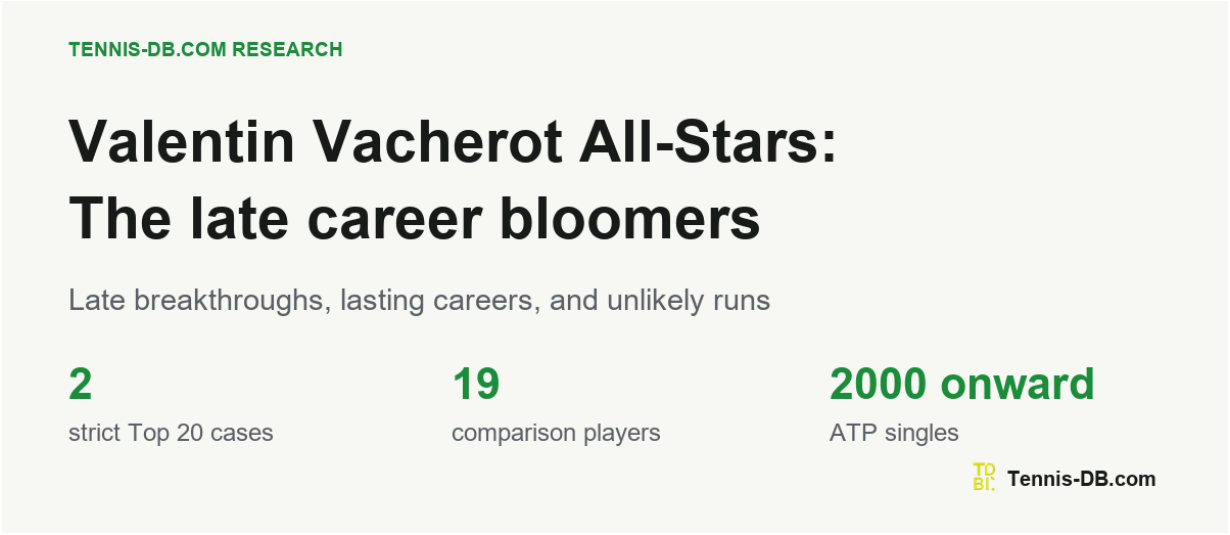
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Valentin Vacherot All-Stars: The Late Career Bloomers

Vacherot was still outside the Top 100 at 26. A year after his Shanghai breakthrough, he has added an ATP 500 title in Basel.

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KEY FINDINGS

- Only Valentin Vacherot and Aslan Karatsev first reached the Top 20 since 2000 without having reached the Top 100 before their 26th birthday.
- Eight of the 12 comparison players with five years of results spent at least a year in the Top 30; seven spent at least two years in the Top 50.
- Vacherot's Shanghai title ranks second among 1,973 runs for winning more matches than Elo expected, and first when the rating also accounts for the court surface.

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From No. 204 to the Top 20

Valentin Vacherot arrived in Shanghai in October 2025 ranked No. 204. At 26, he had never been in the Top 100. He beat Novak Djokovic in the semifinal and his cousin Arthur Rinderknech in the final, leaving with a Masters title and a ranking of No. 40. Six months later, he reached the Monte-Carlo semifinals and entered the Top 20.

On November 1, 2026, he added his first ATP 500 title in Basel, beating Ji■í Lehe■ka 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 in the final. A year after Shanghai, he is a two-time ATP champion.

Aslan Karatsev made a similar climb after the 2021 Australian Open. At 27, he became the first man in the Open Era to reach a major semifinal on his main-draw debut. He entered the Top 100 after that tournament and made the Top 20 in October.

Since 2000, only Vacherot and Karatsev have made the Top 20 after first entering the Top 100 at 26 or older.

"Best before" is the highest ranking reached before that birthday. Career bests are through November 2, 2026, the cutoff for this article.

Player	Best before 25	Best before 26	First Top 100	First Top 20	Career best
Aslan Karatsev	153	153	Feb. 2021	Oct. 2021	14
Valentin Vacherot	257	110	Oct. 2025	Apr. 2026	14

The Vacherot All-Stars

Expanding the criteria brings in more players with similar late rises. Two lists give **19 players** to compare:

- **Top 100 at 25 or later:** 10 players who first entered the Top 100 at 25 or older, then reached the Top 30.
- **Top 80 at 24 or later:** nine other players who first entered the Top 80 at 24 or older, then reached the Top 20.

