Rybakina completes New York coronation, dethrones Sabalenka to become US Open champion and world No. 1

NEW YORK: Elena Rybakina arrived at the US Open with a question mark hanging over her fitness and left Flushing Meadows having answered the biggest question in women's tennis.

The 27-year-old Kazakh defeated two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka 6-4, 5-7, 6-2 in a compelling US Open final on Saturday to claim her maiden title at Flushing Meadows, complete a remarkable rise to world No. 1 and secure the third Grand Slam crown of her career.

Rybakina had already secured the No. 1 ranking by reaching the semifinals, becoming the **30th woman in WTA history** to reach the summit and the first player, male or female, from Kazakhstan to occupy the top spot.

But she was not satisfied with simply taking the ranking from Sabalenka.

She went one step further, taking away the Belarusian's crown in New York as well.

Sabalenka had arrived seeking a third successive US Open title, a feat last achieved by Serena Williams between 2012 and 2014 and previously accomplished by Chris Evert. Instead, Rybakina ended her 19-match winning streak at Flushing Meadows and denied her a place alongside those legends.

For Rybakina, the triumph completed a remarkable hard-court double in 2026. She had beaten Sabalenka in the Australian Open final in January and repeated the feat in New York, winning both of the year's hard-court Grand Slam titles.

Her three major titles now comprise **Wimbledon 2022, Australian Open 2026 and US Open 2026**. Only the French Open remains missing from her collection as she moves within one title of completing the career Grand Slam.

A champion's journey

Rybakina's campaign in New York was particularly impressive given the uncertainty surrounding her participation.

Just days before the tournament, she had been forced to retire from her Cincinnati quarterfinal against Iga Swiatek because of a foot/ankle problem, raising doubts over whether she would be ready for the US Open. She ultimately made it to New York and quickly put those concerns behind her.

She opened her campaign against 17-year-old American Thea Frodin, winning 6-3, 6-2 after a rain delay of almost three hours.

The second round brought another straight-set victory, this time over Jessica Bouzas Maneiro, 6-2, 6-4, moving her closer to the No. 1 ranking.

In the third round, Rybakina faced Yuliia Starodubtseva, the player who had eliminated her in the second round at Roland Garros earlier in the season. The Kazakh overcame a testing opening set to win 7-6(6), 6-3.

The reward was a fourth-round meeting with four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka.

Rybakina produced perhaps her most emphatic performance of the opening week, overwhelming Osaka 6-1, 6-4 to reach the US Open quarterfinals for the first time.

Ranking history made

The quarterfinal against Qinwen Zheng produced another defining moment.

Rybakina dropped the opening set 3-6 but responded emphatically, taking the second 6-1 before edging the deciding set 6-4.

At 3-4 in the third, Zheng earned a break point that would have put her within one game of victory. Rybakina saved it, won the next six points and closed out the match to reach her first US Open semifinal.

The achievement was historic: Rybakina became the first player representing Kazakhstan to reach No. 1 and the 30th woman in WTA history to occupy the position. Sabalenka's 99-week reign at the top was coming to an end.

Gauff comeback sets up blockbuster final

Rybakina's biggest test before the final came against 2023 US Open champion Coco Gauff.

The American had the Arthur Ashe Stadium crowd firmly behind her and took the opening set 6-3. But Rybakina remained composed, gradually taking control of the rallies and eventually turning the match around.

She won the next two sets 6-4, 6-4 to reach her first US Open final.

Rybakina too strong for Sabalenka

The final was billed as a battle between two of the biggest hitters in women's tennis — and for much of the night it lived up to the billing.

Rybakina made the first breakthrough at 2-2 in the opening set after Sabalenka double-faulted. Sabalenka's frustration boiled over immediately as she sent a ball into the stands and received a code violation.

Rybakina, by contrast, remained remarkably calm.

She secured the opening set 6-4 and moved closer to her first US Open crown.

Sabalenka responded in the second set. Rybakina's level dipped temporarily and the defending champion seized the opportunity, breaking late in the set before forcing a decider with a 7-5 scoreline.

The momentum, however, did not stay with Sabalenka.

Rybakina regrouped in the third and gradually imposed her power and accuracy on the match. She moved 5-2 ahead before serving out the championship 6-2.

The victory earned her a record **$5.5 million** winner's cheque and made her only the third woman this century, after Sabalenka and Angelique Kerber, to win both hard-court Grand Slam titles in the same season.

″Everything aligned together″

Rybakina struggled to put into words the magnitude of what she had achieved.

"It's tough to find words ... I didn't expect anything like this coming into the tournament," she said during the trophy presentation.

"I've been dealing a bit with an injury. Somehow, everything aligned together on my side."

She also paid tribute to Sabalenka, who had pushed her to the limit throughout their rivalry.

"Aryna ... it's so difficult to play against you. You push me to the limit," Rybakina said.

And the Kazakh admitted that New York, a city where she had previously struggled to make a deep run, was beginning to win her over.

Rybakina had never progressed beyond the fourth round at the US Open before this year. Her breakthrough was therefore all the more striking.

"I honestly was coming here for the last 10 years, and it was never successful — nothing close to that," she said. "It's just incredible. I'm falling in love with New York more and more."

A new rivalry for women's tennis

Rybakina's US Open triumph is more than another Grand Slam victory.

It marks the arrival of a new world No. 1, the first from Kazakhstan, and gives the women's game another compelling chapter in her increasingly intense rivalry with Sabalenka.

The two have now met in three Grand Slam finals, with Rybakina winning the 2026 Australian Open and US Open finals while Sabalenka prevailed in their 2023 Australian Open showdown. Their overall rivalry remains fiercely competitive, with Sabalenka holding a narrow 10-8 advantage after the US Open final.

But for now, the spotlight belongs entirely to Rybakina.

She now has three of the four major trophies. Only Paris stands between Elena Rybakina and the career Grand Slam.