

Zverev remains wary of 12-day Masters events

World number two says longer tournaments leave players fatigued before US Open

● Zverev warns of player burnout risks

● Criticises length of Masters 1000 events

● Several top stars skip Canadian Open

AFP | Montreal

Alexander Zverev warned on Sunday of burnout and dropouts due to overly long ATP Masters 1000 events as he returned to the scene of his 2017 title in Canada.

The top seed and world number two told reporters in Montreal that he has his doubts about the wisdom of the 12-day Masters tournaments, which can seem as long and draining to players as a Grand Slam fortnight.

This edition of the elite Canadian hard court tournament is missing world number one Jannik Sinner, 24-time Grand Slam winner Novak Djokovic and Spain's Carlos Alcaraz, who has not played since April due to a wrist injury.

"I think (the pullouts) are a result of the two-week Masters event. I think it's just too long for some players, too much before the US Open," Zverev said.

"I used to play more 500 events, 250 events when the Masters were shorter, but now



Alexander Zverev reacts during a match (file photo)

I don't do that anymore just because of time spent away and time spent on tournaments."

Zverev said that he and his team also seriously considered bypassing Canada this year.

"We had a thought also of maybe skipping Montreal, but then we decided to play it

But the reigning Roland Garros champion and Wimbledon finalist last month added: "I need to play matches. I need to play tournaments.

"I don't think maybe I'll play my best tennis here, but the result of playing here, I think I'll

play better in Cincinnati and then hopefully my best tennis in New York," he said, looking ahead to the US Open that starts on August 31.

Despite fatigue, the 29-year-old is hoping to take his summer momentum into the North American hard court build-up before the final major of the season.

"The two months that I had was fantastic. Of course, I wanted to win Wimbledon, I wanted to win the final (against Sinner).

"But I played an opponent who also knows how to play in

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Alexander Zverev revealed he previously played more ATP 250 and 500 events when Masters tournaments were shorter, but stopped due to excessive time spent away on expanded schedules

these moments, and he played a phenomenal match, a great match which could have gone a bit longer. I feel like it could have gone in the fifth set.

"I played a lot of tennis in that period. So I went on holidays for a week and then after started practicing and preparing myself the best I can for this swing."

Zverev leads the tournament field, with Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime seeded second ahead of Australian Alex de Minaur, Daniil Medvedev and title holder Ben Shelton.

With rain marring the opening day in the French-speaking city, completed matches were a rarity, with China's number 270 Jerry Shang defeating Daniel Vallejo of Paraguay 6-3, 6-3 before afternoon rains set in.

'Sanctions won't solve problem of bloated events'

Alexander Zverev said that money won't solve the problem of big-name absentees as the ATP Montreal Masters kicked off on Sunday without Jannik Sinner, Novak Djokovic and injured Carlos Alcaraz.

Amid their frustration, Canadian officials have called for financial and other player sanctions over the series of late withdrawals from the first of two major events prior to the August 31 start of the US Open.

But Zverev said throwing dollars at the problem will make zero difference to any of the trio of elite multimillionaires.

"It's not rocket science," the Wimbledon runner-up said. "We get bonuses at the end of the year if we play all nine Masters.

"You think Novak will care if he gets a bigger bonus? I think the guy has -- if I would have to guess, the guy is north of 400 million (dollars) in his bank account.

"I'm not sure he would care about 50,000 more or less."

Zverev said that also applied to ranking level for the 39-year-old Serb, who owns 24 Grand Slam singles titles

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ALEXANDER ZVEREV

and has career prize money earnings alone approaching \$200 million.

"I don't think he cares about his ranking either. I honestly don't think so," Zverev added of Djokovic, currently ranked number five in the world.

Zverev said weary players would be more likely to be tempted back if the Masters events that have swelled to 11, 12 or even 13 days were scaled back to a week.

"If you're forcing us to be away for two and a half, three weeks during Grand Slams and the same then goes for Masters events, you can't force us to play. Sorry, that's nonsense."

Sabalenka aims to bounce back in Toronto after Wimbledon disappointment

AFP | Toronto

Aryna Sabalenka's world number one ranking will be on the line at the WTA 1000 tournament in Toronto, where the Belarusian star aims to extend her hard court dominance in the build up to her US Open title defense.

Sabalenka has won 23 of her 24 hard court matches this year, the lone defeat her loss to Elena Rybakina in the Australian Open final.

