

Sinner on semi-final collision course with Djokovic at Australian Open

● Sinner opens defense against Hugo Gaston

● Alcaraz opens against home hope Walton

● Sabalenka faces French wildcard first

● Sabalenka and Gauff collide early

● Zverev, De Minaur face tough starts

AFP | Melbourne

Jannik Sinner was drawn yesterday against France's Hugo Gaston to start his Australian Open defence and is on a collision course to meet 10-time champion Novak Djokovic in a blockbuster semi-final.

World number one Carlos Alcaraz opens against home hope Adam Walton in his bid for a career Grand Slam and first Melbourne Park title.

The Spanish superstar is on the same side of the draw as last year's beaten finalist Alexander



Italy's Jannik Sinner (L) shakes hands with Serbia's Novak Djokovic after winning their French Open match (file photo)

Zverev and is scheduled to meet him in the last four.

Italy's Sinner saw off Germany's Zverev in straight sets in last year's final and went on to add the Wimbledon and ATP

Finals crowns to his growing collection.

If the 24-year-old makes it three in a row he would join Djokovic as the only men in the Open era to do so.

The Serbian great is aiming for a record 25th major title and will meet 71st-ranked Spaniard Pedro Martinez first up.

"The draw is very difficult, it doesn't matter who you play,"



If Jannik Sinner wins a third straight Australian Open, he would join Novak Djokovic as the only men in the Open era to achieve the feat

said Sinner at the draw ceremony.

"We are the best players in the world and the way is very, very long and very far. We will go day-by-day."

World number three Zverev faces big-serving Gabriel Diallo in round one while sixth seed Alex de Minaur has a tough encounter against former number six and 2022 semi-finalist Matteo Berrettini of Italy.

In the women's draw, American defending champion Madison Keys will take on Ukraine's Oleksandra Oliynykova while

world number one Aryna Sabalenka kicks off against French wildcard Tiantsoa Rakotomanga Rajaonah.

Keys stunned then title-holder Sabalenka 12 months ago in a classic three-set final to win her first major title aged 29.

But she failed to kick on from there, not winning another tournament all year, and Keys, the world number nine, will have a target on her back as champion.

Sabalenka and world number three Coco Gauff are on the same side of the draw and will meet in the semi-finals if they make it that far.

Gauff gets under way against Uzbekistan's Kamilla Rakhimova and could meet veteran Venus Williams, handed a wildcard aged 45, in the second round.

Second seed and six-time Grand Slam winner Iga Swiatek will play a yet to be determined qualifier in round one and could meet fourth seed Amanda Anisimova in the final four.

Swiatek has won the French Open, US Open and Wimbledon but is yet to go past the semi-finals in Melbourne.

The Australian Open starts Sunday.

Elite horses set for third round of Bahrain International Championship



TDT | Manama

The Rashid Equestrian and Horse Racing Club will stage the third round of the fifth Bahrain International Championship on Friday, January 16, as part of the 14th race meeting of the 2025/2026 season, under the patronage of HH Shaikh Isa bin Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. The meeting is sponsored by National Bank of Bahrain and Bareeq, and will be held at the club's Al Riffa racecourse.

The highlight of the evening is the Shaikh Isa bin Salman bin Hamad Cup, alongside cups named after his sons Shaikh Hamad, Shaikh Abdullah and Shaikh Salman, in addition to the Al Adiyat Cup sponsored by Bareeq and the Al Wasiya Cup sponsored by National Bank of Bahrain.

The event brings together a select field of top-class horses competing in one of the most prestigious fixtures of the sea-

son.

The Bahrain International Championship continues to gain prominence by attracting high-rated international horses, elite trainers and leading jockeys, reinforcing Bahrain's growing status as a regional hub for international horse racing.

The Al Adiyat Cup for imported horses is again run as an internationally listed race, while the Bahrain-bred Al Adiyat Cup makes its debut, aimed at encouraging local ownership and production.

Strong competition is expected in the championship races, particularly in the Al Wasiya Cup over 1,000 metres and the Al Adiyat Listed race over 1,800 metres, featuring proven winners and internationally campaigned contenders. The meeting also includes six additional races across a range of classes, offering competitive and closely matched fields.

Alcaraz career Grand Slam at 22 would be 'crazy' - Federer

AFP | Melbourne

Roger Federer said yesterday that Carlos Alcaraz winning the Australian Open to complete the career Grand Slam aged just 22 would be "crazy".

Spain's Alcaraz already has six major titles but success on the Melbourne Park hard courts is a glaring hole in his resume.

Should the world number one snap his Australia drought at the tournament starting on Sunday, he would become the youngest man to seal a career Grand Slam.

"At his young age to be able to complete the career Grand Slam already would be crazy,"

Swiss legend Federer said at Melbourne Park, where he will headline a "Battle of the World No.1s" at the official launch of the 2026 Australian Open on Saturday.

"Let's see if he's able to do 'crazy' this week. I hope he does because for the game that would be an unbelievable and special



Carlos Alcaraz and Roger Federer shake hands during a Laver Cup match (file photo)

moment."

Alcaraz is aiming to surpass retired compatriot Rafael Nadal, who secured all four majors by the age of 24, but the top seed has not made it past the quarter-finals in four previous Australian Opens.

Federer, a six-time Melbourne champion, compared Alcaraz's

wait to lift the title there to Rory McIlroy's agonising attempts to win a first Masters in golf.

The Northern Irishman finally did it last year to complete the Grand Slam.

"It's like Rory going for the Masters. Those things are tough," said Federer.

Alcaraz faces home hope

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ROGER FEDERER

Adam Walton in the first round.

The now-retired Federer was also asked by reporters about Joao Fonseca, an up-and-coming Brazilian tennis talent aged 19.

Federer spoke glowingly of the teenager, saying: "What separates him from a lot of the other guys in the draw is just his power -- forehand, backhand, serve and just what he's able to bring point by point."

"He's exciting, he's got good aura, he's a very likeable character as well. I like watching him play."

"The sky's the limit."

Error-strewn Keys crashes out to Mboko in Australian Open warm-up

AFP | Adelaide

On erratic Madison Keys struck nearly 50 unforced errors yesterday as the Australian Open champion crashed out of her final warm-up for this year's opening Grand Slam to teenager Victoria Mboko.

The Canadian world number 17 withstood a second-set fight-back from Keys to win 6-4, 4-6, 6-2 in the quarter-final of the Adelaide International.

Keys won the Adelaide tournament 12 months on her way to lifting her maiden Slam title in Melbourne.

This year's Australian Open begins on Sunday and Keys has been drawn to face Ukraine's Oleksandra Oliynykova in the first round.

After dropping the first set, Keys rallied after twice being a break down in the second to the 19-year-old, before taking it to a deciding third set.



Madison Keys reacts during her match

But Mboko broke the American twice for a 4-1 lead and won

after 1hr 52min.

A year ago, Mboko was 337th in the world but she announced herself on the world stage last year by winning the WTA 1000 title in Montreal and the Hong Kong Open.

"There were ups and downs in the match, I had to weather the storm," Mboko said.

"She won here last year so I know coming in this would be a big fight. I'm glad I was able to get it done."