

Wimbledon women's singles: Three talking points

AFP – Iga Swiatek will be desperate to make a major impact on her weakest surface at Wimbledon after a stellar clay court season underlined her dominance of the women's game.

But the Polish world number one faces a tough challenge on the grass at the All England Club from a powerful contingent including Coco Gauff, Aryna Sabalenka and Elena Rybakina.

AFP Sport looks at three talking points at Wimbledon 2024.

Can Swiatek conquer grass?

World number one Iga Swiatek won her third straight French Open title earlier this month and her fourth in five years at Roland Garros.

The 23-year-old, who also picked up clay-court titles in Madrid and Rome, is unbeaten in 19 matches ahead of Wimbledon, which starts on July 1.

Swiatek, who has won five trophies already this year, has not played a warm-up tournament on grass, opting to withdraw from the Berlin event in order to rest.

Last year's quarter-final appearance, when she lost to Elina Svitolina, was her best showing so far at Wimbledon and she does not boast the grass-court pedigree of some of her main rivals.

But Swiatek, who won the US Open in 2022, is justifiably tipped to go far at this year's Wimbledon, where she won the junior title in 2018.

Speaking after her recent French Open win, she admitted the switch from clay to grass was challenging.

“The balls are different,” she said. “Overall tennis is different on grass. I’ll just see and I’ll work hard to play better there.”

But regardless of the difficulty in changing surfaces, surely it is only a matter of time before Swiatek finds the magic formula.

Sabalenka threat

Aryna Sabalenka was second best to Iga Swiatek in the final of the recent Madrid and Rome tournaments on clay but will fancy her chances on the quicker courts at Wimbledon.

The powerful Belarusian won the Australian Open in style in January, showcasing a brutal brand of power tennis while defending her title without dropping a set.

The world number three, who missed Wimbledon in 2022 due to the ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes over the Ukraine war, reached the semi-finals in 2021 and the same stage last year.

There is a question mark over Sabalenka’s fitness following her retirement from her quarter-final at the recent Berlin grass-court tournament after having her shoulder and neck area assessed.

Others tipped for the Wimbledon crown are 2022 champion Elena Rybakina and last year’s US Open winner Coco Gauff, who has never been beyond the fourth round.

Outside the WTA’s so-called “Big Four”, two-time Wimbledon finalist Ons Jabeur, 10th in the rankings, will hope to make it third time lucky after reaching the final in the past two years.

Reigning champion Marketa Vondrousova turns from hunter to hunted after becoming the first unseeded woman to win Wimbledon last year.

Wild card threats

Four Grand Slam champions – three of them mothers – have been given wild cards to compete at Wimbledon this year – Naomi Osaka, Angelique Kerber, Emma Raducanu and Caroline Wozniacki.

Four-time major winner Osaka and three-time Grand Slam champion Kerber returned from maternity leave at the start of the season.

Osaka, who will be making her first appearance at the All England Club since 2019, reached her first grass-court quarterfinal since 2018 this month in 's-Hertogenbosch and was the only player to take a set from Iga Swiatek at the French Open.

The Japanese player has struggled to make an impact since returning to tennis following the birth of her daughter last year and is a lowly 111th in the world.

Kerber, 36, has pedigree at Wimbledon, finishing as runner-up in 2016 and winning the title two years later but the German is now ranked 221st in the world.

Britain's Raducanu exploded onto the scene at her first Wimbledon in 2021, reaching the fourth round weeks before she won the US Open as a qualifier, but she was knocked out in the second round the following year and missed last year's tournament after surgery.

Former world number one Wozniacki, who has two children, has never been beyond the fourth round at Wimbledon.

AFP