

Alcaraz, Pegula advance at US Open

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
ASSOCIATED PRESS

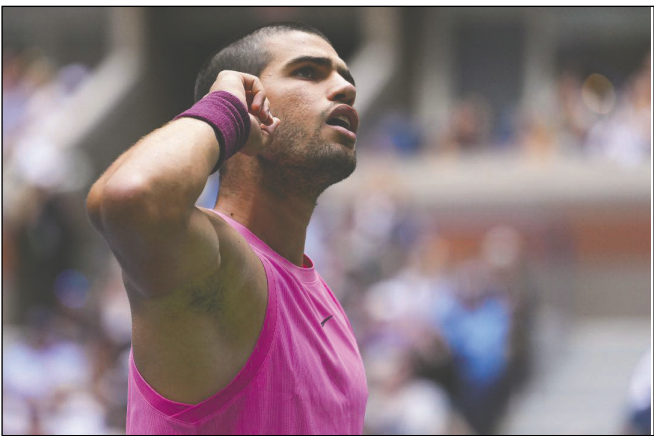
NEW YORK — Carlos Alcaraz finger-wagged the crowd, beat Jiri Lehecka to the net and cruised into the semifinals at the U.S. Open.

The second-seeded Spaniard beat Lehecka 6-4, 6-2, 6-4 in the quarterfinals on Tuesday, making some highlight-reel shots and putting his hand to his ear afterward to encourage more cheers from fans at Arthur Ashe Stadium. It's his first hard-court semifinal appearance at a major since winning his first Grand Slam title at the U.S. Open in 2023.

"I kind of met the Grand Slam version of Carlos," Lehecka said. "He just showed that he is one of the contenders, for sure. Everyone knew that, and he proved that."

Alcaraz is just 22 years old and is in the semifinals at a major for the ninth time. Only Rafael Nadal with 10 has more before turning 23.

Next up for Alcaraz is either Taylor Fritz or Novak Djokovic, who knocked him out of the Australian Open in the quarterfinals. Alcaraz would supplant Jannik Sinner — whom he lost to in the Wimbledon final and beat in the French Open final — atop



Kirsty Wigglesworth/AP photo

Carlos Alcaraz, of Spain, reacts after scoring a point against Jiri Lehecka, of the Czech Republic, during the quarterfinal round of the U.S. Open tennis championships on Tuesday in New York.

the rankings if he wins the U.S. Open for a second time.

"It's really difficult not to think about it," Alcaraz said. "Every time that I step on the court, I am trying not to think about it. If I think about the No. 1 spot too much, I think I'm going to put pressure on myself and I just don't want to do that. I just want to step on the court, try to do my things, try to follow my goals in the match and try to enjoy as much as I can. The No. 1 is there, but I'm trying not to think so much about it."

Before facing Fritz or

Djokovic on Friday night, Alcaraz plans to play golf Wednesday with 2017 Masters champion Sergio Garcia. He thinks his countryman owes him more than a few strokes.

"He has to give me at least between 10 and 15 shots," Alcaraz said. "It's going to be great. I'm not that good, Sergio, come on."

JESSICA PEGULA MAKES THE US OPEN SEMIFINALS AGAIN

On the women's side, Jessica Pegula broke through her

quarterfinal wall again at the U.S. Open, defeating Barbora Krejcikova 6-3, 6-3 to get to the semifinals at a Grand Slam tournament for just the second time in her career.

She failed to advance into the semis in her first 22 main draw appearances at a major before reaching the final at Flushing Meadows a year ago, when she lost to Aryna Sabalenka. They'll meet again in the semifinals on Thursday after Sabalenka advanced in a walkover when Marketa Vondrousova withdrew because of injury.

"My biggest accomplishment last year was just getting past the quarterfinals," Pegula said. "Now I can say I've done it twice."

Pegula, who was eliminated in the fourth round at the Australian Open, the third round at the French Open and the first round at Wimbledon, is the first woman to make back-to-back U.S. Open semifinals without losing a set since Serena Williams from 2011-14.

"I've been able to kind of go into those matches and really take care of business," Pegula said. "I've played good players but (gotten) convincing wins over those players."

Pegula, 31, is seeded fourth at the U.S. Open and aiming

for her first Grand Slam championship. She and No. 8 Amanda Anisimova are the only Americans left in the women's singles field.

Krejcikova knocked out one of them, Taylor Townsend, who failed to convert eight match points when they met in the quarterfinals on Sunday. Pegula was not perfect, but she played well enough to stay in control at all times and broke Krejcikova one final time to end the match in under 90 minutes — on her first match point attempt.

"She had a couple really good returns when I was serving at 4-1," Pegula said. "We all saw what she did against Taylor, so I was happy that we're done."

WHAT ELSE HAPPENED AT THE US OPEN ON TUESDAY?

Venus Williams and Leylah Fernandez are set to face the top-seeded pair of Townsend and Katerina Siniakova in the women's doubles quarterfinals. Fritz against Djokovic is the nightcap.

TARGETS

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legitimate shot, I really do. They've got a good football team, but you never know. There's so many changes, positive changes of leadership, culture changes. But I think they're going to have a shot."

Asked about Saban's comments following the EKU

game, Brohm said:

"I didn't see it. But of course, Coach Saban is one of the greatest ever to do it, and won a ton of championships. Coaches football the right way. We know each other from way back in a couple of occasions, but great respect for him. He obviously knows the college game. I think he knows that every team has some component that can help them win football games."

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