The chart shows how the number changes with different age and ranking limits. Each cell is a player count. For example, five players had never reached the Top 100 before 24 and later made the Top 20.

How many players made a late breakthrough?

Never reached the listed ranking before the age shown; later reached the Top 20 or Top 30

	Reached Top 20			Reached Top 30		
Before turning	Top 100	Top 80	Top 60	Top 100	Top 80	Top 60
24	5	11	15	13	24	33
25	2	3	7	10	12	17
26	2	2	3	3	7	10

TWO STANDOUTS Never Top 100 before 26, then Top 20: Karatsev and Vacherot.

Source: ATP rankings through November 2, 2026

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Top 100 at 25 or later

"Top 30 weeks" adds all the time a player spent at that ranking or better after first reaching it. Separate spells count together. The totals use available ranking lists, with gaps left out, and recent players have had less time to add to them.

Player	Best before 25	Career best	Top 30 weeks
Ivan Dodig	168	29	3
Lukas Rosol	135	26	19
Daniel Evans	123	21	104
Aslan Karatsev	153	14	47
Botic van de Zandschulp	164	22	18
Tallon Griekspoor	120	21	71
Christopher Eubanks	147	29	5
Nuno Borges	189	30	3
Arthur Rinderknech	160	24	41
Valentin Vacherot	257	14	32

Only Karatsev and Vacherot made the Top 20, but several others came close. Evans and Griekspoor reached No. 21, and Van de Zandschulp reached No. 22.

Rinderknech's place on the list makes that Shanghai final more remarkable. Both cousins first reached the Top 100 at 25 or older. Rinderknech had considered quitting early in 2025; he later reached No. 24.

Top 80 at 24 or later

These nine players had never reached the Top 80 before turning 24 and later made the Top 20. The columns have the same meaning as above, with the earlier ranking measured before 24.

Player	Best before 24	Career best	Top 30 weeks
Andrei Pavel	87	13	168
Martin Verkerk	87	14	52
Ivo Karlovic	165	14	240
John Isner	81	8	535
Kevin Anderson	85	5	269
Roberto Bautista Agut	152	9	406
Marco Cecchinato	82	16	46
Nikoloz Basilashvili	86	16	115
Alejandro Tabilo	156	19	45

Bautista Agut's best ranking before 24 was No. 152. He went on to reach No. 9 and spend 406 weeks in the Top 30. Karlovic rose from a pre-24 best of No. 165 to No. 14, with 240 Top 30 weeks.

Those careers lasted far longer near the top than Verkerk's and Cecchinato's. Both reached the Top 20, but their Top 30 stays lasted about a year. A late breakthrough could lead to a decade near the top, as Isner's did, or a single strong season.

How many have made the leap?

For a ranked player who had never made the Top 100 by 25, reaching the Top 30 within the next five years was roughly a **three-in-1,000 achievement**. Making the Top 20 was rarer still: **well under one in 1,000**. These estimates cover men who turned 25 from 2000 onward, including those ranked well outside the Top 300.

For players ranked No. 101-300 near their 25th birthday, the Top 30 figure was closer to **one in 60**. A late rise is more plausible from there, though the jump to the Top 20 remains exceptional. With only two such Top 20 careers, these are rough historical guides.

These counts include anyone who made the climb, however low his earlier ranking was. Reaching the higher ranking counts immediately, even if the player later drops back down.

Earlier career	Later reached Top 30	Later reached Top 20
Never Top 100 before 24	13	5
Never Top 100 before 25	10	2
Never Top 100 before 26	3	2
Never Top 80 before 24	24	11

Vacherot and Karatsev are the two Top 20 names in both the age-25 and age-26 rows. Christopher Eubanks is the third Top 30 player in the age-26 row, with a career best of No. 29. A player can appear in more than one row; these are different ways of looking at the same careers.

How long did they stay near the top?

