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Russian-Born Rybakina Wins Wimbledon Title

By John Weaver for AFP

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Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina kisses the trophy as she celebrates after beating Tunisia's Ons Jabeur to win the final of the women's singles on day thirteen of the Wimbledon tennis championships in London, Saturday, July 9, 2022. **AP Photo/Kirsty Wigglesworth/TASS**

Russian-born Elena Rybakina powered back from a set down against Ons Jabeur to win the Wimbledon title on Saturday, denying the Tunisian world number two the chance to make African tennis history.

Jabeur was in charge at the start of the match but the 17th seed, representing Kazakhstan, regrouped and dropped just four more games on the way to a 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 victory.

"I never felt anything like this before," said the champion. "Congratulations to Ons for everything you have achieved.

"You are an inspiration to Tunisians and everybody. You played a great match."

Jabeur, 27, started in style, breaking Rybakina in the third game of the match when the Kazakh went long with a backhand.

She followed that with a hold to love that included a delicious backhand pass angled past her opponent at the net.

Rybakina was under intense pressure on her own serve again as the set threatened to run away from her but she dug deep to hold for 3-2.

But she failed to force a single break point on the sun-baked Centre Court in the first set and an error-strewn service game gifted the set to Jabeur.

As Jabeur celebrated with a fist-pump, Rybakina returned to her chair contemplating a costly 17 unforced errors.

But momentum shifted immediately at the start of the second set as Rybakina broke Jabeur before holding for a 2-0 lead.

Rybakina had now found her rhythm and Jabeur had to battle hard to hold to stay in touch.

The 23-year-old Kazakh, who stands six feet (1.84 meters) tall, then fended off three break points before breaking again to take a 4-1 lead when Jabeur went long with a forehand.

Rybakina leveled the match with an ace as Jabeur reflected on four missed break-point opportunities in the set.

The 17th seed was first to strike in the decider, breaking straight away to heap the pressure on Jabeur.

The Tunisian squandered three break points in the sixth game as her frustration mounted and that proved to be her last chance.

Rybakina showed a few nerves in serving out for the set but won with her first championship point when Jabeur went long with a backhand.

Rybakina, playing in her first Slam final, switched allegiance to Kazakhstan in 2018.

Russian and Belarusian players are banned from Wimbledon this year following the invasion of Ukraine.

Rybakina had never got past the quarter-finals of a Slam before this year's Wimbledon.

Jabeur congratulated the winner, saying: "Hopefully next time it will be mine".

"Thanks to my team for support and believing in me," she said. "I love this tournament. I feel sad but that's tennis — there can only be one winner."

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