



Wimbledon 2026 Day 1 Preview: Sinner Defends Without Alcaraz as Sabalenka Chases First Title

Description

The Championships, Wimbledon 2026 begin today and from the very first day, the storylines are extraordinary. Defending men's champion **Jannik Sinner** opens on Centre Court as the man to beat, **Aryna Sabalenka** enters as the world's best women's player still chasing her first Wimbledon title, and the draw has been dramatically reshaped by **Carlos Alcaraz's withdrawal through a wrist injury**. Wimbledon 2026 Day 1 promises fireworks from the first ball.

Play gets underway across the outside courts from 11:00 BST (18:00 SGT), with Court 1 beginning at 13:00 BST and Centre Court at 13:30 BST. A record **£64.2 million** in prize money is on offer across the fortnight, with the singles champions each taking home £3.6 million. For the full tournament picture, see our [Wimbledon 2026 draw day preview](#).



Centre Court at Wimbledon – home of the most prestigious tennis tournament in the world. Source: Lawn Tennis Association official website (lta.org.uk)

Sinner Opens as Defending Champion Without His Greatest Rival

The biggest news before a ball has been struck: **Carlos Alcaraz has withdrawn from Wimbledon 2026 with a wrist injury**. The two-time champion's absence removes the man who had beaten Sinner in both the 2023 and 2024 finals, and fundamentally alters the men's draw. Sinner, who claimed the title in 2025, enters as overwhelming favourite with his most dangerous challenger absent.

The Italian world No.1 winner of the Australian Open this year and a Career Golden Masters in Rome opens Day 1 on Centre Court against Miomir Kecmanovic. It is a manageable first-round assignment, but Sinner will be acutely aware that the pressure of defending on grass, without the shadow of Alcaraz to frame expectations, is a different kind of challenge entirely.

Seven-time champion **Novak Djokovic** also opens on Centre Court today, facing Wu Yibing in the evening slot. Djokovic, hunting an elusive 24th Grand Slam title, has been one of the most discussed names in the draw and a potential semi-final clash with Sinner is already being circled in tennis circles worldwide.

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Jannik Sinner returns as defending men's champion at Wimbledon 2026. Source: Lawn Tennis Association official website (lta.org.uk)

Sabalenka Chases First Wimbledon Title

Aryna Sabalenka — world No.1, reigning Australian Open champion, and three-time Wimbledon semi-finalist — enters SW19 more determined than ever to add the one major missing from her growing trophy cabinet. She opens Day 1 on Centre Court against Kristina Kostovic.

Defending women's champion **Iga Swiatek** returns to the grass after her 2025 triumph over Amanda Anisimova in the final, while Elena Rybakina — the 2022 Wimbledon champion and Australian Open winner this year — enters as a significant grass-court threat. The women's draw is wide open in the best possible way, and Sabalenka's ability to handle the pressure of being favourite will define her campaign.

Also debuting in 2026 is the Roland Garros champion **Alexander Zverev** on the men's side — his first Wimbledon since converting his clay consistency into a Grand Slam. Zverev has long been seen as a future Wimbledon champion, and a softer draw following Alcaraz's absence gives him his best ever opportunity.

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Aryna Sabalenka enters Wimbledon 2026 as world No.1 and chasing her first title on the grass. Source: Lawn Tennis Association official website (lta.org.uk)

British Hopes: Raducanu and Draper Lead the Charge

The home crowd will have plenty to cheer from Day 1. **Emma Raducanu**, British No.1 and 2021 US Open champion, opens on Court 1 against Katarzyna Ruzic who is desperate to build on her run to the last 16 at Wimbledon 2024. Raducanu returns to the grass having played the HSBC Championships as preparation, and her movement and ball-striking on this surface have always been exceptional.

Jack Draper, the British No.2 now working under **Andy Murray** in his coaching squad, will also be keen to make a statement at the tournament where Murray himself won twice. After a season disrupted by injury, the SW19 atmosphere suits Draper's attacking brand of tennis, and a run past the second round for the first time in his career would mark real progress.

British No.1 **Cameron Norrie** who famously reached the 2022 semi-final at Wimbledon also features in the draw and will hope to recapture that form after a challenging couple of seasons.

Day 1 Order of Play Highlights

Centre Court (from 13:30 BST): [1] Jannik Sinner vs Miomir Kecmanovic; [1] Aryna Sabalenka vs Kristina Kostovic; [2] Novak Djokovic vs Wu Yibing

Court 1 (from 13:00 BST): Emma Raducanu vs Katarzyna Ruzic; Daniil Medvedev vs Marin Cilic; Mirra Andreeva vs Magda Linette

Wimbledon 2026 Key Dates

- **Main draw begins:** Monday 29 June 2026
- **Women's singles final:** Saturday 11 July 2026
- **Men's singles final:** Sunday 12 July 2026
- **Total prize money:** £64.2 million (singles winner: £3.6 million)
- **Coverage:** BBC TV, BBC iPlayer, BBC Radio 5 Live (UK)

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