

Sports

Medvedev faces Dutch qualifier in US Open quarter-finals

Alcaraz youngest men's quarter-finalist since 1963

NEW YORK: Russian second seed Daniil Medvedev marched into the US Open quarter-finals on Sunday, where a shock Dutch qualifier will try to deny him a third straight trip to the New York semi-finals. Medvedev defeated British 24th seed Daniel Evans 6-3, 6-4, 6-3, making his fourth trip to the last eight in the past five Grand Slams as he chases his first Slam title.

Medvedev, who lost this year's Australian Open final to Novak Djokovic and the 2019 US Open final to Rafael Nadal, has not dropped a set in four matches. "Now I just want to make it to the finals again to have another thing to remember, and hopefully a better one," Medvedev said.

Medvedev next faces 117th-ranked Botic Van de Zandschulp, who outlasted Argentine 11th seed Diego Schwartzman 6-3, 6-4, 5-7, 5-7, 6-1 in four hours and 20 minutes. "I don't really have words for it," Van de Zandschulp said. "Played so many matches. Some of them I was on the brink of defeat, but I pulled through and won them."

He also matched the best showing by any US Open qualifier, last-eight runs by Frenchman Nicolas Pietrangeli in 1999 and Gilles Muller of Luxembourg in 2008. "First time for me in America and it feels great," said Van de Zandschulp, who wondered how his homeland was reacting to his run. "No one expected me to reach the quarter-finals," he said. "I think they are amazed and hopefully proud."

An Evans double fault handed Medvedev a break for a 3-1 lead and the Russian held three times to take the first set. After trading second-set breaks to 3-3, the Russian broke at love in the seventh game and held out from there.

In the third set, Medvedev broke on a forehand

winner in the third game and took the final eight points, holding and breaking at love for the match. There are only nine seeds among the men's last 16 — the fewest to get this far at a Slam since nine at Wimbledon in 2013, and at a US Open since eight in 2005.

Fernandez ousts Kerber

Canadian teen Leylah Fernandez followed her shock upset of 2020 US Open winner Naomi Osaka by defeating German 16th seed and three-time Grand Slam champion Angelique Kerber 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2. "I just tried to use all my trainings from back home," Fernandez said. "They told me take it point by point. I was glad I was able to execute it."

Seven of the top nine women's seeds reached the last 16, with Osaka and top-ranked Wimbledon champion Ashleigh Barty exiting early. Fernandez, who turned 19 yesterday, advanced to a first Slam quarter-final against Tokyo Olympic bronze medalist Elina Svitolina, the fifth seed from Ukraine.

Svitolina, who turns 27 next Sunday, beat two-time major winner Simona Halep 6-3, 6-3 to reach her eighth Grand Slam quarter-final. Svitolina, coming off a WTA title in Chicago, stretched her win streak to nine matches. "That's going to be a very tough match," Fernandez said. "She returns a lot of balls. She's aggressive. I'm just going to go on court and try to keep doing what I've been doing."

Second seed Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus, who made a Slam-best run to July's Wimbledon semi-finals, eliminated Belgian 15th seed Elise Mertens 6-4, 6-1. Sabalenka will next face Czech eighth seed Barbora Krejčíková, the reigning French Open champion who held on to beat two-time Grand Slam



NEW YORK: Russia's Daniil Medvedev hits a return to Britain's Daniel Evans during their 2021 US Open Tennis tournament men's singles fourth round match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York on Sunday. —AFP

champion Garbine Muguruza 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

Krejčíková led a set and two service breaks before Muguruza rallied. But the Spaniard could not convert three set points in the 10th game of the second set and Krejčíková then came back strong after a medical timeout off the court to treat what she told the umpire was trouble with her diaphragm.

Muguruza, apparently annoyed by the time Krejčíková took between points during the remainder of the match, offered a chilly handshake at the net and departed before Krejčíková, breathing hard, made her way from the court escorted by a trainer

and doctor. Spanish 18-year-old Carlos Alcaraz, who upset Greek third seed Stefanos Tsitsipas, reached his first Slam quarter-final by downing 141st-ranked German qualifier Peter Gojowczyk 5-7, 6-1, 5-7, 6-2, 6-0.

