

World number one Barty to end year-long absence in Adelaide



Ashleigh Barty hits a return during a match (file photo)
AFP | Melbourne

World number one Ashleigh Barty will make her first top-level tennis appearance in nearly a year when she joins a star-studded exhibition in Adelaide this month, organisers said yesterday.

Australia's Barty, who has remained top of the rankings despite not playing since last February, joins a field which also includes major-winners Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka and Simona Halep.

Men's Grand Slam champions Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Dominic Thiem, along with Jannik Sinner, the highly rated world number 36 from Italy, will also play the event on January 29.

"I am looking forward to playing my first match for the 2021 season in Adelaide," Barty said in a Tennis Australia statement.

It will be Barty's first match

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I have fond memories from the Adelaide International last year and it will be great to get back on court here for A Day at the Drive

ASHLEIGH BARTY

since her semi-final loss to Petra Kvitova at the Qatar Open last February.

The one-day exhibition, part of the build-up to the Australian Open Grand Slam from February 8, will feature four singles matches in front of a limited crowd.

The presence of tennis's top players in Adelaide has ruffled with some of their rivals, as they were allowed to do their 14-day mandatory coronavirus quarantine in more luxurious conditions.

Eldarov tips students to follow his footsteps in 2021

BRAVE CF champion Eldar Eldarov put on his coaching badge back after his astonishing win over Leonardo Mafra

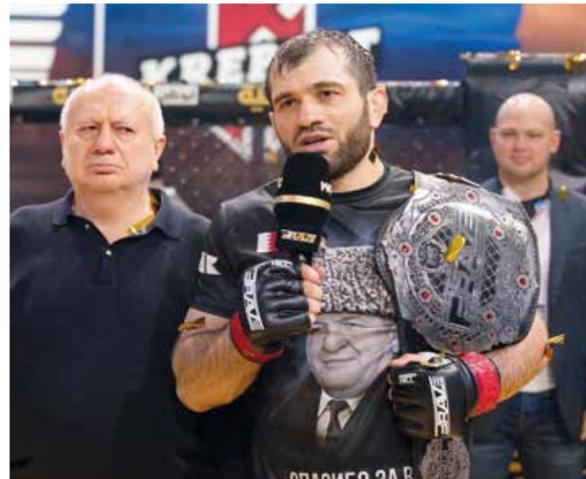
● Eldarov predicted an unforgettable year for his pupils at KHK MMA

TDT | Manama

Eldar Eldarov kicked off 2021 in style, with the first successful defense of his BRAVE Combat Federation world title at BRAVE CF 46, in the headliner of the organization's first-ever trip to his native Russia. Right after his astonishing win over top contender Leonardo Mafra, however, Eldarov immediately put on his coaching badge back on and predicted an unforgettable year for his pupils at KHK MMA, both in Bahrain and Dagestan.

Currently hosting the likes of Ikram Aliskerov, Murtaza Talha, Muhammad Mokaev, Ahmed Amir, Hamza Kooheji among others, Eldar has tipped his students to have an amazing new year.

"This belt is for KHK. My belt is KHK's belt. It will always and forever stay in KHK. And, God willing, it won't be the last one. This year, watch out for KHK,



Eldar Eldarov

we will get more belts", said an ecstatic Eldarov, right after beating Mafra and defending his Super Lightweight crown.

Ikram Aliskerov is on pole position to get the first shot at Mohammad Fakhreddine's recently conquered Middleweight world title. Aliskerov holds the record of most BRAVE CF Middleweight wins with six, but a trip to Welterweight cut short his time in the division. Now that he's back at 185-pounds,

Ikram is on course to have a title shot in 2021.

His teammate, two-time amateur world champion Murtaza Talha was another big winner at BRAVE CF 46. As he started his descent to Middleweight, Murtaza scored a big TKO victory over Dmitriy Krivulets and positioned himself nicely for a big 2021 - Talha expressed his desire to fight at least four more times throughout the year.

Hamza Kooheji and Ahmed

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ELDAR EL DAROV

Amir are also on track to get title shots in the new year. Kooheji is on a four-fight win streak and nearing a Bantamweight title shot, while Amir has two huge wins under his belt and is knocking on the door of Amin Ayoub, the current BRAVE CF Lightweight champion.

Finally, Muhammad Mokaev is tipped to have a breakout year in 2021. Currently training in the Kingdom of Bahrain, "The Punisher" has announced his drop to Flyweight and is hoping to get the first crack at the world champion, which will be crowned in the biggest tournament for Flyweights in the history of the sport.

