's participation in the hockey Men's Asia Cup in India is uncertain due to growing calls for their exclusion following the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor, a Hockey India official said that talks with the government are in progress in the matter, and the final decision will be taken after that. Rajgir, a historic city in Bihar, will host the Men's Asia Cup 2025 from August 29 to September 9 at the Rajgir Hockey Stadium. Following the deadly terror attack in Pahalgam

that claimed 26 lives, Pakistan men's hockey team participation in the continental tournament is in jeopardy.

With less than two months left for the tournament, the Hockey India is still awaiting government clearance for Pakistan men's hockey team's arrival in the country.

"We are in contact with the government, and we will follow whatever instructions it provides. As for the current situation, I don't think the Pakistan team will be allowed to participate," a Hockey India official told

FIANS when asked about the strife-torn nation's participation in the Asia Cup, in August.

The Men's Asia Cup 2025, will serve as a qualifying event for the 2026 FIH Men's Hockey World Cup, set to be hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands. The winner of the tournament will earn a coveted spot in the World Cup.

Moreover, India will also host the FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup 2025, which will be played in Chennai and Madurai from November 28 to December 10. Pakistan's participation in the junior event in India is also in doubt due to the groundswell of demand for excluding them in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack. They were grouped with archrivals India in the expanded 24-team tournament.

Pakistan men's hockey team last visited India in 2023 when the latter hosted the Asian Champions Trophy in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Harmanpreet Singh-led Indian team beat Malaysia 4-3 in the final to claim a record fourth title.

## Blazers C Deandre Ayton to be free agent after buyout



The Portland Trail Blazers have reached an agreement to buy out the final year of Deandre Ayton's contract and have requested waivers on him, making the center a free agent, the team announced late Sunday night.

Ayton, 26, is owed \$35 million for the coming season to complete a four-year, \$132 million contract that he had signed while with the Phoenix Suns, according to multiple media reports.

Instead, he will hit free agency on Monday and be in much higher demand than in Portland, which picked centers Donovan Clingan and Yang Hansen in the first round of the two most recent drafts and also has veteran Robert Williams III.

Ayton averaged 14.4 points, 10.2 rebounds, 1.6 assists and 1.0 blocks in

40 games last season, his second with Portland that was shortened by a season-ending left calf injury.

He is averaging for his career 16.4 points, 10.5 rebounds, 1.6 assists and 1.0 blocks in 398 regular-season games for the Phoenix Suns and Blazers.

He was third in NBA Rookie of the Year voting in the 2018-19 season, when he made the All-Rookie first team. The Suns selected Ayton with the first overall pick of the 2018 NBA Draft out of the University of Arizona.

Portland acquired him as part of a three-team trade with Milwaukee and Phoenix that sent All-Star guard Damian Lillard from the Trail Blazers to the Bucks on Sept. 27, 2023.

ESPN first reported news of the buyout on Sunday night.

## Rays aim to take advantage of visit from skidding Athletics

As they prepare to close out a June to remember, the Tampa Bay Rays will also hope to start off another great week.

Propelled into the American League playoff chase and pursuing the first-place New York Yankees in the East, the Rays will host the opener of a three-game series against the Athletics on Monday night.

The Rays are 17-9 in the month after losing 5-1 at the Baltimore Orioles on Sunday. The setback concluded a 4-2 week that included a sweep at the Kansas City Royals and a three-game series loss to their division rivals.

However, Brandon Lowe's 18th home run in Sunday's setback extended his hitting streak to a majors-best 16 games.

The lefty-swinging second baseman is hitting .403 during the streak with five homers and 13 RBIs. He is 6-for-11 with runners in scoring position.

With a standout rotation, Rays manager Kevin Cash will send out his first-half ace Drew Rasmussen against the AL West's last-place club.

Over 16 starts,



Rasmussen has emerged as an All-Star lock and the team's top pitcher with left-handed flamethrower Shane Bieber out since 2023 and currently seeking help for a nerve problem.

The right-handed Rasmussen will make his fourth appearance against the Athletics. He is 2-0 with a 0.69 ERA over 13 innings in three career appearances that have yielded just three hits for the A's.

Rasmussen, 29, has battled through three major elbow surgeries, forcing the staff to limit his workload by keeping him to a maximum of five or six innings per start.

"He always makes it tough because he's so good, we feel so good when he's

out on the mound with us, but we have to continue to be smart and just monitor the overall body of work and the workload," Cash said Wednesday after Rasmussen delivered his fifth scoreless outing in the past eight starts.

Added the pitcher, "They're just looking out for me and my greater good. And it's hard to complain about that."

The Athletics are 11-16 this month, a June that saw skipper Mark Kotsay's squad produce its season-high four-game winning streak two weeks ago.

Still, the Athletics own the AL's worst run differential and are 18 games under .500 after losing 12-5 on Sunday in New York and dropping two of three against the Yankees.

## Ayush Shetty Wins Maiden BWF World Tour Title At US Open; Tanvi Sharma Finishes Runner-Up



Rising shuttler Ayush Shetty notched up his first BWF World Tour title with a commanding straight-games victory over Canada's Brian Yang in the men's singles final of the US Open Super 300, ending India's title drought this season. The 20-year-old, a 2023 junior world championships bronze winner, defeated the third seeded Yang 21-18, 21-13 in 47 minutes on Sunday to cap off an impressive week, which included a come-from-behind win against top seed Chou Tien Chen in the semi-finals. It was Shetty's third victory over Yang, having defeated him twice earlier this year at Malaysia and Taipei Open.

