

Alcaraz through at US Open as Sabalenka, Vondrousova advance

Carlos Alcaraz's impressive win sets up a potential quarter-final rematch with Jannik Sinner

● **Medvedev muscles into US Open third round**

● **Andy Murray lose to Grigor Dimitrov**

AFP | New York

World number one Carlos Alcaraz edged closer to a US Open rematch with Italy's Jannik Sinner on Thursday as Grand Slam winners Aryna Sabalenka and Marketa Vondrousova booked their places in the third round.

Defending champion Alcaraz eased into a last 32 meeting with Britain's Dan Evans after dispatching South Africa's Lloyd Harris 6-3, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) in 2hr 28min on the Arthur Ashe Stadium showcourt.

It means Alcaraz is just two wins away from a potential quarter-final collision with Italian sixth seed Sinner, who continued his serene progress through the draw with a 6-4, 6-2, 6-4 defeat of compatriot Lorenzo Sonego.

Last year, Alcaraz and Sinner produced an epic five-set quarter-final classic that was not completed until 2.50am local time -- the latest ever finish in US Open history.

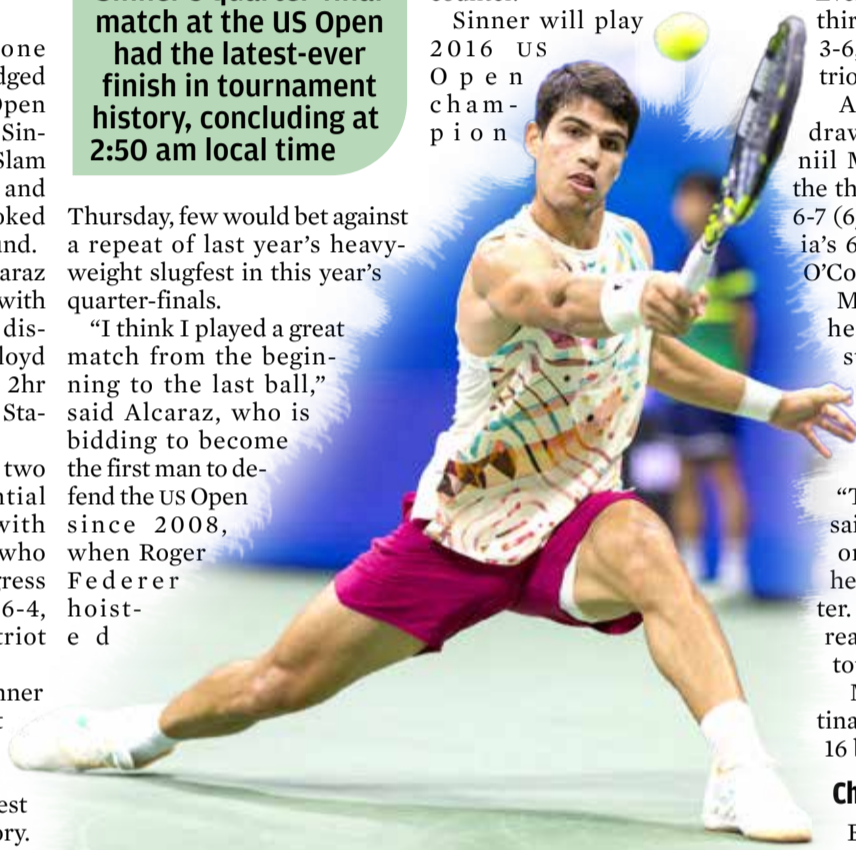
After their performances on



Last year, Alcaraz and Sinner's quarter-final match at the US Open had the latest-ever finish in tournament history, concluding at 2:50 am local time

Thursday, few would bet against a repeat of last year's heavy-weight slugfest in this year's quarter-finals.

"I think I played a great match from the beginning to the last ball," said Alcaraz, who is bidding to become the first man to defend the US Open since 2008, when Roger Federer hoisted



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain returns a ball to Lloyd Harris of South Africa

the trophy for a fifth straight year.

The 22-year-old Sinner meanwhile looks to be firing on all cylinders on the evidence of his second round performance.

The Italian conceded just 10 points on serve without giving Sonego a single break point throughout the 2hr 5min encounter.

Sinner will play 2016 US Open champion

Stan Wawrinka in the third round on Saturday. Wawrinka, 38, rolled back the years to eliminate Argentine No.30 seed Tomas Martin Etcheverry 7-6 (8/6), 6-7 (7/9), 6-3, 6-2.

Germany's 12th seed Alexander Zverev is also potentially lurking in Sinner's path before a quarter-final with Alcaraz.

Zverev booked his place in the third round with a 7-6 (7/1), 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 defeat of compatriot Daniel Altmaier.

Also in Alcaraz's side of the draw is 2021 champion Daniil Medvedev, who reached the third round with a 6-2, 6-2, 6-7 (6/8), 6-2 defeat of Australia's 69th-ranked Christopher O'Connell in a late night match.

Medvedev looked to be heading for a comfortable straight sets win before a wobble -- double-faulting on match point and set point -- took it to a fourth set.

"Tough match," Medvedev said. "I don't know why but one moment in the match he decided to play much better. I don't know why was the reason, but it became much tougher for me."

Medvedev will play Argentina's Sebastian Baez for a last 16 berth on Saturday.

