

Sabalenka, Djokovic open with wins

Sabalenka overcomes slow start while Djokovic fights through challenge to reach US Open second round

- Sabalenka beats Masarova 7-5, 6-1
- Djokovic wins in straight sets over Tien
- Raducanu ends four-year US Open drought
- Alexandra Eala makes Filipino tennis history
- Fritz, Shelton progress with comfortable victories

AFP | New York

Aryna Sabalenka launched the defence of her US Open crown with a victory on Sunday while Novak Djokovic made a successful start to his latest bid for a record 25th Grand Slam singles title.

World number one Sabalenka, who is bidding to become the first woman to claim back-to-back US Open titles since Serena Williams completed a hat-trick of wins in 2014, was made to work hard en route to a 7-5, 6-1 victory over Switzerland's Rebeka Masarova.

Masarova, ranked 108th in the world, pushed Sabalenka out of her comfort zone with a gutsy performance on the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center's main Arthur Ashe Stadium showcourt.

"Happy to get this win and happy to be in the second round. I feel like I didn't start

Happy to get this win and happy to be in the second round. I feel like I didn't start my best in the first games, but then I found my rhythm

ARYNA SABALENKA

my best in the first games, but then I found my rhythm," said Sabalenka, who will face unseeded Russian Polina Kudermetova in the second round.

While Sabalenka advanced safely, Danish 14th seed Clara Tauson tumbled out to Alexandra Eala.

Eala, 20, became the first player from the Philippines to win a Grand Slam singles match with a thrilling 6-3, 2-6, 7-6 (13/11) win, battling back from a 5-1 deficit in the final



Aryna Sabalenka

set to advance.

"I'm super over the moon with what I was able to do today, especially coming back in the third," Eala said.

"It's a very special win for me."

Another player

from Southeast Asia -- Indonesia's Janice Tjen -- also bagged an upset, ousting Russian 24th seed Veronika Kudermetova 6-4, 4-6, 6-4 to move on.

"I feel proud to be able to do this for my country," said Tjen, the first Indonesian since Angelique Widjaja in 2004 to reach the main draw of a Grand Slam singles event.

Tjen, ranked 149th in the world, will face Britain's Emma Raducanu in the second round.

Djokovic off the mark

Raducanu, who made history at Flushing Meadows in 2021 by becoming the first qualifier to lift a Grand Slam title, clinched her first US Open match win since that memorable triumph with a 6-1, 6-2 drubbing of Japan's Ena Shibahara.

"I wanted to win a match here really bad," said Raducanu.

"It's been four years, and it's a very special tournament for

With men's defending champion Jannik Sinner rival Carlos Alcaraz not opening their first-round campaigns until yesterday and Tuesday, all eyes were on the veteran Serbian star Djokovic in Sunday's night session on Ashe.

The 38-year-old showed flashes of brilliance in a 6-1, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 win against his unseeded 19-year-old American opponent

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Alexandra Eala became the first player from the Philippines to win a Grand Slam singles match in the Open Era, saving four match points in her victory

the energy," he told the crowd. "Hopefully I can keep it going."

Fourth seed Taylor Fritz and sixth seed Ben Shelton eased into the second round.

Fritz, last year's beaten finalist and a semi-finalist at Wimbledon last month, won 7-5, 6-2, 6-3 against unseeded compatriot Emilio Nava.

Shelton had a similarly comfortable 6-3, 6-2, 6-4 defeat of Peruvian qualifier Ignacio Buse.

Shelton and Fritz are spearheading US hopes of a first Grand Slam men's singles title since Andy Roddick's victory at the 2003 US Open.

Shelton insisted he was not looking beyond the second round, where he will face Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta.

"As soon as you start looking ahead, you stumble over your own feet. So just one game at a time," he said.

Czech 16th seed Jakub Mensik edged Chile's Nicolas Jarry 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 6-4 and Spanish 18th seed Alejandro Davidovich Fokina breezed past Alexander Shevchenko of Kazakhstan 6-1, 6-1, 6-2.

Italy's 32nd seed Luciano Darderi eliminated Australia's Rinky Hijikata 6-2, 6-1, 6-2.

US Open chaos as Bonzi ousts raging Medvedev



France's Benjamin Bonzi (R) shakes hands with Russia's Daniil Medvedev

France's Benjamin Bonzi sent Russian 13th seed Daniil Medvedev crashing out of the US Open early yesterday in a stormy late-night thriller that boiled over into chaos following an extraordinary third-set flashpoint.

Bonzi advanced to the second round after holding his nerve to win 6-3, 7-5, 6-7 (5/7), 0-6, 6-4 in 3hr 45min.

The match exploded into drama in the third set as Bonzi served at advantage on match

point, leading 5-4 after winning the opening two sets.

After faulting on his first serve, Bonzi prepared to serve again when chair umpire Greg Allensworth suddenly halted play after a photographer mistakenly walked onto the court.

Allensworth called for time after shouting "Not now, get off the court please" before awarding a new first serve to Bonzi on the grounds of a "delay caused by outside interference."

Djokovic voices physical concerns after win

Novak Djokovic fears his lack of physical conditioning may come back to haunt him as he chases a record 25th Grand Slam singles title at the US Open.

Djokovic, who needed a lengthy medical timeout to treat a blister on his right foot between the second and third sets, admitted afterwards he was worried by a sudden loss of stamina during the second set.

"I started great -- just over 20 minutes, first set, I felt really good. Then some long games to start the second set... I really was surprised how bad I was feeling in the second physically," Djokovic said.

"We had long exchanges, but also, I kind of dropped my level and made a lot of unforced errors and kind of got him back into the match. There are positives, but also things that hopefully won't happen in terms of how I felt on the court physically in the second set. It's slightly a concern. I don't know. I don't have any injuries or anything. I just struggled a lot to stay in long exchanges and recover after points," he added.

Djokovic has not played since his defeat in the semifinals at Wimbledon last

month, skipping ATP Masters events in Toronto and Cincinnati to focus all his energy on the US Open.

While there were a few signs of rustiness at times on Sunday, Djokovic also laced his performance with flashes of the brilliance that has been his calling card throughout a glittering career.

Djokovic looked to be a man in a hurry in a scorching start, rattling off winners to take the first set 6-1.

Tien was giving



Novak Djokovic

hope in a laboured second set from Djokovic, but the 19-year-old American could not convert a break point that would have made it one set all.

Instead, Djokovic held serve to make it 5-5 in the second set and reasserted himself to claim the second-set tie break, attacking

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NOVAK DJOKOVIC

the net cleverly and using some sublime variation to pull Tien all over the court.

Djokovic paused for a medical timeout for treatment to his right foot before the third set got under way. The rest appeared to give Djokovic a jolt of energy and he sprinted into a 5-1 lead to leave Tien reeling.

Tien did well to save a match point on Djokovic's serve before breaking for 5-2. But the respite was short-lived as Djokovic again responded emphatically, breaking back immediately to wrap up victory.

Djokovic will face US qualifier Zachary Svajda in the second round.

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