

# ‘Would be fun’: Alcaraz, Sinner tease prospect of teaming up in doubles

AFP | Seoul

Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner teased yesterday the prospect of teaming up for doubles as the world's top two prepare to open their seasons with a lucrative exhibition match in South Korea, a week before the Australian Open.

The pair dominated men's tennis in 2025 and contested all four Grand Slam finals between them, with Spain's Alcaraz winning the French and US Opens and Italy's Sinner triumphing at the Australian Open and Wimbledon.

Speaking on the eve of their match in Incheon, the friends and rivals floated the idea of pairing up as a formidable team.

"I think it would be fun at least one time to share the court in different ways, on the same side," said Sinner, the world number two behind top-ranked Alcaraz.

"Of course the schedule, and we are so focused on singles that it's very difficult because if then you go deep in singles and then you have to play doubles, you don't have the right recovery."

"But for one tournament I



Italy's Jannik Sinner (L) plays table tennis with Spain's Carlos Alcaraz (R) during a welcome event at Hyundai Card headquarters in Seoul

think it's great to do it, and we're going to talk about it maybe this

year at a certain time where we feel like, or next year."

Alcaraz was also receptive to the idea, saying it had crossed

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JANNIK SINNER

his mind "once or twice".

"At least once would be fun," he said.

"I think I'm playing forehand and he's playing backhand."

Alcaraz and Sinner will be on opposite sides of the court when they square off again on Saturday, when they will play their only warm-up before the Australian Open starts on January 18.

The 22-year-old Alcaraz has been critical of tennis's packed schedule and pulled out of the

Shanghai Masters in September because of "physical issues".

He said playing in South Korea was "a great way to get ready" for Melbourne, where he is looking to go beyond the quarter-finals for the first time.

"I think coming here for two, three days, keep preparing, keep getting yourself ready for the new season, I think it was a great idea," he said.

"I'm just really happy that I'm able to do this event, this match with Jannik."

Their rivalry has drawn comparisons with the "Big Three" of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, who ruled tennis for the early part of this century.

Sinner said he and Alcaraz "want to make our own story".

"We need to see how long we can keep up this level," said the 24-year-old, who won six titles last year despite missing three months over a doping ban.

"What the big three has done, we cannot compare ourselves with them, and we also don't want to."

"We are just ourselves and we want to make our own story."

## Rybakina has little hope of change to tennis schedule



Elena Rybakina in action

AFP | Brisbane

Former Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina said yesterday she agreed with Aryna Sabalenka's description of the tennis schedule as "insane" -- but does not see it changing.

Speaking after her surprise loss to Karolina Muchova in the Brisbane International, world number five Rybakina said Sabalenka's criticism of the packed WTA Tour calendar was correct.

WTA rules stipulate that top players must play all four Grand Slams, 10 WTA 1000 events and six WTA 500 tournaments, unless they have a valid reason such as injury.

Players who don't meet these requirements risk being fined.

Sabalenka said Thursday that she was prepared to be punished by the WTA in order to rest her body and not risk

injury.

"The season is definitely insane," four-time Grand Slam champion Sabalenka said.

Rybakina, who beat Sabalenka to win last year's season-ending WTA Finals, said -- but does not see it changing.

"We all want to have more freedom of choosing what to play, what not to play," said the Moscow-born Kazakh, the 2022 Wimbledon winner.

"You're kind of forced to play most of the tournaments, so it is not ideal."

"You don't need to force anyone to play so many tournaments since it's so tough on the body."

"It's not easy to show the same good results, be healthy all the time."

"But it's a topic which we have had for a long time, and I don't see much changing."

## Man City win race to sign forward Semenyo

AFP | London

Manchester City added to their attacking arsenal yesterday with the signing of Antoine Semenyo from Bournemouth for a reported £65 million (\$87 million).

The 26-year-old, who has scored 10 Premier League goals this season, has signed a five-and-a-half-year deal.

Liverpool, Manchester United and Tottenham were amongst the other clubs interested in the London-born Ghana international, who had a buyout clause that would reportedly expire on Saturday.

"I am so proud to have joined Manchester City," said Semenyo.

"I have watched City over the last decade under Pep Guar-



Antoine Semenyo applauds the fans after a match (file photo)

diola, and they have been the dominant team in the Premier League as well as achieving

amazing things in the Champions League, FA Cup and League Cup.

"They have set the highest of standards and it's a club with

world-class players, world-class facilities and one of the greatest managers ever in Pep."

His final act after three years with the Cherries was scoring a stoppage-time winner to beat Tottenham 3-2 and end an 11-game winless run on Wednesday.

City are hoping Semenyo can boost their challenge for silverware on four fronts in 2026.

Guardiola's men trail Arsenal by six points at the top of the Premier League and have FA Cup, League Cup and Champions League fixtures in the coming weeks.

City's options in the wide areas are currently limited with Savinho out injured and Omar Marmoush representing Egypt at the Africa Cup of Nations.

## Sabalenka gets revenge over Keys in repeat of Australian Open final

AFP | Brisbane

World number one Aryna Sabalenka sent an Australian Open warning as she beat Madison Keys yesterday in Brisbane in a repeat of last year's Melbourne final.

Keys stunned Sabalenka nearly 12 months ago but the Belarusian took revenge on the American with a statement 6-3, 6-3 victory to reach the semi-finals.

Keys was playing less than 24 hours after her marathon three-hour win over Russia's Diana Shnaider and had heavy strapping on her thigh.

She turned in an uncharacteristically error-strewn performance and struggled to serve as Sabalenka struck a series of



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka hits a return against USA's Madison Keys

superb returns.

Sabalenka, aiming for her third Melbourne title in four years when the Australian Open

begins on January 18, said the Brisbane tournament was helping her find form ahead of the first major of the year.

"I'm just trying to bring on court things I have been working on the pre-season, such as coming to the net," she said.

"I was working on my serve and it seems that it's working a little bit better."

"I'm just trying to get some matches, get some wins, get the rhythm going again."

Sabalenka will play Czech surprise package Karolina Muchova in the last four after the 11th seed held her nerve to see off world number five Elena Rybakina 6-2, 2-6, 6-4.

Muchova raced through the first set against an out-of-sorts Rybakina, who eventually found some rhythm to claim the second.