Champions advance

Elsewhere Thursday, Britain's 2012 US Open champion



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DANIIL MEDVEDEV

Andy Murray slumped to a 6-3, 6-4, 6-1 loss to Bulgarian 19th seed Grigor Dimitrov.

Former world number three Dimitrov, who saved three match points in the opening round, meets 2020 runner-up Zverev in the last 32.

While Murray tumbled out, fellow Briton Jack Draper advanced to the third round, upsetting Polish 17th seed Hubert Hurkacz 6-2, 6-4, 7-5 to set up a third round meeting with American wild card Michael Mmoh, who defeated John Isner 3-6, 4-6, 7-6 (7/3), 6-4, 7-6 (10/7) in what was the final game of the big-serving veteran's career.

In the women's draw, another Briton, Jodie Burrage, saw her tournament come to an end after a one-sided defeat to second seed Sabalenka of Belarus, the reigning Australian Open champion. Sabalenka prevailed 6-3, 6-2 in 1hr 14min.

Sabalenka, 25, has reached

the semi-finals or better at the past four Grand Slams and can replace Iga Swiatek as world number one if she matches the Pole's result in New York.

Another of 2023's Grand Slam winners, Wimbledon champion Vondrousova of the Czech Republic, could meet Sabalenka in the semi-finals.

Vondrousova, who made history by becoming the first unseeded woman to win Wimbledon in July, had too much firepower for Italy's Martina Trevisan, winning 6-2, 6-2 in 1hr 20min.

The ninth seed said afterwards she is adjusting to being the hunted rather than the hunter in the wake of her unexpected Wimbledon triumph.

"It's a tough position," Vondrousova said. "I feel like everybody wants to beat me. I'm just happy to be here and play good tennis."

One of the players likely targeting Vondrousova is third seed Jessica Pegula, who was barely troubled on her way to a 6-3, 6-1 win over Patricia Maria Tig of Romania. US hope Pegula, who is seeded to meet Vondrousova in the last eight, faces Ukraine's Elina Svitolina in the next round.

Meanwhile Tunisia's fifth seed Ons Jabeur, struggling with a bout of flu, was put through the grinder in a 7-6 (9/7), 4-6, 6-3 defeat of Czech teenager Linda Noskova.

Rohit says India ready for Pakistan's pace test in Asia Cup

AFP | Kandy

India skipper Rohit Sharma yesterday said his team's experienced batsmen were unfazed by the threat of Pakistan's fast bowlers, ahead of the arch-rivals' blockbuster Asia Cup clash.

Pakistan boast of one of the world's best pace attacks including Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf.

All three made a good start in the opener of the 50-over tournament, a prelude to the upcoming ODI World Cup in India.

Rohit's side will play their opening match of the tournament against Pakistan on Saturday in Pallekele, the first of three potential clashes between the bitter rivals in Sri Lanka.

The captain praised the Pakistan quicks but said his team was ready for the challenge.

"We don't have Shaheen, Naseem and Rauf in the nets," Rohit joked.

"So we practise with the bowlers that we have. But these three are quality bowlers and have performed well in the last few years."

"Pakistan have always had quality bowlers," he added. "Their strength, where they bowl and not bowl, we have seen all that. We will use our years of experience to play against them, as simple as that."

India have a strong batting unit that includes Rohit, Virat



Rohit Sharma (L) and Rahul Dravid (R), of India, take part in a training session



Pace ace Jasprit Bumrah has recently returned to the Indian attack after recovering from an injury and joins fellow quicks Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj

Kohli, Shubman Gill, Shreyas Iyer and Hardik Pandya.

Pace ace Jasprit Bumrah has recently returned to the Indian attack after recovering from an injury and joins fellow quicks Mohammed Shami and Moham-

med Siraj. Rohit played down the comparison between the quicks of the two teams.

"All those six bowlers (from India and Pakistan) are great bowlers. They have proved in world cricket how good they are," he said.

'Game of intensity'

Pakistan, who recently rose to the top of world ODI team rankings, crushed Asia Cup debutants Nepal in the opener in Multan.

Rohit acknowledged the opposition's quality and relished the challenge.

"It (Pakistan) is a good team, they have performed well since the past few years including the T20 World Cup or the 50-over format," said Rohit.

"It will be a good challenge for us to play against such a team and perform. We have prepared well and will execute what we



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ROHIT SHARMA

have worked on."

The two nuclear-armed neighbours play cricket against each other only in international tournaments, due to long-standing political tensions.

India have dominated the limited-overs rivalry in the past decade but Babar Azam's Pakistan has got a few T20 victories in the last two years.

"We are not focussing on the past, but looking to do good in the upcoming matches," said Azam, who remains fresh from his match-winning 151 against Nepal.

"We will try to give our best and carry forward the momentum (from the first win). You know India-Pakistan is always a game of intensity and fans wait for it, so we are also excited for it."

Rain threat looms large over the hotly anticipated clash, with weather agencies predicting moderate-to-heavy showers in Kandy at the weekend.

Union Berlin sign Italy captain Bonucci from Juventus

AFP | Berlin

Union Berlin have signed Italy captain Leonardo Bonucci from Juventus, the Bundesliga club announced yesterday.

"At Union, I have the opportunity to continue playing at the highest level and to support the team on its way in three demanding competitions with my experience" Bonucci said in a statement released by the club.

"I am very much looking forward to this new station in my career."



Leonardo Bonucci

Arriving in the German capital on a free transfer reportedly on a one-year deal the centre-back will help Union as they prepare for their maiden Champions League campaign.

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