

# Sabalenka and Rybakina to clash again in Miami semi-final

Frenchman Fils saves four match points in epic three-set thriller

● Sabalenka defeats Hailey Baptiste in straight sets

● Rybakina defeats Pegula in three sets

● Lehecka ends qualifier Landaluce's run

AFP | Miami

World number one Aryna Sabalenka and Elena Rybakina on Wednesday booked a blockbuster semi-final at the Miami Open in a rerun of their Melbourne Grand Slam decider.

Defending champion Sabalenka held off big-hitting 45th-ranked American Hailey Baptiste 6-4, 6-4.

World number two Rybakina beat fifth-seeded American Jessica Pegula -- runner-up to Sabalenka last year -- 2-6, 6-3, 6-4.

They will return Thursday at Hard Rock Stadium -- home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins -- to fight for a place in the final.



Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus returns a shot against Hailey Baptiste of the United States

Rybakina beat Sabalenka in a nail-biting Australian Open final in January -- the world number one's only defeat in 2026 -- but the Belarusian avenged it with victory in the Indian Wells final this month.

"We've been playing a lot of matches, recently actually, and

all of them have been a battle, all of them been a show," Sabalenka told the Tennis Channel. "I'm super-excited facing her."

Sabalenka is now two wins away from completing the "Sunshine Double" of Indian Wells and Miami.

Baptiste, playing her first

WTA 1000 quarter-final, failed to convert three break points in Sabalenka's first two service games.

Sabalenka finally broke Baptiste when the American double-faulted on set point.

Sabalenka gained an early break in the second, but Baptiste

broke back and held confidently to level at 4-4.

But as she served at 4-5 to stay in the match, the American opened with three straight double faults. Sabalenka pounced, converting her second match point with a blistering return.

"She really pushed me," Sabalenka said.

"The rhythm, the heaviness of her shots is incredible. I'm super happy that I was able to hold the pressure and to get the win."

She'll now face a familiar foe in Rybakina, who shrugged off a slow start to post her fifth straight win over Pegula -- a streak that includes a semi-final victory at the Australian Open and a quarter-final win at Indian Wells.

Pegula, who won last month's WTA title in Dubai, broke twice to jump to a 4-0 lead and took the opening set in 35 minutes.

But Moscow-born Kazakh Rybakina was finding her rhythm and broke for a 4-2 edge on the way to forcing a third set, gaining control of the decider with an opening break.

"She started playing well, and I was a bit rushing and frustrated, but I'm happy that I managed to

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ARYNA SABALENKA

bounce back and turn it around in the second set," said Rybakina, who is seeded third despite rising to No. 2 in the world for the first time this week.

Fils tops Paul

In the men's draw, 28th-seeded Arthur Fils of France saved four match points on the way to a 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (8/6) victory over 22nd-seeded American Tommy Paul.

Fils trailed 6-2 in the third-set tiebreaker, saving four straight match points before prevailing in two hours and 49 minutes.

"It was a dog fight and I never back down from a fight," Fils said. "Even if I lose, it's OK, I just fought the best that I could."

## Muharraq Dominate Rivals Al Ahli in Semifinal Opener

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

Reigning champions Muharraq cruised to a 90-73 win over Al Ahli in the Zain Bahrain Basketball League semifinal opener at Khalifa Sports City Arena, taking control of the best-of-five series. Under the guidance of German coach Peter Schomers, the Red Wolves are chasing a fifth straight league title and a season treble after already claiming the Khalifa bin Salman Cup and Super Cup.

Muharraq made their dominance clear from the opening tip. Captain Bader Abdulla scored 10 of the team's first 19 points, sparking a 24-9 lead. Wayne Chism dominated the boards, while Mohamed Ameer's inside presence disrupted the Eagles. Al Ahli, led by coach Ahmed Jan, struggled to find rhythm despite Anthony Fairley's energy and Ali Shukralla's rebounding.

Al Ahli fought back in the second quarter. Fairley attacked the basket, and Maitham Jameel hit timely mid-range shots to trim the deficit to 13 by halftime. Schomers' game plan, however, kept Muharraq composed. Mahmood Abbas Isa orchestrated the offense, Nick West drained jumpers, and Ameer continued to control the paint, preventing the Eagles from gaining momentum.

The third quarter was decisive. Muharraq went on a 12-2



Captain Bader Abdulla Malabes in action

run, fueled by West's back-to-back jumpers and Abdulla's three-pointer. Jan's Eagles tried to rally through Sarhan and Jameel, but turnovers and forced shots allowed the four-time champions to maintain a comfortable lead.

In the final quarter, Muharraq focused on closing out the win. Abdulla finished with a team-high 19 points, while Abbas Isa and West added 15 each. Ameer recorded a double-double with 13 points and 10 rebounds, and Chism contributed 11 points and seven boards. For Al Ahli, Fairley led

with 17 points and 10 rebounds; Jameel and Sarhan scored 14 each, while Shukralla grabbed 10 boards. Abbas Isa led the assists with seven, and Fairley added two blocks.

Muharraq's balanced scoring, rebounding dominance, and disciplined defense ensured a 17-point victory and a 1-0 series lead. Game 2 on Sunday will see Jan's Eagles fighting to stay alive.

Earlier last night, Al Najma kept their own championship hopes alive with a win over Manama, setting up another compelling semifinal series.

## Al Najma stun Manama with last-gasp winner

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

Al Najma pulled off a 78-76 victory over Manama last night, sealing a stunning win with a last-second tip-in in their Golden Square semi-final opener of the 2025-26 Zain Bahrain Basketball League.

In a closely contested clash at Khalifa Sports City Arena in Isa Town, the game went down to the wire, with Najma overturning a late deficit to snatch victory in thrilling fashion.

Manama, coached by Bahraini Salman Ramadhan, appeared in control entering the final minutes, holding a lead that stretched to as many as 10 points earlier in the fourth quarter. Behind Ali Jaber and Alex Young, who both finished with 18 points, and Mohammed Buallay, who added 16 points along with 10 rebounds and five assists, Manama looked poised to draw first blood in the best-of-five series.

However, Najma, guided by Tunisian coach Racem Marzougui, refused to back down. Led by a superb 25-point outing from Mohamed Hussain, they chipped away at the deficit with timely shooting and defensive stops. Donovan Smith and Hassan Fahad also played crucial roles, contributing 14 and 13 points respectively, with Fahad pulling down 10 rebounds and adding three blocks inside.



Al Najma's Mohammed Hussain drives to the basket

The final minute proved decisive. Hussain drained a clutch three-pointer to tie the game at 76-76 with under 30 seconds remaining. Manama had a chance to respond but missed on consecutive possessions. Najma capitalised in the closing seconds: Smith grabbed a crucial offensive rebound and converted a tip-in lay-up with just four seconds left, giving his side a two-point lead.

Manama had one final opportunity, but Hasan Nowrooz's three-point attempt at the buzzer missed its mark, sealing Najma's remarkable comeback.

Earlier, the two teams trad-

ed blows throughout the first three quarters. The opening period ended level, and Manama carried a narrow 66-60 advantage into the fourth after edging ahead slightly by halftime. Despite Manama's balanced scoring and strong showing, Najma's resilience and execution in crunch time ultimately proved decisive.

The result gives Najma a 1-0 lead in the series. Game two is set for Sunday, where Ramadhan's Manama will look to respond and keep their title ambitions alive, while Marzougui's Najma aim to build on their momentum.