

Alcaraz, Sabalenka, Gauff surge into Australian Open third round

Carlos Alcaraz fends off heavy hitting as top women seeds secure clinical second-round victories

● Alcaraz survives Hanfmann challenge

● Sabalenka drops just nine games

● Gauff delivers near-perfect display

● Medvedev fights through four sets

AFP | Melbourne

Top-ranked Carlos Alcaraz fended off a series of “bombs” before surging into the Australian Open third round yesterday, where he was joined by Aryna Sabalenka and a near-flawless Coco Gauff.

Three-time finalist Daniil Medvedev needed four sets to keep his Grand Slam dream on track at a cooler Melbourne Park after days of hot weather.

Alexander Zverev, the third seed well beaten in last year’s final by Jannik Sinner, also went through in four sets.

Spanish superstar Alcaraz came through 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena against hard-hitting German Yannick Hanfmann to take another step towards a career Grand Slam.

But the 22-year-old was put through his paces by a player 12 years older before setting up a showdown with France’s Corentin Moutet.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hits a return against Germany's Yannick Hanfmann

“To be honest, it was tougher than I thought at the beginning,” said Alcaraz, who already has six major titles but has never gone past the last eight in Melbourne. “I didn’t feel the ball that good. You know, the ball was coming as a bomb, forehand and backhand.”

If Alcaraz does win the Australian Open to complete the career Grand Slam of all four majors, he would be the youngest man to do so, surpassing compatriot Rafael Nadal, who was 24 when he achieved that feat.

The unpredictable Medvedev,

runner-up in 2021, 2022 and 2024, is trying to keep his emotions in check this year and was on his best behaviour against Frenchman Quentin Halys.

He lost a tight first set but the result was never in doubt as he surged to the finish line 6-7 (9/11), 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

“It was a very tough match, happy I managed to fight,” said the Russian, who faces Fabian Marozsan of Hungary next.

American Tommy Paul, Argentine duo Francisco Cerundolo and Tomas Etcheverry, Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich

Fokina and Russian Andrey Rublev also safely negotiated the second round.

Heavy rain fell late in the evening, delaying Zverev’s match against France’s Alexandre Muller for more than 30 minutes.

The break failed to derail the German’s victory charge, which resumed under a closed roof, as he won 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Zverev, who faces Britain’s Cameron Norrie in the third round, needed physio treatment for what appeared to be a lower leg injury.



Alcaraz described his opponent Yannick Hanfmann’s powerful shots as “bombs,” saying the ball was coming at him like a bomb from both the forehand and backhand during a tougher-than-expected first set

“I took a painkiller and it was fine after that,” said Zverev, who is still searching for a maiden major aged 28.

Great home hope Alex de Minaur, the sixth seed, dropped the first set to Hamad Medjedovic of Serbia but fought back to go through in four sets.

‘Near perfect’

World number one Sabalenka started in imperious mood.

The four-time major winner raced into a 5-0 lead over qualifier Bai Zhuoxuan, ranked a lowly 702, on centre court before wobbling to give the Chinese player a glimmer of hope.

But the top seed quickly snuffed it out to race home 6-3, 6-1 and set up a clash next with Russian-born Anastasia Pota-

pova, now representing Austria, who dispatched 2021 US Open champion Emma Raducanu.

“Super-happy to close the (first) set, it gives me confidence that my game is there, my focus is there,” said Sabalenka, who is bidding for a third Australian Open title in four years.

“Step by step. Super-happy with my win. There is always a little gap to improve.”

Sabalenka has dropped just nine games so far as she looks to make amends for her upset in last year’s final to Madison Keys.

Third seed Gauff was clinical against Serbia’s Olga Danilovic, who ended Venus Williams’s tournament in round one.

The two-time major winner took just 78 minutes to race home 6-2, 6-2 on Margaret Court Arena.

It set up a showdown next against fellow American Hailey Baptiste, ranked 70, who downed home hope Storm Hunter in straight sets.

“Near perfect,” said Gauff, whose best performance in Melbourne was a semi-final in 2024.

Ukrainian 12th seed Elina Svitolina, Turkish prospect Zeynep Sonmez and in-form Canadian teenager Victoria Mboko also won on day four, all sweeping past their opponents in straight sets.

Mirra Andreeva, the 18-year-old Russian sensation, underlined her talent with an impressive 6-0, 6-4 victory over Maria Sakkari of Greece.

Audi unveil new car for 2026 Formula One season

AFP | Berlin

German manufacturer Audi, which will make its Formula One debut this season after acquiring the Sauber team, unveiled its first-ever single-seater on Tuesday and declared its ambition to “win championships by 2030”.

The livery of the car, named the Audi R26, features a predominantly grey colour scheme and displays the four rings of the German brand’s logo in red on its rear wing and was designed to be “the most elegant and striking on the grid.”

Last year’s Sauber drivers Nico Huelkenberg and Gabriel Bortoleto will remain at the team in 2026 following the re-branding.

“The 2026 regulations creat-



The Audi Revolut F1 car is presented ahead of its entry into the 2026 Formula One season

ed the perfect moment to enter Formula 1,” said Italian Mattia Binotto, the project’s chief.

Team principal Jonathan

Wheatley added: “This car is the physical embodiment of thousands of hours of hard work from a hugely talented group of

people across our facilities.

“Today, we start this journey with immense pride, but also with humility. This is just day one of a long campaign. Our mission is to embed a championship DNA into every fibre of this team.

“A culture of resilience, precision, and relentless curiosity where we stop at nothing to find performance. For everyone here, the excitement comes from this challenge: to build a team that gets stronger with every lap, every debrief, and every race. We will turn our long-term ambition into on-track reality, day by day, decision by decision.”

Like the other ten F1 teams, this new car will make its track debut next week during closed-door tests at the Barcelona-Catalunya circuit.

Barca’s Ter Stegen joins Girona on loan



Barcelona's German coach Hans-Dieter Flick (R) and Barcelona's German goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen speak before a match (file photo)

AFP | Barcelona

Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen has joined Girona on loan until the end of the season, both clubs confirmed Tuesday.

Germany international Ter Stegen has fallen behind Joan Garcia and Wojciech Szczesny in the pecking order at Barca.

With the 2026 World Cup on the horizon the 33-year-old stopper needs to play regularly to make his case to start for Germany at the tournament.

“Today is my last day this

season with my team-mates and the staff at Barcelona, and I truly have mixed feelings,” wrote Ter Stegen on Instagram.

“So many memories and emotions are running through me right now. For nearly 12 years this club and especially this locker room, has been my home.”

Barca coach Hansi Flick had confirmed the news earlier in a news conference ahead of the team’s Champions League clash at Slavia Prague yesterday.

Ukraine’s Oliynykova wants Russian, Belarusian players banned from tennis

AFP | Melbourne

Ukraine’s Oleksandra Oliynykova has called for world number one Aryna Sabalenka and other Belarusian and Russian players to be banned from tennis, saying their presence was “very wrong” with the conflict ongoing.

The 25-year-old, whose fa-



Ukraine's Oleksandra Oliynykova

ther is fighting on the frontlines, made her Grand Slam debut at the Australian Open on Tuesday, losing to defending champion Madison Keys.

She attended her post-match press conference wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with the slogan: “I need your help to protect Ukrainian women and children but I can’t talk about

it here.”

Under Grand Slam guidelines, players are prohibited from making political statements at competition venues.

But in an interview with the Melbourne Age newspaper she took aim at Russian and Belarusian players, despite them competing under a neutral white flag as independents.