Last in, first through - Rybakina closes the season in style.

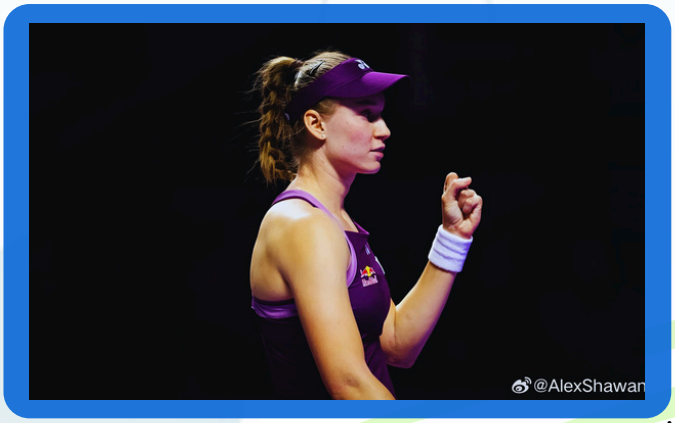
Elena Rybakina came to Riyadh as the last player to qualify. She left with the biggest title of her season, the richest single event prize in women's tennis, and a claim as Asia's leading name. In a week where every match was tough, she didn't lose once, finished it by beating World No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka 6–3 7–6(0).

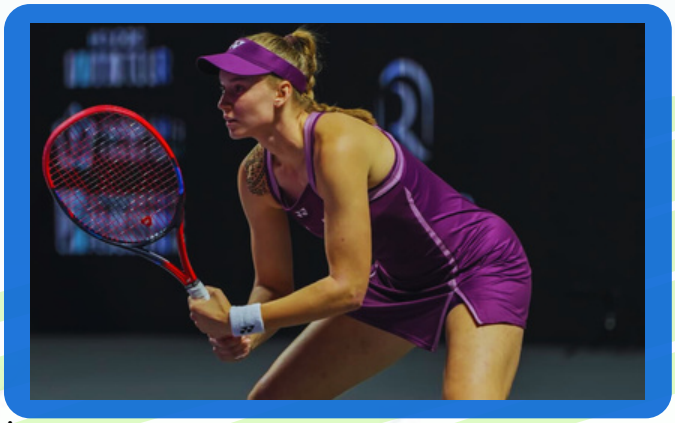
It didn't happen overnight. She made a late, steady push. Two weeks before Riyadh she was still chasing a place. Then she won the WTA 500 in Ningbo, flew to Tokyo, and clinched qualification with a tough quarterfinal. The travel was heavy, the schedule tight, but the wins kept coming. She carried that form straight into Riyadh

In the Serena Williams group, Rybakina beat three very different opponents. Amanda Anisimova, Iga Swiatek, and late substitute Ekaterina Alexandrova, to reach her first WTA Finals semifinal. She then got past Jessica Pegula and finished the week by overshadowing Sabalenka to lift the trophy. The pattern stayed the same all week. Big first serve, first strike, typical Rybakina style. When rallies stretched, she kept it deep and flat and took time away.

Since her 2022 Wimbledon breakthrough, she has become the most visible face of Asian women's tennis on the big stages. In this season, she won in Ningbo earlier in the Asian swing, then finished the year by taking the title in Riyadh and that run lifted her to No. 5.

Elena Rybakina's rise has been steady. Born in Moscow, she has played for Kazakhstan since 2018. She worked her way up through ITF events in early 2019–20. She has built her game on a big first serve and flat, early hits, and broke through by winning Wimbledon in 2022. It was Kazakhstan's first singles Grand Slam. And in early 2023, she proved it wasn't a fluke in 2022. She has finished as the runner-up at the Australian Open 2023, won WTA 1000 titles at Indian Wells and Rome, and a climb to WTA No. 3 for the first time on her career. She has won everywhere - on hard, clay, and grass. The last two years had some dips and off court noise, but her basics stayed the same. Big serve under pressure, stay calm, play her best on big days. In 2025 she won Strasbourg, Ningbo during the Asian swing and then the WTA Finals in Riyadh, moving back up to No. 5. Taken together, her career shows a consistent, big-match player and a clear flag bearer for Asian women's tennis





The numbers around the final tell their own story. Rybakina won every match in Riyadh and earned $5.235 million for an undefeated run, the largest single event prize ever won by a tennis player. The figure set a new benchmark and will stay in the record books for a while.

There was also a moment that said something about who she is off the court. During the ceremony, Rybakina chose not to pose next to WTA CEO Portia Archer. She didn't spell out a reason. But it came after a season in which the WTA banned her coach, Stefano Vukov, for breaching the code of conduct. A decision later overturned in August.

Earlier in the year, Rybakina had said she didn't agree with "a lot of things with WTA". Vukov, who denied any wrongdoing, was back in her box in Riyadh. Rybakina kept her answer brief, "the chance to talk was there, but in the end it never happened". And she answered everything with her fierce tennis.

The Finals in Riyadh come at the very end of the year and reward simple, repeatable tennis indoors. Rybakina brought exactly that. She arrived late, served her way out of tight games, took the ball early, and stayed calm when the set got close. In an eight player field where every match feels like a final, her simple plan worked eventually.

It matters for Asian tennis, too. From Beijing to Tokyo, From Chennai to Riyadh, the region stayed in the news all year, and Rybakina gave it the perfect closing line. Last to qualify, first into the semis, champion in the end. She wasn't the favorite when the week began. She was the winner when it ended.