

# Record crowds witness top seeds advance in Australia

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Another day, another record crowd. Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka and Carlos Alcaraz advanced in straight sets Wednesday and the No. 3 seeds — Coco Gauff and Alexander Zverev — also progressed to the third round of the Australian Open.

The combined numbers for day and night sessions, 103,720 fans, set a full-day record for the third time in four days of the main draw at the season-opening major, which has become a festival of tennis.

Two-time Australian Open champion Sabalenka opened Day 4 with a 6-3, 6-1 win over Bai Zhouxuan on Rod Laver Arena, and Gauff beat left-hander Olga Danilovic 6-2, 6-2 at Margaret Court Arena.

Alcaraz fended off Yannick Hanfmann 7-6 (4), 6-3, 6-2 in an afternoon encounter on the center court, and then reflected on his own performance and on his golf outing with Roger Federer.

“I didn’t see myself playing that good but then talking to my team, I realized that I played better than I thought,” he said of his tough outing against the free-hitting Hanfmann. “I’m still getting used to the conditions, getting used to playing better.”

Alcaraz, 22, is trying to win his first title at Melbourne Park to become the youngest man to complete a career Grand Slam.

Zverev, who lost last year’s final here to Jannik Sinner, had to wait through a half-hour rain delay and concern over a sore left ankle before beating Alexandre Muller 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

He was leading the fourth set 2-1 and serving at 15-0 when he had to halt the match and sit in a court-side chair for treatment.

“I took a painkiller. It was fine after that,” he said. “I was a bit scared because it was toward the Achilles tendon. I just wanted the

physio to check it out. After the medical timeout I was moving fine, playing fine.”

He was playing a night match on John Cain Arena, the third of Melbourne Park’s arenas with a retractable roof, where only ground pass tickets are needed for entry. So on a day with a massive crowd, it was still full late.

“The atmosphere is insane. The crowd is wild,” he said. “I love playing here.”

Local hope Alex de Minaur beat Hamad Medjedovic 6-7 (5), 6-2, 6-2, 6-1 on Rod Laver Arena around the same time.

“I weathered the storm. He was hitting the ball really big and deep,” said de Minaur, who is aiming to end a long drought for Aussie men at the home Grand Slam event. “I’m super happy to battle my way through.”

He next faces No. 29 Frances Tiafoe, who beat Francisco Comesana 6-4, 6-3, 4-6, 6-2.

## Women’s draw

Sabalenka won the Australian Open in 2023 and 2024 and was the runner-up a year ago against Madison Keys. She is after her fifth Grand Slam title and has two trophies at the U.S. Open.

She raced to a 5-0 lead but then needed seven set points to take the first set against the defensive-minded Bai, who used clever drop shots to help her stay in the match.

Sabalenka will next face Anastasia Potapova, who ousted former U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu 7-6 (3), 6-2.

Teenagers Mirra Andreeva (No. 8), Victoria Mboko (17) and Iva Jovic (29) advanced to the third round.

The 12th-seeded Elina Svitolina defeated Linda Klimovicova 7-5, 6-1 a day after her husband, Gael Monfils, said goodbye at Melbourne Park in his retirement year.

Zeynep Sönmez of Turkey, who

was highly praised during her first-round match Sunday for assisting an ill ballkid, advanced 6-2, 6-4 over Anna Bondar.

“I really appreciated there were many Turkish people, and I felt like I was at home,” she said. “At first I couldn’t even hear my own thoughts. It was very, very loud.”

## Men’s draw

Former U.S. Open winner and 11th-seeded Daniil Medvedev beat Quentin Halys 6-7 (9), 6-3, 6-4, 6-2, 13th-seeded Andrey Rublev beat Jaime Faria 6-4, 6-3, 4-6, 7-5 and 19th-seeded Tommy Paul defeated Thiago Agustin Tirante 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

No. 10 Alexander Bublik, No. 25 Learner Tien and No. 26 Cameron Norrie progressed along with No. 14 Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, who won the first two sets but then had to struggle to beat big-serving American Reilly Opelka 6-3, 7-6 (3), 5-7, 4-6, 6-4.

