

Serena loses to Bencic in first match of farewell tour

Serena Williams says goodbye to Canada after defeat by Belinda Bencic

● **Retiring great falls 6-2, 6-4 in Toronto**

AFP | Toronto

Serena Williams, who said this week she will soon call time on her storied tennis career, departed the WTA Toronto Masters for the last time Wednesday with a 6-2, 6-4 loss to Belinda Bencic.

The second-round defeat by Switzerland's reigning Olympic gold medalist was hardly unexpected, with the 40-year-old Williams competing in only her third match of 2022.

Bencic fired eight aces and broke Williams twice in the first set and once in the second, advancing on her first match point after 78 minutes.

But as Bencic herself said in the post-match interview on court: "Tonight is about her."

Williams's farewell on-court interview was threaded with emotion.

"I love playing here, I've always loved playing here," she said, choking up as fans who cheered her throughout the match called out their appreciation.

"I wish I could have played better tonight, but Belinda was playing so well."

Williams, who turns 41 next month, had beaten Spain's Nuria Parrizas Diaz on Monday for her first singles victory since the



Serena Williams leaves the court carrying flowers and waving to fans after her loss to Belinda Bencic

2021 French Open, 14 months ago.

But it sent shockwaves through the sport when she revealed in an essay in Vogue magazine and an Instagram post on Tuesday that "the countdown has begun" to her retirement from the sport.

Williams didn't specify an actual retirement date but is expected to compete next week in Cincinnati before travelling to the US Open, which starts on August 29.

She has lifted the US Open title six times, including her first Grand Slam triumph at the age of 17 in 1999.

"It's been a pretty interesting 24 hours," said Williams, who remains one shy of the all-time record of 24 Grand Slam singles

titles won by Margaret Court.

"Like I said in my article, I'm terrible at goodbyes," she said, her voice breaking.

"But, goodbye," she said, then adding with a laugh "Toronto."

'A joy playing here'

"It's been a joy playing here all of those years."

Bencic said the occasion was "Overwhelming."

Williams's match was preceded by a video tribute played for fans. Before she left the court she was presented with jerseys from the NBA's Toronto Raptors and NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs -- and with a child's version of the same for daughter Olympia.

In explaining that she was "evolving away" from tennis in the Vogue article, Williams said

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It's been a pretty interesting 24 hours ... I'm terrible at goodbyes. But, goodbye Toronto. I always had amazing times here both on and off the court. I'll be coming back just as a visitor to the city but otherwise its been remarkable

SERENA WILLIAMS

she wanted to focus on family life and new business ventures.

Bencic said the occasion was "really overwhelming."

"It definitely felt very special to be on court with her today again," she said "For me it was great, great, opportunity."

Williams's appearance highlighted a day that saw US teenager Coco Gauff -- who says Williams was "the reason why I play tennis" -- overcome 13 double-faults to battle past Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina and into the third round.

Gauff beat Rybakina 6-4, 6-7 (8/10), 7-6 (7/3) while world number one Iga Swiatek -- who beat Gauff in the French Open final this year -- sailed past Australian Ajla Tomljanovic 6-1, 6-2 in 55 minutes.

Swiatek, 21, said she was "pretty sad" that she's never had a chance to play Williams, even if in the American's heyday "I



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would probably be the player that loses in the quarter-final against her."

The Polish player has won six titles this year, and when she lost in the third round at Wimbledon it ended a 37-match unbeaten run.

But she's not sure she will ever scale the kind of heights reached by Williams.

"Being able to kind of do business and tennis at the same time, but also be a mother and play well and do four Grand Slam finals, it's amazing," Swiatek said. "I think nobody is going to repeat that. I would be happy to have that belief that maybe I can do that."

Frankfurt's Kostic arrives in Turin for Juventus medical



Filip Kostic
AFP | Turin

Eintracht Frankfurt winger Filip Kostic arrived in Turin yesterday to finalise a move to Juventus on a three-year deal, the Italian Serie A giants announced.

"Filip Kostic has arrived at Caselle airport for his medical visit at Juve," the club reported.

According to Italian newspaper Gazzetta dello Sport reports, Frankfurt will receive around 15 million euros, which could rise as high as 17 million euros with bonuses, for the 29-year-old Serbian international.

Kostic was crucial in Frankfurt's unlikely run to the Europa League title in 2021-22, which saw him named Europa League player of the season.