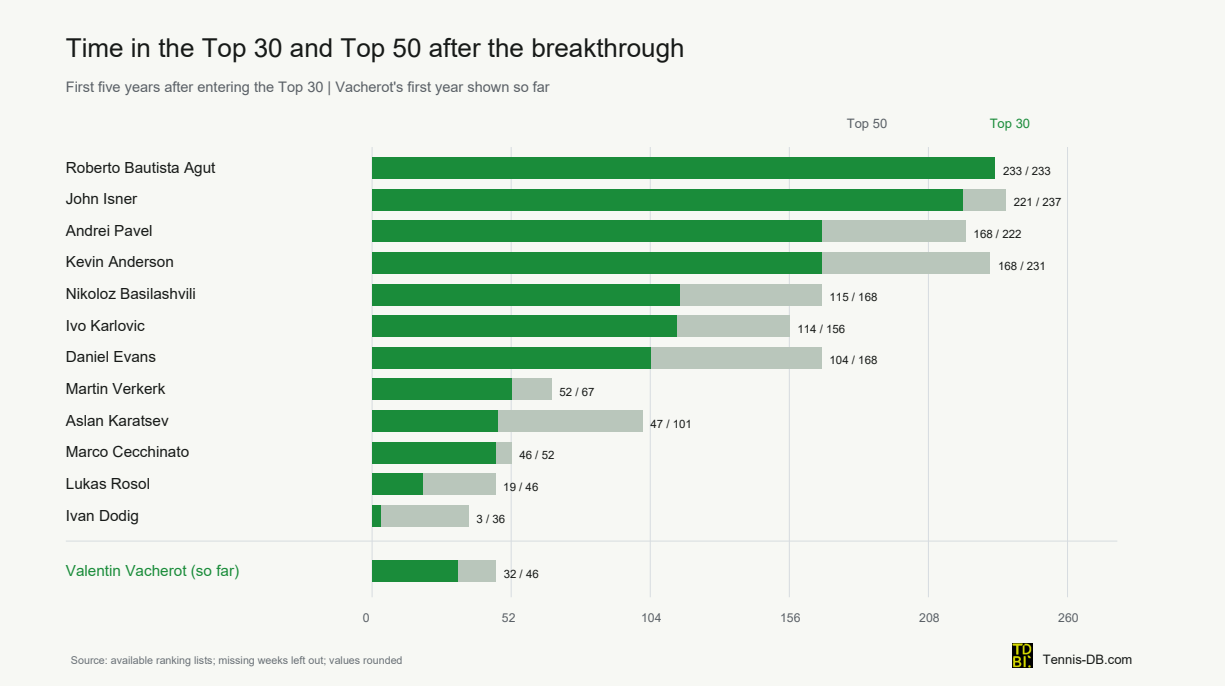
Twelve of the 19 players reached the Top 30 at least five years ago. Comparing their first five years at that level gives each player the same amount of time.

The last two columns count players who spent at least a year in the Top 30 or two years in the Top 50 during those five years. Separate spells count together.

Player list	Players compared	At least 1 year in Top 30	At least 2 years in Top 50
Top 100 at 25 or later	4	1	1
Top 80 at 24 or later	8	7	6
All players	12	8	7

The four from the first list are Dodig, Rosol, Evans, and Karatsev. Evans spent 104 weeks in the Top 30, Karatsev 47, Rosol 19, and Dodig three. Evans was the only one to spend a full year there.

Seven of the eight players from the second list spent at least a year in the Top 30. Everyone on that list had also reached the Top 20, so it contains more successful careers to begin with.



Vacherot looks good at the moment and could have several years near the top ahead of him. He has followed Shanghai with a Monte-Carlo semifinal, the Basel title, and **17 weeks in the Top 20**, already more than Karatsev's 16. He was ranked No. 27 on November 2.

The unlikeliest runs after 25

This comparison covers Grand Slam and Masters 1000 runs since 2000 by players aged 25 or older when the tournament began. It includes comebacks by established stars.

Elo estimates a player's chance of winning each match from his results and opponent strength. Adding those chances gives his **expected wins** against the opponents he played. **Extra wins** is how many more matches he won than that total.

For example, if a player won four matches and his chances added to 1.5 expected wins, he finished with 2.5 extra wins. A larger number means a bigger surprise.

Here are the leaders among 1,973 runs with at least three completed main-draw wins. Qualifying matches and wins by retirement are left out.

