

Swiatek, Paolini set for Cincy final

Swiatek overcomes early struggles as Paolini edges Kudermetova to reach Cincinnati title clash

● **Swiatek beats Rybakina 7-5, 6-3**

● **Paolini outlasts Kudermetova in three sets**

AFP | Cincinnati

Iga Swiatek reached the final of the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Open for the first time on Sunday, surging past Elena Rybakina 7-5, 6-3 to book a title clash with Jasmine Paolini.

The six-time Grand Slam champion earned a Monday evening final against an opponent with nothing to lose after Paolini managed to “forget” a patch of bad form to claim a 6-3, 6-7 (2/7), 6-3 win over Russian Veronika Kudermetova.

The 29-year-old, who was a two-time Grand Slam finalist in 2024, will bid for the fourth title of her career when she faces Swiatek, who is set to compete in her 13th final at the 1000 level as she closes in on a return to world number two.

Swiatek, the reigning Wimbledon champion, recovered an early break in the opening set and pow-

ered away to beat 2022 All England winner Rybakina -- who had swept past world number one and defending champion Aryna Sabalenka in the quarter-finals.

The former world number one from Poland now ranked third, had twice stalled at the semi-final stage at the pre-US Open event, but booked her title chance on her third opportunity.

“It was a great match, and at the begin-



Iga Swiatek of Poland serves to Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan

ning, I was even surprised that I'm able to keep up with the pace, because we played so fast,” Swiatek said.

“I wanted to be there when Elena starts making mistakes. It's impossible to play such a good level throughout the whole match.”

Swiatek recovered from 3-5 down in the opening set, sweeping the last four games.

She jumped to a 4-1 lead in the second, sandwiching a pair of love service games around a break of Rybakina's serve.

Jasmine Paolini

YOU KNOW WHAT

Swiatek had twice fallen in Cincinnati semi-finals before finally breaking through on her third attempt, setting up a title clash with Paolini, whom she has defeated in all five of their previous matches

But Kazakhstan's Rybakina made her work for it, fending off three break points in the sixth game and saving a pair of match points in the eighth before Swiatek closed it out a game later.

“I was playing with intensity and quality,” Swiatek said. “I feel good about my game right now and would not change anything.” Swiatek has beaten Paolini in all five of their prior meetings with the Italian winning just one set.

But Swiatek said she was prepared for a tough final against a player who beat world number two Coco Gauff in the quarter-finals.

“Anyone who is there will have been playing well,” she said.

“It was a great match, and at the beginning, I was even surprised that I'm able to keep up with the pace, because we played so fast. I wanted to be there when Elena starts making mistakes. It's impossible to play such a good level throughout the whole match

IGA SWIATEK

‘Keep fighting’

Before her 6-0, 6-0 Wimbledon final win over Amanda Anisimova last month, Swiatek had been in a trophy drought with her last prior title coming in June 2024 at Roland Garros.

Another victory yesterday would be a strong springboard into the US Open, where first-round play starts on August 24.

Paolini looked headed to a straight-set victory but failed to serve out her match at 5-4 in the second set and admitted the lapse left her nervous.

“The key was to forget, get back into the fight and stay in the present,” Paolini said after wrapping up the win in two and a quarter hours.

“I was fighting in the second set and all was fine. But I got nervous and thought I would lose the tiebreaker.

“I came back onto court in the third set trying not to think about what had happened. You have to keep going.”

Joao Felix says late Jota ‘will forever be part of football history’

AFP | London

Joao Felix said yesterday that Portugal team-mate and close friend Diogo Jota will “forever be a part of football history” following the Liverpool star's death aged 28.

Jota was killed along with brother Andre Silva when their Lamborghini went off the road in northern Spain on July 3.

Just 11 days prior to the accident, the Portuguese forward had married Rute Cardoso, the mother of his three children.

The Premier League remembered Jota over the weekend in a series of moving tributes.

Adding his voice to the outpouring of grief across the football world, Felix looked visibly moved as he spoke about his good friend and



Portugal's Diogo Jota celebrates with Joao Felix (L) (file photo)

international colleague.

Felix, who was among the mourners at the brothers' funeral, said: “Diogo to me was one of my best friends in the national team, he was always

part of our mini group in the national team, those of us who were always together.

“I knew his family, especially his parents, an incredible family.”

Speaking in Hong Kong, where Felix is with his new team Al Nassr for this week's Saudi Super Cup, the 25-year-old added: “I think he will forever be a part of football history, he will remain in the hearts of those who were already close to him.

“After that day, every time we go on the field we will remember him and play in part for him.”

The attacker Felix joined fellow Portuguese Cristiano Ronaldo at Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr late last month from Chelsea in a move reported to be worth up to 43.7 million pounds (\$58 million).

Felix, who has also played for Benfica, Atletico Madrid, Barcelona and AC Milan, will reportedly earn \$10 million a year.

FIFA boss condemns racial abuse in German Cup games

AFP | Berlin

FIFA President Gianni Infantino has condemned the alleged racial abuse which occurred during two German Cup fixtures on the weekend as “unacceptable”, in a statement issued yesterday.

“I repeat myself and will continue to do so. There is no place for racism in football,” Infantino said in the statement.

On Sunday, a match between home side Lokomotive Leipzig and Schalke was halted af-

ter winger Christopher Antwi-Adjei said he was racially abused by home spectators.

An announcement on the stadium PA was made condemning racist abuse. After the match resumed, the winger was booed repeatedly by the home support and Lokomotive issued an apology later on Sunday.

Also on Sunday, a player from visiting side Kaiserslautern also alleged racial abuse from a member of the crowd at club RSV Eintracht.



Forest sign French forward Kalimuendo

AFP | London

French striker Arnaud Kalimuendo has signed a five-year contract with Nottingham Forest, the Premier League club announced on Monday.

According to French media, the transfer paid to ex-club Rennes is believed to be at least 30 million euros (\$35

million).

“Nottingham Forest is delighted to announce the signing of Arnaud Kalimuendo, who joins the club on a five-year deal,” read a statement on the English club's website.

The 23-year-old came through the ranks at Paris Saint-Germain, before enjoying a breakthrough season at Ligue 1 side Rennes last year when he netted 18 times in 34 appearances

in all competitions.

Prior to joining Rennes in 2022, he made five appearances for PSG and enjoyed success during loan spells at Lens -- scoring 21 goals in 65 outings.

“When I heard about the interest from Forest, I was honoured. This is a proud moment for me, joining a team who had a strong season last year and a club with great history,” said Kalimuendo.

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