# Australian Open: Osaka, Rybakina and in-form Bublik lead Asia's challenge

With the Australian Open getting underway on Monday, Asian players arrive at Melbourne Park carrying a mix of pedigree, promise and renewed ambition, hoping to make a deep imprint at the first Grand Slam of the season.

On the women's side, Asia's biggest spotlight will once again fall on Naomi Osaka, the two-time Australian Open champion, who opens against Croatia's Antonia Ruzic.

Osaka has shown encouraging signs in the lead-up events, gradually rediscovering her rhythm and competitive sharpness after an injury-interrupted comeback season. Melbourne remains her most successful hunting ground, and if her serve and baseline game click, she is again capable of unsettling the top seeds.

Another major Asian hope is Elena Rybakina, the Kazakhstan-born Wimbledon champion, who begins against Slovenia's Kaja Juvan. Rybakina's powerful game is well-suited to the fast Australian hard courts and she comes in with solid results from the early-season swing, underlining her status as a genuine title contender.

China's women continue to add depth to the Asian challenge. Zhang Shuai, Yue Yuan, Wang Xinyu and Bai Zhuoxuan face tough first-round tests.

However, Asia will miss one of its brightest stars as Qinwen Zheng has been forced to pull out of the tournament, a significant setback after her strong 2024 season and rapid rise at the top level.

There is also interest around emerging names such as Japan's Mai Hontama and Thailand's Mananchaya Sawangkaew, who are gaining experience at the biggest stage, while the presence of young Filipino talent Alex Eala underlines the growing geographical spread of Asian women's tennis.

In the men's draw, Asia's leading charge will be spearheaded by Alexander Bublik and Alexander Shevchenko of Kazakhstan, along with China's trailblazers Zhang Zhizhen, Shang Juncheng, Bu Yunchaokete and Wu Yibing.

Bublik arrives in strong form after capturing the Hong Kong Open title in the lead-up to Melbourne, showcasing the big-serving power and aggressive all-court game that can trouble any opponent on a good day. His confidence from that victory gives Asian fans a genuine reason to believe he can produce standout wins in Melbourne.

Zhang, who made history with his ATP Tour breakthrough last season, faces a demanding opener but has shown in the build-up events that he can compete consistently against top-30 opponents.

Youngster Shang continues to be watched closely after a steady transition from junior promise to the main tour, while Japan's Shintaro Mochizuki and Rei Sakamoto add further depth to the Asian contingent.

Overall, Asia enters the Australian Open with realistic hopes of second-week representation and the belief that its leading names can challenge the established order.

With Osaka and Rybakina carrying the biggest title expectations, and Bublik's recent Hong Kong triumph injecting extra momentum into the men's side, Melbourne Park once again presents an important stage for Asian tennis to underline its steady rise on the global map.