Alcaraz, ranked 55th, is the youngest US Open men's quarter-finalist since Brazilian Thomaz Koch in 1963. The Spaniard will face Canadian 12th seed Felix Auger-Aliassime, who beat American Frances Tiafoe 4-6, 6-2, 7-6 (8/6), 6-4, with one of the two assured of playing his first Grand Slam semi-final. —AFP

Pakistan cricket head coach Misbah resigns in blow to World Cup plans

LAHORE: Pakistan cricket head coach Misbah-ul-Haq resigned yesterday, citing family concerns and bio-bubble restrictions in a move that leaves team preparations for next month's World Cup in tatters. The 47-year-old, who took over as head coach in September 2019, said he had made the decision while undergoing mandatory quarantine after testing positive for COVID-19 following Pakistan's tour of the West Indies last week.

"The quarantine time provided me with an opportunity to reflect on the past 24 months, future commitments and bio-bubble environment and on considering that I made the decision," Misbah said in a statement released by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB). Misbah admitted the timing of his decision — which came as Pakistan named a 15-man squad for the Twenty20 World Cup to be held in the United Arab Emirates next month — "may not be ideal".

"But I don't think I am in the right frame of mind for the upcoming challenges and it makes sense for someone fresh to step in and take the side forward," he said. Bowling coach Waqar Younis also resigned yesterday, saying Misbah's decision had prompted him to step down.

"After Misbah shared with me his decision and future plans, it was a straightforward one for me to resign as we had walked into the roles together, had worked collectively as a pair and now also step down together," Waqar, a legendary former fast bowler, was quoted as saying in the PCB release.

Misbah, appointed chief selector in 2019 before leaving the post after a year, coached Pakistan in 16 Tests, with the team winning seven, losing six and drawing three. Under him Pakistan managed to win six of their 11 ODIs, with four losses and one no result, as well as secure 16 wins in 34 Twenty20 internationals, losing 13 and five no results. —AFP

Cantlay edges Rahm for US Tour Championship, \$15 million playoffs payout

WASHINGTON: Patrick Cantlay held off top-ranked Jon Rahm to win the US PGA Tour Championship Sunday and claim the \$15 million FedEx Cup playoffs top prize. Cantlay two-putted for birdie at the par-five 18th to cap a one-under-par 69 that gave him a 21-under-par total and a one-shot victory over Spain's Rahm, who made the second birdie of his two-under 68 at the final hole to finish on 20-under. "I played great today. It hasn't even sunk in yet," Cantlay said. "I just kept telling myself to focus and lock in and I did a great job of that today."

While Cantlay had said throughout that he was trying to approach each round as usual and tune out the prospect of a monster payday, he admitted

Tennis star shares abusive social media posts

WASHINGTON: American tennis player Sloane Stephens has become the latest prominent athlete to share the personal burden of what she said were the relentless and "exhausting" attacks she receives on social media. "I am human," Stephens said on Instagram a day after being inundated by more than 2,000 "messages of abuse/anger" following a third-round loss to Germany's Angelique Kerber at the US Open.

"It's so hard to read messages like these, but I'll post a few so you guys can see what it's like," said Stephens, who voiced her concerns just as a number of other Black female athletes have also recently spoken out about the mental health toll high-pressure sports can take. One of the abusive messages read: "I promise to find you and destroy your leg so hard that you can't walk anymore @sloanestephens!... I hope you enjoyed your last

Bottas to join Alfa Romeo as Russell set for Mercedes

PARIS: Valtteri Bottas has signed a multi-year deal with Alfa Romeo starting next season, the Formula One team announced yesterday, paving the way for George Russell to join Lewis Hamilton at Mercedes. "A new chapter in my racing career is opening: I'm excited to join Alfa Romeo Racing for 2022 and beyond for what is going to be a new challenge with an iconic manufacturer," Bottas said in a statement.

Bottas, 32, has spent the past five seasons alongside seven-time world champion Hamilton at Mercedes, having replaced Nico Rosberg, who retired after winning the 2016 title. The Finn has won nine Grands Prix and claimed 17 pole positions in 92 starts with the team, but has not consistently been able to challenge Hamilton.

Bottas finished second in the world championship the past two seasons but is a distant third this year.

that it wasn't just another week. "It was tough," he said. "It was definitely different than any other week. It was the longest lead I've ever held. But I just tried to stay, day after day in the present, and I did an amazing job of that this week because the last couple days I made some mistakes I don't usually make and I was able to really center myself and hit a lot of good shots when I needed to."

Cantlay came into the tournament stacked to a two-shot lead — and a four-stroke advantage over Rahm — under the staggered scoring system that awarded the 30 starters strokes based on their place in the playoff standings. He led every day, with Rahm pushing hard but unable to get past him.