Player and event	Result	Wins	Expected wins	Extra wins
Goran Ivanisevic, Wimbledon 2001	Champion	7	2.16	+4.84
Valentin Vacherot, Shanghai 2025	Champion	6	1.23	+4.77
Borna Coric, Cincinnati 2022	Champion	6	1.85	+4.15
Alexei Popyrin, Canada 2024	Champion	6	1.89	+4.11
Gaston Gaudio, Roland Garros 2004	Champion	7	2.94	+4.06
David Nalbandian, Madrid 2007	Champion	6	1.97	+4.03
Albert Portas, Hamburg 2001	Champion	6	2.01	+3.99
John Isner, Miami 2018	Champion	6	2.43	+3.57
Mardy Fish, Indian Wells 2008	Final	6	2.44	+3.56
Alex Corretja, Indian Wells 2000	Champion	6	2.54	+3.46
Pete Sampras, US Open 2002	Champion	7	3.54	+3.46
Fabio Fognini, Monte-Carlo 2019	Champion	5	1.59	+3.41
Aslan Karatsev, Australian Open 2021	Semifinal	5	1.68	+3.32

Standard Elo puts Vacherot second. Combining it with a rating for the court surface puts him first. Shanghai stands near the top under either version.

Vacherot advanced through seven main-draw rounds, but Machac retired during their third-round match. The table counts six completed wins. His two qualifying wins are also left out.

Conclusion

Vacherot's breakthrough is exceptional, and so was Shanghai. The longer careers of Isner, Anderson, and Bautista Agut show that a late start can still leave years near the top. Vacherot's results since Shanghai suggest he could join them.

Methodology

Rankings and career comparisons

The article covers ATP singles breakthroughs and runs from January 1, 2000 through November 2, 2026. Earlier rankings establish previous career bests. Birth dates come from player records or linked original Sackmann records.

A Top 100 ranking means No. 100 or better. "Before 25" ends the day before the 25th birthday; a ranking on the birthday comes afterward. February 28 is used for leap-day birthdays in other years.

Each ranking counts for up to seven days or until the next ranking is recorded, whichever comes first. Missing weeks, including the pandemic pause, are left out. The totals can therefore be lower than official ATP week counts. Four 2025 ranking lists with inconsistent dates are excluded; details are in the research record.

The 19-player list combines the two career rules above; players who fit both go in the first list. The download includes three- and five-year career totals. Each comparison includes only players with enough time since their breakthrough.

Reaching a target ranking counts permanently, even if the player later drops back down. Vacherot's longevity chart row shows his shorter record so far.

The rough five-year rates include players ranked at any position in the year before their birthday, with no earlier Top 100 ranking. Recent players contribute the time available so far; those still waiting for a breakthrough are not counted as five-year failures. The No. 101-300 comparison uses the last ranking before the birthday. Players without a known birth date are left out. These rates describe this group of past careers, not an individual player's chances.

Tournament runs

Players must be at least 25 when the tournament starts. Only finished tournaments and runs with at least three completed main-draw wins are ranked. Retirements, walkovers, defaults, and qualifying wins do not count toward that total.

The review excludes 195 match records whose scores or results could not be confirmed, including 145 qualifying matches. A player's run is left out if one of his main-draw matches has such a problem.

Elo chances use the ratings before each match. Expected wins add those chances across all completed matches played, including losses. The second version gives equal weight to the overall rating and the rating for that court surface. Full calculations and additional checks are retained with the research record.

Limits

Small changes in age or ranking limits change the player list. Only four players from the later Top 100 group have five years of results, so their careers offer limited guidance about Vacherot's future.

Rankings also depend on points earned months earlier. Elo can be slow to catch up with a newcomer: the data contain only seven completed main-draw matches for Vacherot before Shanghai. These estimates compare performances against the opponents faced; they are not pre-tournament title odds. Incomplete historical records may leave out other surprising runs.

Data and attribution

Historical data credit Jeff Sackmann and Tennis Abstract; current data credit BALLDONTLIE. ATP and Australian Open reports supply the player stories and confirm the highlighted milestones. The download contains the study results. The queries, code, saved inputs, and checks are retained with the research record.

Questions or suggestions for future Research can be sent through the contact form or to contact@tennis-db.com.

Sources

1. Swiss Indoors Basel report on Vacherot's 2026 title
2. ATP report on Vacherot's Shanghai title
3. ATP report on Vacherot's Top 20 debut
4. ATP on Karatsev's 2021 breakthrough
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Questions about this study or requests for future tennis-db.com Research can be sent to contact@tennis-db.com or through the contact form.