

Swiatek extends winning run, to face Gauff in French Open final

Brutal Iga Swiatek destroys Daria Kasatkina to reach Roland Garros final

● **Gauff blitzes Trevisan to reach French Open final**

AFP | Paris

Iga Swiatek romped into her second French Open final yesterday and will face Coco Gauff for the title after the teenager became the youngest Grand Slam finalist since 2004.

World No 1 Swiatek, the 2020 Roland Garros champion, cruised to a dominant 6-2, 6-1 semifinal victory over Russian Daria Kasatkina after just 64 minutes on Court Philippe Chatrier.

That extended her unbeaten streak to 34 matches.

Swiatek will equal Venus Williams' record for the longest women's winning run since 2000 if she beats 18-year-old Gauff, who brushed aside Martina Trevisan 6-3, 6-1, on Saturday.

"I'm so grateful. It's easier to play matches with this kind of support," Swiatek, who won 10 of the last 11 games, said in her on-court interview.



Poland's Iga Swiatek plays a shot against Russia's Daria Kasatkina

"It's surprising this week how much they're supporting me.

"I try to treat every match in the same way because when I think about how it's the biggest match of the season so far, it stresses me out."

It will be the 21-year-old's second major final, as she looks to win a sixth consecutive WTA title.

The Polish star has stormed up the rankings this season, moving from world No 7 to the summit during her remarkable run.

Swiatek hammered 22 winners past her opponent and she

has still lost only one set in the tournament, against Chinese teenager Zheng Qinwen in the fourth round.

Kasatkina, the 20th seed, won her first clash with Swiatek on the Eastbourne grass last year, but has lost all four of their meetings in 2022 in straight sets, without winning more than five games in a match.

Swiatek too strong

After a quick opening hold from Swiatek, both players struggled on serve and traded breaks.

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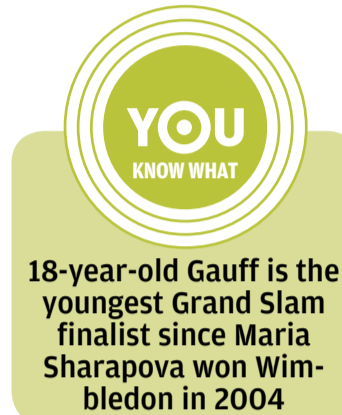
IGA SWIATEK

But Kasatkina was still finding it difficult to live with the consistent groundstrokes of her opponent and slipped 4-2 behind after horribly mishitting what should have been a simple winner at the net wide of the tramlines.

Swiatek had the set wrapped up just minutes later as a backhand return winner sealed a break to love.

Kasatkina managed to cling onto her first service game in the second set, but Swiatek was on a roll and forged 3-1 ahead when Kasatkina blazed long.

That effectively ended the semifinal as a contest, and top seed Swiatek finished it off with a run of five straight games, capped by her first ace on her



first match point.

Gauff sees off erratic Trevisan

Gauff brushed aside Trevisan in a nervous match which saw both players featuring in a major semifinal for the first time.

Gauff is the youngest Grand Slam finalist since Maria Sharapova stunned Serena Williams to win Wimbledon 18 years ago.

"I think I'm a little bit in shock right now," said 2018 junior champion Gauff. I didn't know how to react after the match. I'm lost for words."

The players made 37 unforced errors between them in a poor first set before Gauff upped her

game to race through the second.

The 18th seed will be a heavy underdog against Swiatek, but says she is not feeling the pressure.

"It's a Grand Slam final but there are so many things going on in the world right now, especially in the US, so I don't think it's worth stressing about it," said Gauff, referring to the deadly school shooting in Texas last month, after writing "peace, end gun violence" on a court-side camera.

Gauff, who burst onto the scene by reaching the Wimbledon fourth round as a 15-year-old three years ago, has still not lost a set over the fortnight in Paris.

In Friday's men's semifinals, 13-time champion Rafael Nadal will take on third seed Alexander Zverev before Norwegian Casper Ruud plays Croatia's Marin Cilic.

Second seeds Ena Shibahara and Wesley Koolhof won the mixed doubles title earlier yesterday with a 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 victory over Ulrikke Eikeri of Norway and Belgium's Joran Vliegen.

Messi stars as Argentina beat Italy in Finalissima

● **Argentina on top of the world as Lionel Messi inspires Wembley win over Italy**

● **Messi leads Argentina to second international trophy in a year**

AFP | London

Lionel Messi stole the show as Copa America holders Argentina powered to a 3-0 win against European champions Italy in the Finalissima at Wembley on Wednesday.