# Bellinger stays with Yankees; Bichette finalizes deal with Mets

NEW YORK —Cody Bellinger became the last of the top free-agent hitters to reach a deal, agreeing Wednesday to stay with the New York Yankees for a \$162.5 million, five-year contract, a person familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the agreement was subject to a successful physical.

Bellinger gets a \$20 million signing bonus payable on April 1, \$32.5 million in the first two seasons, \$25.8 million in the next two and \$25.9 million in 2030. He also has a full no-trade provision.

Bellinger has the right to opt out after the 2027 or 2028 seasons to become a free agent again, but if there is a work stoppage that leads to no games

being played in 2027, the agreement specifies the opt outs will shift to after the 2027 and 2028 seasons.

A two-time All-Star acquired by the Yankees from the Chicago Cubs in December 2024, Bellinger hit .272 with 29 homers and 98 RBIs last year — including .302 with 18 homers and 55 RBIs at Yankee Stadium. A left-handed hitter, he played in 149 games in the outfield and seven at first base in his first season since 2022 without a stint on the injured list.

He is a son of former Yankee Clay Bellinger.

Voted the 2017 National League Rookie of the Year and 2019 NL MVP, Bellinger has a .261 average with 225 homers and 695 RBIs in eight seasons with the Los Angeles

Dodgers (2018-22), Cubs (2023-24) and the Yankees.

He earned \$57.5 million from the \$80 million, three-year contract he reached with the Cubs before the 2024 season. Bellinger declined a \$25 million option for 2026 in favor of a \$5 million buyout.

## Bichette, Mets finalize deal

NEW YORK — Bo Bichette and the New York Mets finalized their \$126 million, three-year contract on Tuesday night.

The sides agreed to terms last week, subject to a successful physical. Bichette spurned the NL East rival Philadelphia Phillies to sign with the Mets and was introduced by the team Wednesday during a news con-

ference at Citi Field.

He gets a \$40 million signing bonus payable March 15, a \$2 million salary this year and has \$42 million player options for 2027 and 2028. If he declines either option, he would receive a \$5 million buyout, payable in \$1 million installments each July 1 from 2036-40.

A two-time All-Star shortstop with the Toronto Blue Jays, Bichette will move to third base with the Mets, who have Francisco Lindor at shortstop. Bichette has never played a professional game at the hot corner.

“Throughout his career, Bo has distinguished himself as one of the best pure right-handed hitters in baseball,” Mets president of baseball operations David Stearns said in a

news release announcing the deal.

“He possesses the rare combination of elite bat-to-ball (skills) and power that will impact our lineup. Beyond his on-field skills, Bo has earned the reputation as one of the most intense competitors in our sport. We’re excited to add him to our team and believe he fits our organization very well.”

About two hours later, the busy Mets acquired center fielder Luis Robert Jr. from the Chicago White Sox in a trade for infielder Luisangel Acuña and minor league pitcher Truman Pauley.

Bichette gets a full no-trade provision. His \$42 million average annual value ties for the sixth-highest in baseball history.

## THE DAILY SCOREBOARD

NFL PLAYOFFS									
Wild-card Playoffs									
Saturday, Jan. 10									
L.A. Rams 34, Carolina 31									
Chicago 31, Green Bay 27									
Sunday, Jan. 11									
Buffalo 27, Jacksonville 24									
San Francisco 23, Philadelphia 19									
New England 16, L.A. Chargers 3									
Monday, Jan. 12									
Houston 30, Pittsburgh 6									
Divisional Playoffs									
Saturday, Jan. 17									
Denver 33, Buffalo 30, OT									
Seattle 41, San Francisco 6									
Sunday, Jan. 18									
New England 28, Houston 16									
L.A. Rams 20, Chicago 17, OT									
Conference Championships									
Sunday, Jan. 25									
AFC									
New England at Denver, 3 p.m. (CBS/Paramount+)									
NFC									
L.A. Rams at Seattle, 6:30 p.m. (FOX)									
Super Bowl LIX									
Sunday, Feb. 8									
At Santa Clara.									
Conference Championships winners, 6:30 p.m. (NBC/Peacock)									