The Serbian's performances had led to speculation he may leave Frankfurt in the summer, with Italy the likely destination.

His exit became clear on Tuesday, when it emerged he had not travelled with the team to Helsinki for their UEFA Super Cup clash with Real Madrid.

Frankfurt manager Oliver Glasner has lamented the loss of his star winger who was under contract until 2023, but said he leaves as a "hero".

Andreescu enjoying pushing boundaries again

Reuters | Toronto

Former US Open champion Bianca Andreescu said she has found the joy in competing again, months after the 22-year-old revealed that she was close to quitting the sport over mental health issues.

After returning to the Tour in Stuttgart in April for the first time since her appearance at Indian Wells last October, Andreescu said she was struggling a lot mentally and was no longer enjoying being on court.

But she was once again enjoying fighting for victories, Andreescu said after defeating France's Alize Cornet for the first time in three meetings to reach the last 16 of the Canadian Open in Toronto.

"Man, I just enjoy pushing myself a lot. I love challenging myself," the Canadian said. "Before it was kind of a hassle for me to do that. But now I really enjoy it. I love testing my limits."

In 2019, Andreescu won in Indian Wells and the Canadian Open at home before going on to lift her maiden Grand Slam title at the US Open in New York.

She rose to a career-best ranking of fourth the same year but has since struggled



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with injuries, never able to reprise the same form again.

Andreescu, ranked 53rd, has made some tweaks to her routine -- like rising early -- and it has paid dividends.

"I never used to do that, but now I love it. I would say I'm a morning person now. Before I would say I'm a night person," she said after wrapping up a 6-3 4-6 6-3 win late on Wednesday.

Kyrgios beats No. 1 Medvedev at Montreal, Alcaraz and Tsitsipas ousted

AFP | Montreal

Nick Kyrgios rallied to topple world number one Daniil Medvedev at the ATP Montreal Masters on Wednesday as the top three seeds tumbled in the second round.

Australia's Wimbledon finalist beat Medvedev 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 6-2 to produce his second career upset of a reigning number one after ambushing Rafael Nadal at Wimbledon in 2014.

Unseeded American Tommy Paul also came from a set down to send second-seeded Carlos Alcaraz of Spain packing 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 while unseeded Briton Jack Draper beat third-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece 7-5, 7-6 (7/4).

Kyrgios started the landslide. The mercurial Aussie produced his usual on-court antics, complaining about a high bounce, hitting a ball into the stands to draw a warning and bickering with his player box in moments of tension.

But after gathering his formidable resources, the 27-year-old ranked 37th finished off Medvedev in exactly two hours.

"I don't go in looking at the rankings, just the guy in front of me," Kyrgios said. "I had a clean objective today -- play a lot of serve and volley and execute better."

"Hopefully I can keep this rolling and keep on winning."



Nick Kyrgios (AUS) (left) and Daniil Medvedev hug in second round play

Both players were coming off weekend title wins, Kyrgios at the Washington 500 on Sunday and Medvedev at Los Cabos, Mexico, on Saturday.

Kyrgios has won 14 of his last 15 matches to improve to 29-7 for 2022. Medvedev lost for the 11th time in 2022, but by reaching the final at Los Cabos -- where he lifted his first trophy of the season -- he is assured of taking the number one ranking into his US Open title defense later this month.

He was barred from Wimbledon as the tournament excluded Russian and Belarussian players over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Alcaraz, who like Medvedev enjoyed a first-round bye, fared

no better in his opening match, with the teenager admitting pressure got to him.

Alcaraz came into the event with two prestige Masters 1000 titles from Miami and Madrid and holding a 42-7 record this season.

"It was the first time that I couldn't handle the pressure," Alcaraz said. "I felt the pressure (of being) the number two seed and number four in the world."

"It was the first time that I felt this pressure."

The youngster added: "I had chances, I was a break up in the second set, had chances to win the match."

"He played really good in the tough moments. He played great, and I couldn't show my



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best."

The 34th-ranked Paul claimed victory on a volley winner after holding off the Spaniard's charge from 5-2 down in the third set.

"It was nice to finish this match at the net," said Paul, who fired 36 winners to Alcaraz's 33. "I did a lot of things well today. I played a good level of tennis, comfortable tennis."

Tsitsipas completed the hat-trick of losses for the tournament elite.