

Zverev eases past Mensik to reach second French Open final

Zverev's experience proved decisive against the first-time major semi-finalist

● Alexander Zverev chasing first Grand Slam title

● Cobolli advances after Arnaldi withdrawal

AFP | Paris

Alexander Zverev moved to the verge of a long-awaited first Grand Slam title as the second seed saw off Jakub Mensik in four sets yesterday to set up a French Open final against Flavio Cobolli.

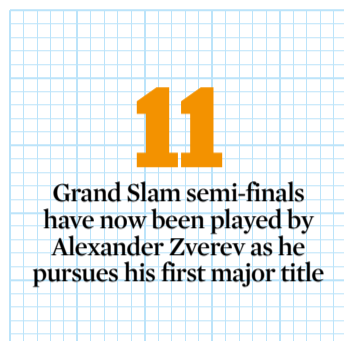
The German will face 10th seed Cobolli on Sunday after securing a 7-5, 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 victory over Mensik.

Cobolli did not even have to play his first Grand Slam semi-final, as his last-four opponent and fellow Italian Matteo Arnaldi withdrew from the tournament shortly before the match due to illness.

Zverev has endured several near misses at the majors, with three previous final defeats, including against Carlos Alcaraz at Roland Garros two years ago.

"This is a Grand Slam, it's best of five, things are going to happen, opponents are going to play better. I managed it," said Zverev.

"I hope to play another great match on Sunday."



11 Grand Slam semi-finals have now been played by Alexander Zverev as he pursues his first major title

Zverev will be a strong favourite when he faces Cobolli, against whom he holds a 3-1 winning record, to finally get over the line and lift a Slam trophy.

The world number three was playing in his 11th Grand Slam semi-final and his experience showed against Czech youngster Mensik.

The 20-year-old, in the last four of a major for the first time, tired as the match went on as his previous exertions in Paris, including two five-set matches, took their toll.

Zverev has dealt well with the pressure of being the tournament favourite since the early exits of Jannik Sinner and Novak Djokovic, in the second and third rounds respectively.

He will face one last test of his mental strength on Court Philippe Chatrier in two days' time, but should at least be fresh physically after reaching the final having only lost two sets in six matches.



Germany's Alexander Zverev hits a half volley to Czech Republic's Jakub Mensik

"Pure emptiness, there's absolutely nothing in my head," insisted a smiling Zverev in his on-court interview.

"We're athletes, very few of us have anything in our heads. Sometimes it's easier to be stupid and not to think too much."

The 29-year-old has been within one set of victory in two of his previous three Slam finals, when facing Alcaraz in Paris in 2024 and when he blew a two-set lead against Dominic Thiem at the 2020 US Open.

Zverev is also aiming to end

a 14-month title drought dating back to a clay-court event in Munich in April last year.

Mensik briefly threatens comeback

Zverev took a closely-fought first set courtesy of a break in the 11th game, having earlier saved three break points to deny Mensik a 5-3 lead.

The 26th seed could not keep pace at all in the second set, as Zverev broke twice and only dropped four points on his own serve.

Mensik called for a medical time-out just three games into the third set, appearing to struggle with a neck injury.

But he dragged himself back into the contest seemingly out of nowhere, breaking to take a 4-2 lead in the third set as his use of the drop shot started to make a greater impact.

That shot wrapped up a hold to love and the set -- only the second Zverev had lost in the tournament.

Mensik could not keep up his momentum, though, falling 2-0

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behind in the fourth set as consecutive backhand unforced errors gifted Zverev a break.

The three-time Grand Slam runner-up powered into the final from there, despite drawing the ire of some spectators for disputing two line calls and also receiving a warning for a time violation.

Zverev wrapped up victory on his first match point as Mensik netted a backhand.

Arnaldi withdraws

World number 104 Arnaldi had spent the most amount of time on court for a player en route to a Grand Slam semi-final, winning marathon matches in the third and fourth rounds.

His quarter-final opponent Matteo Berrettini retired injured in the second set of their last-eight tie.

But Arnaldi's dreams of a remarkable Slam title were ended by a virus.

Sooryavanshi, 15, in line for maiden India call-up: report



Rajasthan Royals' player Vaibhav Sooryavanshi in action

AFP | New Delhi

The 15-year-old batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is likely to be named in India's T20 squad while skipper Suryakumar Yadav could get the axe when selectors meet on Saturday, according to reports.

Sooryavanshi had a stellar IPL for Rajasthan Royals, finishing top of the batting charts with 776 runs, including a hundred and five half-centuries.

The left-handed opener is in line to be picked for two T20 matches in Ireland, followed by five games in England.

He would be the youngest

debutant for India in history.

"The manner in which 15-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi smashed bowling attacks in his first full IPL season, and the way in which he responded to match situations, have convinced the selectors that he needs to be given the opportunity to play T20Is," Indian website ESPNcricinfo said.

Batting great Sachin Tendulkar played his first Test for India at 16 years and 205 days in 1989.

Sooryavanshi has also been included in a 30-member of probables for the Asian Games in September-October in Japan, Indian media says.

Gambhir tells struggling Pant to play natural game in Afghan Test

AFP | New Delhi

India coach Gautam Gambhir yesterday told struggling Rishabh Pant to stick to his natural attacking game after removing him as vice-captain for the one-off Test against Afghanistan.

KL Rahul will be Shubman Gill's deputy for the match starting on Saturday in New Chandigarh in place of Pant.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Pant has scored 3,476 runs at an average of 42.91 in 49 Test matches since his debut in England in August 2018.

But the 28-year-old stepped down as captain of Lucknow Super Giants last week, the team having finished last in the IPL.

The usually flamboyant Test match star scored just 312 runs from 14 innings in this year's IPL, at a strike rate of 138.05.

"The responsibility is to play for India -- the rest, everything else, is a by-product," Gambhir told reporters on the eve of the Test.

"When you start playing for



India's Rishabh Pant hits a boundary against England in July 2025

India, you don't think about being a vice-captain. You think about doing good for India."

Gambhir said that no player is told to "play a completely different game than his natural game".

"We will not tell him to 'curb your game', but in international cricket, it is very important to play the situation, to read the

situation," Gambhir added.

Gambhir's Test record as India coach is unimpressive with 10 defeats, seven wins and two draws in 19 matches.

India suffered a 2-0 defeat to South Africa at home in November in their most recent Test outing.

They were also whitewashed in 2024 by New Zealand on

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GAUTAM GAMBHIR

home soil.

Gambhir is taking positives though from the 2-2 Test series draw in England last year, and performances against the West Indies.

India won 2-0 at home in October.

"We all know how well this young team played in England, and then we won against West Indies," he said, admitting that the South Africa series still "hurts".

Yamal named La Liga player of the year

AFP | Madrid

Teenage Barcelona striker Lamine Yamal was named player of the year in La Liga yes-

terday after spearheading the club's drive to the title.

The winger succeeds his Brazilian teammate Raphinha, who won the award in 2025.

Yamal missed much of the first half of the campaign with groin issues but still managed 16 goals and 12 assists in the 28 Liga games he played.



Lamine Yamal