NHL STANDINGS

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Tampa Bay	48	31	13	4	66	170	121
Detroit	51	31	16	4	66	159	154
Montreal	50	28	15	7	63	172	167
Buffalo	49	27	17	5	59	163	153
Boston	50	28	20	2	58	166	156
Toronto	50	24	17	9	57	166	166
Florida	48	25	20	3	53	146	160
Ottawa	49	23	19	7	53	163	164

Metropolitan

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Carolina	50	31	15	4	66	173	145
N.Y. Islanders	49	27	17	5	59	145	137
Pittsburgh	48	23	14	11	57	156	147
Philadelphia	48	23	17	8	54	143	150
Washington	50	24	20	6	54	159	148
New Jersey	50	26	22	2	54	131	151
Columbus	49	22	20	7	51	149	164
N.Y. Rangers	51	21	24	6	48	138	159

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Central

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Colorado	47	34	5	8	76	190	112
Dallas	50	28	13	9	65	169	141
Minnesota	51	28	14	9	65	164	147
Utah	49	25	20	4	54	153	135
Nashville	49	23	22	4	50	141	166
Chicago	49	20	22	7	47	135	154
Winnipeg	49	20	23	6	46	147	151
St. Louis	50	19	23	8	46	121	171

Pacific

	GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	48	24	12	12	60	161	147
Edmonton	51	25	18	8	58	171	160
Anaheim	49	25	21	3	53	163	175
San Jose	49	25	21	3	53	153	173
Los Angeles	49	20	16	13	53	129	139
Seattle	48	21	18	9	51	133	147
Calgary	49	21	23	5	47	127	145
Vancouver	49	16	28	5	37	129	180

NOTE: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss. Top three teams in each division and two wild cards per conference advance to playoffs.

Tuesday's Games

Tampa Bay 4, San Jose 1  
Ottawa 4, Columbus 1  
Montreal 4, Minnesota 3  
Dallas 6, Boston 2  
Winnipeg 3, St. Louis 1  
Buffalo 5, Nashville 3  
New Jersey 2, Edmonton 1  
Los Angeles 4, N.Y. Rangers 3

Wednesday's Games

Detroit 2, Toronto 1, OT  
Anaheim at Colorado, late  
Philadelphia at Utah, late  
N.Y. Islanders at Seattle, late  
Pittsburgh at Calgary, late  
Washington at Vancouver, late

Thursday's Games

Buffalo at Montreal, 7 p.m.  
Chicago at Carolina, 7 p.m.  
Dallas at Columbus, 7 p.m.  
Vegas at Boston, 7 p.m.  
Florida at Winnipeg, 8 p.m.  
Ottawa at Nashville, 8 p.m.  
Pittsburgh at Edmonton, 9 p.m.  
Detroit at Minnesota, 9:30 p.m.

Friday's Games

Tampa Bay at Chicago, 7 p.m.  
Vegas at Toronto, 7 p.m.  
St. Louis at Dallas, 8 p.m.  
Philadelphia at Colorado, 9 p.m.  
Washington at Calgary, 9 p.m.  
Anaheim at Seattle, 10 p.m.  
N.Y. Rangers at San Jose, 10 p.m.  
New Jersey at Vancouver, 10 p.m.

Saturday's Games

Buffalo at N.Y. Islanders, 1 p.m.  
Utah at Nashville, 3:30 p.m.  
Carolina at Ottawa, 7 p.m.  
Detroit at Winnipeg, 7 p.m.  
Montreal at Boston, 7 p.m.  
Tampa Bay at Columbus, 7 p.m.  
Los Angeles at St. Louis, 8 p.m.  
Florida at Minnesota, 9 p.m.  
Washington at Edmonton, 10 p.m.