

WTA Finals : Rybakina Finds Form When It Matters



It felt like the spark of her season had travelled with her. Elena Rybakina came to Riyadh as the last qualifier and played like a front runner. The big test was the 2nd seed Iga Swiatek. Rybakina lost the first set, then took over, 3-6 6-1 6-0 winning 12 of the last 13 games. The serve hit its spots, the depth pushed Swiatek back, and the match turned quickly.

“Mentally, I am happy that I stayed focused. I got some confidence in the second set and everything was going my way,” she said. In two hours of calm, clean hitting, a slow start became a statement. That win set up her week. The belief stayed. She beats Amanda Anisimova, then finished the group with a steady 6-4 6-4 over Ekaterina Alexandrova, who stepped in for the unwell Keys. Three wins from three, and a place in the WTA Finals semifinals from the Serena Williams Group.

Anisimova has been the other story in this group. She came back from a set and a break down to beat Madison Keys, then beat Iga Swiatek 6-7(3) 6-4 6-2 in a straight decider for the last semifinal spot. It's her first WTA Finals, and she's shown she belongs.

Across in the Stefanie Graf Group, the final round robin ties will decide the other two semi-finalists, with Aryna Sabalenka facing defending champion Coco Gauff and Jessica Pegula playing Jasmine Paolini. The margins are tiny. One slip and you are out, one surge and you are through.

Rybakina is the only Asian singles player at this WTA Finals. She got here the hard way. She sealed her spot late. Won Ningbo, kept the run going in Tokyo and then flew to Riyadh with real rhythm. Her game remains simple. Big first serve, first hit, no fuss.

Riyadh felt like a different kind of finish to the year. Louder crowd, quick indoor courts, night sessions where Rybakina won the show and kept winning. Now she waits for the semifinal with momentum on her side. The draw is down to those who have earned it. Whatever comes next, this week already stands out in her season. Last in, first through, and hot favourite in the run.

