US Open champion Sabalenka chases year-end number one ranking

AFP – Aryna Sabalenka said Tuesday that she wants to cap off a stellar year by returning to the top of the world rankings.
The world number two is the top seed at the China Open this week following the withdrawal of top-ranked Iga Swiatek, the defending champion, because of undisclosed “personal matters”.

Fresh from winning the US Open, Sabalenka can take a large step towards overhauling the Pole at the top of the rankings with victory in Beijing.

“Of course that’s one of my goals, to finish the season at world number one,” the Belarusian, who won the Australian Open at the start of the year for a second time, said.

But the 26-year-old added: “I’m not trying to focus on that, I’m trying to focus on my game. There is only three tournaments left.

“I’m just trying to bring my best tennis on court. After the season, I’ll see if it was enough to finish the year at number one or have to improve something else to get to number one.”

The three-time major champion first became world number one a year ago, before being usurped by Swiatek.

“To be called the best player in the world, that means everything. It’s good to know that you’ve been doing the right thing, all of that hours of training, wasn’t a waste of time,” she said.

Sabalenka will be playing for the first time since beating Jessica Pegula in the final in New York earlier this month. She has a bye in the first round.

Pegula also features at the prestigious 1000 WTA hardcourt event in the Chinese capital, along with fellow American Coco Gauff, four-time major champion Naomi Osaka and China’s Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen.

The competition begins on Wednesday.

A men’s ATP 500 event runs alongside the women’s tournament.

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