

Naomi Osaka edges Petra Kvitova for Australian Open title, to become No. 1 in WTA ranking

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Melbourne: Naomi Osaka recovered after wasting three championship points and reasserted herself down the stretch to win the Australian Open for a second consecutive Grand Slam title, edging Petra Kvitova 7-6 (2), 5-7, 6-4 on Saturday night.

The victory allows the 21-year-old Osaka to become the first tennis player from Japan to reach No. 1 in the rankings.

Osaka held three match points in the second set at 5-3, love-40 as Kvitova served. But Osaka couldn't close it out. Instead, she completely lost her way, dropping 23 of the next 27 points.

That allowed Kvitova to come back and make a match of it, reeling off five games in a row to take the second set and go up 1-0 in the third.

Osaka was yelling at herself. She slammed a ball off the court. She tugged at her pink visor's brim. She headed to the locker room after the second set with a towel draped over her head.

Hard as it must have been, Osaka regrouped. She also got her powerful shots going again. After Kvitova double-faulted to offer up a break point at 1-all, Osaka converted it with a cross-court backhand winner. There was still more work to be done, of course, and some additional drama when it began raining at the changeover right before Osaka tried to serve for the match at 5-4 in the third set.

This time, Osaka would not falter. She would not let this lead disappear.

Osaka added the Australian Open trophy to the one she collected in a U.S. Open final last September that forever will be remembered for the way runner-up Serena Williams was docked a game after arguing with the chair umpire.

Unlike that day, there was no jeering from the confused crowd. No controversy. No chaos. No sharing the spotlight.

Osaka is the first woman to win two major championships in a row since Williams picked up four straight in 2014-15 and has clearly marked herself as tennis' new star.

- AP