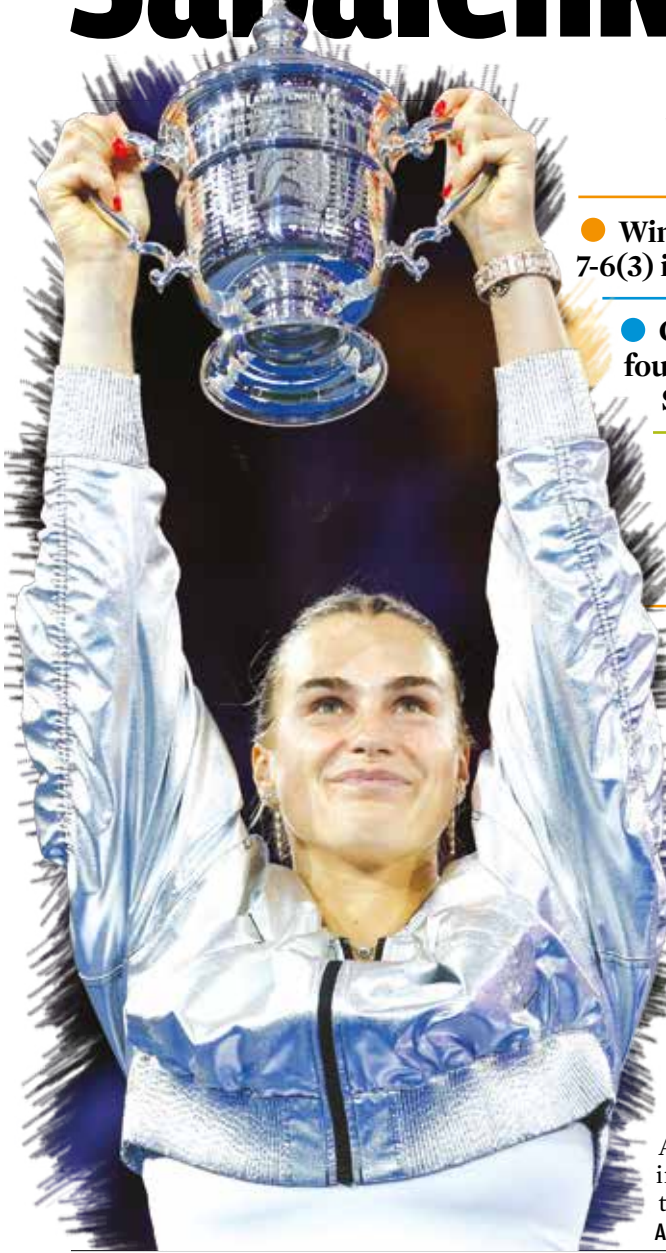


Sabalenka defends US Open title

World No. 1 avenges Wimbledon loss to Anisimova with dominant serving performance



- Wins 6-3, 7-6(3) in final
- Claims fourth Grand Slam title
- Converts 5 of 6 break points

AFP | New York

World number one Aryna Sabalenka overpowered Amanda Anisimova to defend her US Open crown on Saturday, defeating her American rival in straight sets to clinch the Aryna Sabalenka

fourth Grand Slam title of her career. Sabalenka ruthlessly attacked Anisimova's shaky service game to complete a 6-3, 7-6 (7/3) victory on the Arthur Ashe Stadium which cements her status at the pinnacle of women's tennis. The 27-year-old from Belarus had gone into Saturday's final knowing it was her last chance to grab a Grand Slam crown in 2025 after agonising losses in the Australian and French Open finals. Sabalenka duly atoned for those losses to end Anisimova's hopes of a remarkable redemption just two months after her traumatic 6-0, 6-0 thrashing by Iga Swiatek in the Wimbledon final. "It's crazy, all those tough lessons were worth it for this one," said Sabalenka afterwards. "I'm speechless right now." Anisimova had won six of nine previous encounters against Sabalenka, a run which included a victory in the semi-finals at Wimbledon. But a determined Sabalenka, playing in the seventh Grand Slam title game of her career, brought all her experience

BETTER YOU KNOW

Sabalenka has now won 19 consecutive tiebreaks - a streak that dates back to her first-round match at Wimbledon