Inspired by the peerless Messi, Argentina raced into a two-goal lead in the first half of the prestigious friendly thanks to strikes from Lautaro Martinez and Angel Di Maria.

Paulo Dybala capped Argentina's rout, but after a disappointing season with Paris Saint-Germain by his sky-high standards, it was the sight of Messi back to his imperious best that took the spotlight.

The 34-year-old's eye-catching display featured two assists and was worthy of his rare appearance at one of football's great cathedrals.

It was another memorable moment for Argentina, who have qualified for this year's World Cup as they extend the golden afterglow from the victory over Brazil that ended their 28-year wait to win the Copa America in 2021.

Argentina were already established as one of the leading contenders to win the World



Argentina's Lionel Messi tosses a trophy as he celebrates with his teammates

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What we experienced here was beautiful. We knew it was going to be a nice game and a nice setting in which to be champions

LIONEL MESSI

Cup and defeating Italy was another statement of intent from La Albiceleste, who are now unbeaten in 32 matches.

If Messi can play at this level in Qatar, Lionel Scaloni's side will be a force to be reckoned with as they chase a first World Cup title since 1986.

For Italy, it was a disappointing return to Wembley 11 months after they beat England on penalties in the Euro 2020 final.

Roberto Mancini's team have gone into a steep decline since that memorable triumph.

They failed to qualify for the World Cup after suffering a hu-

The Finalissima is the revival of the CON-MEBOL-UEFA Cup of Champions that has been played only twice before -- in 1985 and 1993

miliating loss to North Macedonia in their play-off semi-final.

Mancini admitted the Finalissima represented the "end of a cycle" for his European champions.

After the World Cup failure, Mancini is transitioning to a younger generation, with the forthcoming Nations League matches against Germany, England and Hungary his real focus.

Ukraine beat Scotland to keep World Cup dream alive

● **Ukraine to face Wales on Sunday**

AFP | Glasgow

Ukraine are one game away from qualifying for the World Cup after beating Scotland 3-1 in a play-off semi-final in Glasgow on Wednesday in their first competitive match since the country was invaded by Russia.

Andriy Yarmolenko, Roman Yaremchuk and Artem Dovbyk scored the goals for Ukraine to set up a play-off final away to Wales on Sunday for a place in Qatar later this year.

The match had been moved from March, just weeks after the war began, to give Ukraine the chance to fulfil the fixture.

Six of the starting line-up for the visitors are still contracted to Ukrainian clubs and had not played competitively for months.

Manchester City's Oleksandr Zinchenko broke down in tears on the eve of the game as he described how much it would mean to take Ukraine to the World Cup.

But they showed no signs of rust or letting the expectation of a nation weigh heavily on their shoulders.

The Ukrainian players entered the field draped in yellow and blue flags before an emotionally-charged national anthem which was applauded from all sides of the stadium.

Among the Ukrainian support, children held up signs saying "stop war."

However, once the action got underway, it was the small band of travelling supporters who



Ukraine's Andriy Yarmolenko, left, scores his side's opening goal

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of the starting line-up for Ukraine are still contracted to Ukrainian clubs and had not played competitively for months

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We played for them, for those who fight with their last drop of blood, for those who suffer every day

UKRAINE COACH OLEKSANDR PETRAKOV

en in eight games, but rarely threatened a response to keep alive their hopes of reaching a first World Cup since 1998.

Manager Steve Clarke tried to turn the tide at half-time by introducing Ryan Christie for the ineffective Lyndon Dykes in attack.

Within four minutes of the restart, Scotland's mountain to climb got even steeper when Benfica striker Yaremchuk headed in Oleksandr Karavayev's cross to the back post.

Scotland finally flickered into life to appease a frustrated sell-out crowd of 50,000 at Hampden Park in the final quarter.

John McGinn somehow headed wide from point-blank range after Georgiy Bushchan spilled Scott McTominay's cross.

had travelled from around the world to see their country who had far more to cheer.

Scotland goalkeeper Craig Gordon kept his side in the game early on.

The Hearts goalkeeper was named player of the year this season in the Scottish Premiership and showed why with stunning saves to deny Viktor Tsygankov and Yarmolenko.

Ukraine's greater poise and technical ability soon told, though, as from Ruslan Malinovskyi's through ball, Yarmolenko's perfect control allowed him to lob the onrushing Gordon to make it 1-0 just after the half-hour mark.

Scotland had been unbeat-