But she was turfed out in the quarter-finals on the clay of Roland Garros and fell to Naomi Osaka in the round of 16 on the grass courts of Wimbledon.

If Sabalenka fails to reach the round of 16 in Toronto, Kazakhstan's Rybakina can rise to number one if she lifts the trophy.

Sabalenka has never made it past the semi-finals in Canada, which alternates each year between Montreal and Toronto, but she said she was feeling rested and ready to reassert herself after taking time off in the wake of her All England Club exit.

"Clay and grass, I wouldn't say they were that bad," she said. "I was trying a couple of things, didn't go the way that I expected. And now we're kind of back to basics and I really hope it's going to work out well."

Sabalenka had exited Wimbledon saying she wanted to "forget about tennis".

She did that with a summer holiday on the Greek island of Mykonos.

"I think the rest was



Aryna Sabalenka waves to fans after a match (file photo)

much-needed," she told reporters on Sunday. "I spent there five, six days maybe. I felt much better, I couldn't wait to get back on court and start working towards my goals for this swing."

Sabalenka heads a top half of the draw that also includes two-time winner Jessica Pegula, the third seed, 2024 finalist Amanda Anisimova and seventh-seeded Iga Swiatek of Poland.

Former world number one Swiatek, a six-time Grand Slam champion, will be aiming to regroup after slumping to a third-round defeat at Wimbledon.

Rybakina anchors a bottom half of the draw that also includes fourth-seeded Coco Gauff, four-time Grand Slam champion Osaka and newly crowned Wimbledon champion Linda Noskova.

Czech Noskova, who broke into the top 10 after winning her first Grand Slam title at Wimbledon, is seeded sixth and could face another rising star in the Philippines' Alexandra Eala in the third round.

They have met twice already this year, with Noskova winning both times.

Wimbledon runner-up Karolina Muchova is among the notable absentees as she recovers from a minor surgery.

Reigning champion Victoria Mboko of Canada, who thrilled Montreal fans with her run to a first WTA title last year, remains sidelined with the knee injury that forced her out of Wimbledon.

Tricky schedule

The ATP Masters 1000 in Montreal this week has also

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ARYNA SABALENKA

been hit by high-profile defections, including that of Wimbledon champion Jannik Sinner.

Sabalenka said the scheduling is "tricky" for any player that does well in the grass court season, with the Canadian tournaments followed by a 1000-level event in Cincinnati in a schedule that offers little respite before the US Open begins on August 30.

"If you go far at the grass court (season) you feel really fatigued and you're not able to pull out any good tennis so what's the reason of coming when your body is really so much stress," she said. "It's very tricky, but this year I didn't do well so I'm here."

All 32 seeded players received first-round byes.

Play got underway on Sunday with Japanese qualifier Moyuka Uchijima booking a second-round meeting with Sabalenka with a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Spain's Cristina Bucsa.

Greaves steadies West Indies in second test against Pakistan



Justin Greaves of West Indies in action

AFP | Port of Spain

Justin Greaves made an unbeaten 64 to steer West Indies to 239-5 at stumps on a rain-shortened opening day of the second and final Test against Pakistan in Trinidad on Sunday.

After a match-winning display with the ball in the first Test last week, Greaves displayed what has now become his trademark ease and composure at the crease in a battling knock at Queen's Park Oval.

His only error of judgement came just after reaching the half-century mark when opposing captain Babar Azam put down a straightforward chance at leg-slip off spinner Sajid Khan.

Greaves at that time was almost hobbling after a left leg injury sustained while completing a sharp run that necessitated lengthy treatment on the field.

His sixth-wicket partnership with Roston Chase (36 not out) was worth 66 runs at the close of play and Greaves will be hoping for a return to his usual athletic mobility when he resumes the innings with his captain on the second morning.

He had come to the crease in mid-afternoon at 91 for three as Kavem Hodge became Khan's first wicket.

When Amir Jangoo fell to a leg-side catch to give debutant pacer Ubaid Shah his first Test wicket with the first ball of a new spell, Pakistan sensed the chance to break the back of the West Indies resistance.

However Greaves and Shai Hope provided a measure of stability in a 53-run stand until seamer Mohammad Ali, the most impressive of the bowlers on the day, bowled Hope off the inside-edge for 29 to leave the innings in the balance at 173 for five.