In the women's singles final, 16-year-old Tanvi Sharma finished runner-up after a fighting three-game loss to top seed Biwen Zhang of the United States.

Playing her first World Tour final, the unseeded teenager went down 11-21, 21-16, 10-21 in 46 minutes.

Shetty vs Yang The men's singles final began evenly with scores tied at 6-6, but Shetty, seeded fourth, surged ahead with a string of winners to lead 11-6 at the interval.

Yang narrowed the gap to 13-11 and drew level at 16-16, but Shetty regained control with well-placed shots to secure the opening game with a decisive jump smash.

The second game saw the Mangalore shuttler race to a 7-2 lead before Yang briefly caught up, but the Indian maintained composure, mixing variations and sharp defence to keep his opponent at bay.

Leading 17-12, Shetty closed out the match with a cross-court punch followed by a powerful smash to seal his maiden World Tour title.

## Giants host Diamondbacks, try to put frustrations behind them

The Arizona Diamondbacks and San Francisco Giants begin a four-game series Monday to see who will be first to recover from a frustrating week against the same two bottom-feeders.

The host D-backs went 2-4 against sub-.500 teams Miami and the White Sox, capped when the Marlins completed a three-game sweep with a 6-4 victory on Sunday. The Giants went 1-5 against the same two teams that also included a sweep by the host Marlins last Tuesday through Thursday. San Francisco lost two of three in Chicago over the weekend, failing to hold a 2-1 lead in the seventh inning of a 5-2 loss Sunday.

Each team lost an opportunity to gain ground in the NL West.

"A lot of 'how frustrating' questions, and that's kind of where we are," Giants manager Bob Melvin said Sunday. "We have to answer them. I think when you are not playing well, it's tough to win, regardless."

The Giants scored five runs and were 4-for-22 with



runners in scoring position against the White Sox, who have the second-worst record in the majors. They loaded the bases twice with one out Sunday but scored only on a bases-loaded walk. "Whether the guys are trying too hard in certain spots, that's probably the case," Melvin said. "Obviously, it is not great right now. We just have to keep working and get through it."

The D-backs have lost four and a row and are five games out of the final NL wild-card spot and behind three others. The Giants are 1 1/2 games out of the wild card. The D-backs committed two errors Sunday, were 1-for-7 with runners in scoring position and walked 10 Marlins batters. Arizona

pitchers walked four, including one intentionally, and all scored in the Marlins' game-deciding five-run eighth inning.

"What I saw there today was unacceptable," Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said. "A frustrating series. We have to be better than that. That's ultimately on me. We're going to figure this out." The D-backs have lost eight games in which they led entering the eighth, including the last two. They have a 5.31 bullpen ERA.

The Giants will start Logan Webb on Monday. The right-hander has made six straight quality starts and nine of 10, and he is 2-0 with a 1.85 ERA in five June starts. He is averaging 10.1 strikeouts per nine innings this season, pairing

a sinking fastball with the return of his changeup.

Webb is 6-3 with a 2.31 ERA over 74 innings in 12 career starts against the D-backs. He did not allow an earned run in two wins against them last season and is 3-1 over the last two years.

Arizona's Ketel Marte is 5-for-24 with a homer against him.

Arizona will start Ryne Nelson, who has given up only two earned runs and eight hits in his last three starts over 15 2/3 innings. The right-hander yielded one run and one hit in each of his last two starts a 9-5 victory at Toronto and a no-decision in a 4-1 victory at the Chicago White Sox on Tuesday.

He has made 17 appearances with eight starts this season, and has one save.

"I really love being a starter," Nelson told MLB Network. "The routine and the daily work that comes with being a starter. I used to think that I would be a reliever long term, but I ended up falling in love with what it takes to be a starter."

## Formula 1 Confirms 2026 Pre-Season Testing Schedule, Azerbaijan GP Date Shifted



Formula 1 and the FIA have officially unveiled the pre-season testing schedule for the 2026 campaign, setting the stage for what promises to be an intriguing year of fresh regulations and fierce competition.

In preparation for the new season, teams will get three crucial opportunities to fine-tune their machinery, starting with a private test at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya from January 26 to 30. "Formula 1 and the FIA are today announcing the 2026 pre-season testing dates. In 2026, there will be three tests: Test one will be a private test and will take place at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya between January 26-30.

"Test two will take place at the Bahrain International Circuit between February 11-13. Test three will take place at the Bahrain International Circuit between February 18-20, which opens Tuesday.

These sessions will offer the final glimpse of form before the season-opener in Australia, scheduled for March 6-8 at Melbourne's Albert Park.

In addition to confirming the testing programme, Formula 1 also announced a tweak to the 2026 race calendar.

The action will then shift to the Middle East, where the Bahrain International Circuit will host two official tests under the watchful eyes of fans and media. The first Bahrain test runs from February 11 to 13, followed by a final tune-up from February 18 to 20 at the same venue.

These sessions will offer the final glimpse of form before the season-opener in Australia, scheduled for March 6-8 at Melbourne's Albert Park.

In addition to confirming the testing programme, Formula 1 also announced a tweak to the 2026 race calendar.