'The Muscleman' wants to leave Alaska

TDT | Manila

Gripped veteran Vic "The Muscleman" Manuel has candidly expressed his desire to leave Alaska Aces in the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA).

The eight-year forward felt dismayed over the Aces offer of a one-year contract extension, though Alaska coach Jeffrey Cariaso has already met with Manuel to discuss his request.

Cariaso said that re-signing Manuel was Alaska's top priority while clarifying that the team had offered a two-year extension.

But the player's agent, Danny Espiritu, said that his ward is still hoping for a change of scenery.

In fact, the 6-foot-4 banger has a "short list" of teams as his preferred destination for the coming season: it's either Phoenix, NLEX or San Miguel Beer.

Espiritu hopes that Alaska would be able to find a way to complete a deal.

"He wants to get traded to Phoenix Fuel and play alongside his best friend, Calvin Abueva," said Espiritu - who has been in the player-agent business since the late 80s.

Abueva and Manuel played a couple of seasons when the former was still with Alaska.

Manuel joined the Aces following a trade with the now-defunct Air21 back in 2013-14 Season, and "The Muscleman" immediately formed a solid tandem with "The Beast" Abueva.

That partnership ended when Alaska dealt Abueva to the Fuel Masters in 2017-18 Season.

The two, however, main-



Manuel, left, is dismayed over the Aces offer

with one-time PBA MVP Arwind Santos.

Espiritu said that it is up to Alaska to look for a trade partner, although he mentioned that he understands that the Aces' option is not limited to the three mentioned teams.

Alaska management met with Espiritu on December 26 last year to make known its desire to re-sign Manuel. Then on December 31 Alaska followed-up its offer.

"Therefore, it is incorrect to claim that Alaska did not reach out to him. Alaska offered a two-year, maximum deal with a clause for the second year," said Cariaso.

"The reason behind is completely explained to Vic and which like any other clause, considering the player's history with the team."

Manuel joined the league as the ninth overall pick in the 2012 PBA Draft. He played for the GlobalPort, Meralco and Air21 Express before finding a home with the Aces.



The 6-foot-4 banger has a "short list" of teams as his preferred destination for the coming season: it's either Phoenix, NLEX or San Miguel Beer

tained a close relationship particularly during the PBA restart at the bubble in Pampanga.

Aside from Phoenix Fuel, Espiritu said that Manuel mentioned NLEX as his preferred destination because of the latter's desire to play for Road Warriors coach Yeng Guiao, as well as San Miguel Beer because of Manuel's close ties

Arteta focuses on new signings as Arsenal shed fringe players

AFP | London

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta is focusing on potential signings in the January transfer window after trimming his squad but refused to be drawn on a loan move for Real Madrid's Martin Odegaard.

Sokratis Papastathopoulos was released from his contract this week, while Mesut Ozil is on the brink of a transfer to Turkish club Fenerbahce.

Sead Kolasinac and William Saliba have already left on loan deals as Arteta seeks to re-balance his squad.

The Arsenal boss, speaking ahead of Saturday's FA Cup fourth-round match at Southampton, would not be drawn on reports linking the club with a loan move for Real's attacking midfielder Odegaard.

But he said the focus would now turn to the entrance door rather than the exit at the Emirates.

"We are in that process now," Arteta said yesterday when asked if it was now time to start bringing players in.

"We have done the first part more or less and we are focusing now on the second phase.

"Obviously this market and the context makes it difficult, but we are looking at options and we will see what we can do."

Arteta, whose team are FA Cup holders, said the departures had left his squad short in certain areas.

He said a left-back could be on the radar, with the decision



Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta speaks during a training session (file photo)

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MIKEL ARTETA

to allow Kolasinac to join Schalke until the end of the season leaving him with only Kieran Tierney as a natural option.

"With the departure of Kola we are a little bit short with left-footed full-backs at the moment," he added.

Both Ozil and Sokratis were

omitted from Arsenal's Premier League and Europa League squads for the first half of the season.

Arteta had stressed several times he was unhappy with the bloated nature of the squad and feels the departures will help him achieve a better balance.

"We could not carry on with 31 players in the squad," he said. "It is unmanageable. And when you have to leave some of the foreign players out, it makes it even more difficult.

"To do it for a few weeks is OK, to do it for months and maintain the health, the ambition and the chemistry is really complicated.

"So one of the main objectives was to make some decisions about how we are going to offset that. We have done it."