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ARYNA SABALENKA

left ruing her inability to make the most of break points at key moments, in sharp contrast to Sabalenka who converted five of her six break point chances. That imbalance was on display early in the first set, when Anisimova failed to convert three break points openings as Sabalenka took a 2-0 lead. Yet Anisimova hit back in the third game, lasering a backhand winner into the corner to earn break point before unfurling a rasping forehand winner to break back before holding for 2-2. With the momentum behind her and her groundstrokes forcing Sabalenka around the court, Anisimova then broke again for a 3-2 lead. But that was the catalyst for Sabalenka to raise her game and she broke to love before holding to edge back in

front. Anisimova's faltering serve again betrayed her in the eighth game, the eighth seed double-faulting twice in quick succession to hand Sabalenka two break points at 15-40. Sabalenka needed no further encouragement and she duly converted before holding to take the first set. Sabalenka punished another wayward service game from Anisimova early in the second set and looked in complete control at 3-1. Yet Anisimova wasn't quite finished, and she held confidently before breaking back to love to level it at 3-3. The fightback was shortlived however, and when Anisimova thumped a wide open forehand long to gift Sabalenka a 15-40 lead, the Belarusian once again seized her chance for a break. Sabalenka held for 5-3 and was soon serving for the match at 5-4. Yet she allowed Anisimova off the hook after ploughing a wide open smash into the net. Instead of giving her match point, Anisimova had break point which she took to give her a lifeline.

Granollers, Zeballos win men's US Open doubles in thriller



Spain's Marcel Granollers (L) and Argentina's Horacio Zeballos with the trophy
AFP | New York

Marcel Granollers and Horacio Zeballos saved three championship points against all-British pair Joe Salisbury and Neal Skupski on Saturday to win their first US Open men's doubles title. Salisbury and Skupski were a point away from winning with their opponents serving down 5-4 down in the third set but Granollers and Zeballos fought back to prevail 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 7-5. It is a second Grand Slam triumph for Spain's Granollers and Argentina's Zeballos. They also beat Salisbury and Skupski in three sets at this year's French Open final. "When you play these kind of matches it's so unfair there's a winner and a loser," said Zeballos. "I don't really know how we... won those last points after what we did during the match. We kept fighting. I think if I had to describe the match with one phrase is 'never give up'."

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HORACIO ZEBALLOS

Granollers had finished on the losing side in five Grand Slam doubles finals before this year, three of those playing with Zeballos. "Tennis sometimes is crazy, because we were talking coming here that how close you are to lose the match, and then in 20 minutes you win the trophy," said Granollers. Salisbury fell short in his bid for a fifth Grand Slam crown in men's doubles after winning four times with Rajeev Ram. Skupski won at Wimbledon in 2023.

Poignant Portugal cruise, England unbeaten in World Cup qualifying

Ronaldo scores brace in emotional tribute to Diogo Jota as Portugal win 5-0

- Portugal win 5-0 vs Armenia
- England beat Andorra 2-0

AFP | Paris

Cristiano Ronaldo helped an emotional Portugal enjoy a perfect start to their World Cup qualifying campaign as Thomas Tuchel's uninspiring England remained unbeaten on Saturday. Portugal, playing for the first time since the death of their Liverpool forward Diogo Jota along with his brother Andre Silva in a car accident, took an impressive first step to the finals next year sweeping aside Armenia 5-0 in Yerevan. Both teams observed one minute's silence before kick-off at the Vazgen Sargsyan Republican Stadium in tribute to Jota and his brother who were killed in a crash in northern Spain on July 3, 11 days after Jota had married Rute Cardoso, the mother of his three children. Five-time Ballon d'Or winner Ronaldo was in sparkling form, Portugal's irrepressible 40-year-old talisman scoring in either half, the second a sizzling shot from distance, to take his record international tally to 140 goals, over two decades after his first. A brace from Joao Felix, Ronaldo's new teammate at Saudi side Al Nassr, and a contribution from another Saudi-based player Joao Cancelo lifted Roberto



Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo in action

Martinez's Nations League winners into a Group F lead. Portugal's number 21 Cancelo marked his goal by pointing to the skies with both hands in memory of Jota's goal celebration. Lazio left-back Nuno Tavares believed Ronaldo's 21st-minute goal held special significance as 21 was the shirt number worn by Jota when playing for his country. "We're all very happy because it shows he's (Jota) with us, that he was there, and that moment,

Ronaldo's goal, was made possible. He'll always be with us, as was clear today," said the defender. Ronaldo said on social media it was the "first step taken" in his quest to appear at a sixth World Cup. The Republic of Ireland face Hungary in the pool's late fixture. England extended their unbeaten run in Group K to four matches but hardly set the world alight in defeating modest Andorra 2-0 at Villa Park in Birmingham.

YOU KNOW WHAT

Ronaldo's first goal came in the 21st minute – the shirt number worn by Diogo Jota for Portugal – a poignant moment that teammates said symbolized Jota's lasting presence with the team

Christian Garcia's first-half own-goal was followed by Declan Rice's header to keep Tuchel's team firmly on course for the 2026 football fiesta in the United States, Mexico and Canada. But while the Three Lions will be more than satisfied with their 12 points this was in truth another underwhelming display that raised questions about Tuchel's ability to produce a trophy-winning team from a gifted generation. England were efficient but unspectacular, lacking guile and intelligence in the final third. No wonder Tuchel wore a frustrated expression on the touchline. Claiming the subdued crowd played a role in the display, the German said: "It's difficult because it's a very different crowd to a Premier League crowd.