Cantlay's third bogey of the day at the par-four 17th saw his lead shrink to one, the American doing well to limit the damage after going right off the tee from where his second shot bounced through the green. He responded with a booming drive up the middle of the fairway at the par-five 18th, where he two-putted for birdie from 11 feet.

Rahm pushed to the bitter end, his second shot at

moments on court today."

Stephens, who won the US Open in 2017 and once ranked No. 3 in the world, commented: "This type of hate is so exhausting and never-ending. This isn't talked about enough, but it freaking sucks." Her comments came in the wake of intense attention to four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka, who withdrew from the French Open and skipped Wimbledon this year over mental health issues she said were exacerbated by the harsh light of media attention.

Osaka's case increased public awareness of the mental-health challenges facing professional athletes, particularly women and athletes of color. Osaka, after suffering a stunning upset loss at the US Open on Friday to Canadian teen Leylah Fernandez, said she was taking an indefinite break from tennis.

Former junior world champion Taylor Townsend, who is African American, said in a video on CNN that she had also received harassing social-media messages, calling her "a piece of s—" and criticizing her for "my body image, my race, my skin color."

Stephens, meanwhile, said she also received many positive messages, for which she was thankful. "I'm happy to have people in my corner who sup-

port me," she told CNN. "I'm choosing positive vibes over negatives ones... but it's not always smiles and roses." On Sunday she wrote on Instagram that she hopes "this conversation continues" while thanking fans for their "kind and thoughtful messages." —AFP

His last win came at the Russian Grand Prix in September 2020.

"I am proud of what I have achieved (at Mercedes) and I am fully focused on finishing the job as we fight for another world championship," said Bottas. "But I am also looking forward to the new challenges that await me next year."

Bottas will effectively replace compatriot Kimi Raikkonen at Alfa Romeo. The 2007 world champion is retiring from the sport at the end of the campaign. "The potential of the setup is clear and I am relishing the opportunity to help lead the team forward up the grid," said Bottas. "Especially with the new regulations in 2022 giving the team a chance to make a leap in performance." Alfa Romeo have picked up just three points through 13 races this season and are ninth in the constructors' championship.

"With (Bottas), we bring to Hinwil a strong team player with experience at the sharp end of the grid," said Alfa Romeo team boss Frederic Vasseur. "Valtteri has been an integral part of a team that rewrote the history books and he has four constructors' world titles to his name: he is the right driver to help Alfa Romeo Racing make a step forward towards the front of the grid."

18 tracking the pin only to bounce through the green and into the greenside rough from where he got up and down for birdie. Rahm's only other birdie was a tap-in at the fifth hole.

"A couple shots I keep going back, that stretch of 10, 11, 12, I was in position to put a little bit of pressure and I just didn't," Rahm said. "But at the same time, I shot my lowest score ever for four days on this golf course, which has usually been a challenge for me."

In fact, Rahm's 72-hole total of 266 was actually three shots lower than Cantlay's 269. But the Spaniard went into the event four adrift in the staggered start system. Asked if he felt "in his heart of hearts" that he had won the tournament, Rahm said "No. Because I didn't," he said. "That's the reason why we have this system we have. In scoring when they show you the sheets and points, it felt really weird to have this feeling of disappointment of not winning on a day you are making \$5 million. Then I'm thinking, you know, yeah, I gave it my all. It wasn't enough." —AFP



NEW YORK: USA's Sloane Stephens looks at her racket during her 2021 US Open Tennis tournament women's singles third round match against Germany's Angelique Kerber at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York, on Friday. —AFP

port me," she told CNN. "I'm choosing positive vibes over negatives ones... but it's not always smiles and roses." On Sunday she wrote on Instagram that she hopes "this conversation continues" while thanking fans for their "kind and thoughtful messages." —AFP



SPIELBERG: In this file photo taken on June 27, 2021 third placed Mercedes' Finnish driver Valtteri Bottas looks on after the Formula One Styrian Grand Prix at the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria. —AFP

Mercedes are expected to announce the arrival of Russell from Williams in the coming days. Russell, 23, has spent three seasons at Williams, and impressed in a one-off appearance for Mercedes at last year's Sakhir Grand Prix as a stand-in for Hamilton after he tested positive for COVID-19. —AFP



ATLANTA: Patrick Cantlay of the United States celebrates with the FedEx Cup after winning during the final round of the TOUR Championship at East Lake Golf Club on Sunday in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP