

SPOTLIGHT

Neesham keen to give WC ‘one last crack’

Reuters
Auckland

Having almost secured New Zealand a maiden one-day World Cup triumph in 2019, all-rounder **Jimmy Neesham** is keen for “one last crack” at the elusive title in India next month.

Neesham was included in New Zealand’s 15-man squad for the tournament yesterday and will reunite with many of the players left heartbroken after the 2019 final defeat to England.

New Zealand lost on boundary count in a classic at Lord’s after the teams could not be split by a tie-breaking Super Over.

Neesham scored 13 runs in the Super Over but England claimed the win when Martin Guptill was run out on the last delivery when seeking the winning run. Four years on, the result still gnaws at the New Zealand players.

“I think it’s motivated all of us,” Neesham told reporters yesterday. “Trent (Boult) has talked about it as well, around a few of the guys

back then talking about giving it one more crack in four years’ time.

“It’s come around pretty quickly, really, with all the events since 2019 in the world.

“We’ve got that generation from 30- to 35-years-old. We’ve all played a huge amount over the last 10-12 years and there’s certainly huge motivation from the guys to give it one last, good crack.”

Neesham and fast bowler Boult were both included in the World Cup squad despite opting out of their New Zealand contracts last year.

The pair have been overlooked for selection for much of the international schedule, with selectors favouring contracted players.

Boult returned to action on Sunday, though, with an encouraging three-wicket haul in the rain-hit, 79-run defeat to England in the second ODI in Southampton.

Neesham said there was no awkwardness from contracted team mates about he and Boult’s place in the New Zealand set-up.

“No one gets judged on those kinds of decisions,” he said.

“Myself and Trent have talked a

lot about it over the last year or so around trying to stay fit and stay in the picture.

“There’s no lack of familiarity with the group. As Trent said a couple of days ago in England, you slide back into the group as if nothing’s changed.”

Williamson, Boult to lead New Zealand’s World Cup charge

Kane Williamson will lead New Zealand at next month’s one-day World Cup and Trent Boult will spearhead the pace attack but opener Finn Allen and fast bowler Adam Milne have missed out on the squad for India.

Boult returned to action with three wickets in a 79-run defeat by England in Southampton on Sunday and was duly named in the 15-man squad to be led by Williamson, despite the batter’s ongoing recovery from a long-term knee ligament injury.

New Zealand were runners-up to hosts England at the 2019 tournament, losing a classic final at Lord’s on boundary count after the teams could not be separated by a tie-breaking Super Over.

RYAN WOOD
GULF TIMES
12-09-2023



Will Young beat out Allen for the opening batsman slot which has been contested since Martin Guptill’s release last year.

“We just felt that we looked through what the potential game-plan was looking like in India, looked at the grounds, and also looked at the form of the two play-

ers as well,” head coach Gary Stead told reporters. “We felt that Young was the right guy to go with.”

Neesham has also been included, despite joining Boult in opting out of his national contract last year. “I think you always have the need for all-rounders and I guess with Michael Bracewell dropping

out, that also opened up an option for another all-rounder there,” Stead said of Neesham’s selection.

Boult, Williamson, Neesham, fast bowler Tim Southee and wicketkeeper batsman Tom Latham form a strong core of World Cup veterans but the squad also includes six players looking to make their debut at the 50-over tournament. Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Daryl Mitchell and Glenn Phillips were selected in their first one-day World Cup squad, having featured in T20 World Cup squads before.

All-rounder Rachin Ravindra and Young are set for their first World Cup in any format.

New Zealand will bid for a first World Cup title, having been runners-up at the last two 50-over tournaments in England and Australia in 2015.

New Zealand squad: Kane Williamson (capt), Trent Boult, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Tom Latham, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitch Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee, Will Young.

CRICKET

Kohli and Rahul hit tons as India thump Pakistan

India spinner Kuldeep Yadav (5-25) rips through Pakistan’s line-up

Reuters
Colombo

India beat rivals Pakistan by 228 runs after Virat Kohli passed 13,000 in one-day internationals en route to his 47th century and KL Rahul marked his return from injury with a ton in a lopsided Asia Cup Super Four clash in Colombo yesterday.

Pakistan’s batsmen, needing a daunting 357 for victory after Kohli made 122 not out off 94 balls and Rahul remained unbeaten on 111 off 106, never really got going and finished on 128 with Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf both absent through injury.

India spinner Kuldeep Yadav (5-25) ripped through Pakistan’s line-up following a brief rain interruption after Jasprit Bumrah removed Imam-ul-Haq and Hardik Pandya castled the dangerous Babar Azam.

India had reached 147-2 in 24.1 overs after half-centuries by skipper Rohit Sharma (56) and fellow opener Shubman Gill (58) on Sunday but rain meant the match would finish on the reserve day and the runs continued to flow after a delayed start.

Kohli and Rahul saw off the threat of Pakistan’s pace attack, missing Rauf due to a right flank problem, and the duo targeted the spinners on an improving wicket to post 356-2 in 50 overs.

Rahul and Kohli’s unbeaten 233-run partnership for the third wicket was the highest stand in the Asia Cup.

Rahul, returning to the side af-



India’s Virat Kohli (right) and K L Rahul bump their fists during the Asia Cup 2023 Super Four one-day international in Colombo yesterday. (AFP)

ter surgery for a quadriceps injury in May, flexed his muscles against spinners Iftikhar Ahmed and Shadab Khan and stepped down the wicket to flick the latter for a massive six after getting his half-century.

India raised the tempo amid the threat of more showers and cruised to the 300-run mark in 45 overs before Rahul - who made the team due to Shreyas Iyer’s back issue - reached his sixth hundred and raised his bat like a sword.

Kohli then became the fifth batsman and the quickest to make 13,000 runs in the format and celebrated his own century shortly afterwards, pumping his fists before raising his hands to huge roars at the R Premadasa Stadium.

He finished with a flourish, carting Faheem Ashraf for two fours - including one from a free hit - and a huge shot over the ropes at the end of the final over.

India, whose group meeting with Pakistan in Pallekele this

month was abandoned due to rain, take on Sri Lanka today.

BRIEF SCORES
India, who resumed reserve day on 147-2 in 24.1 overs, 356-2 in 50 overs (V. Kohli 122 not out, KL Rahul 111 not out; S. Khan 1-71, S. Shah Afridi 1-79) **v Pakistan 128 all out in 32 overs** (A. Salam 23, I. Ahmed 23; K. Yadav 5-25) **Result:** India won by 228 runs **Toss:** Pakistan **Playing today:** Sri Lanka v India, Colombo

BOTTOMLINE

Sri Lanka confident against India in Asia Cup

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka will come in “fresh” for an Asia Cup Super Four clash against an Indian team likely to be playing for a third consecutive day, their coach said yesterday.

India’s match against arch-rivals Pakistan split over into a reserve day on Monday after only 24.1 overs, with the 50-over contest acting as a prelude to their big battle in the upcoming ODI World Cup.

Dasun Shanaka’s Sri Lanka, who won the last edition of the Asia Cup - played in the T20 format - began their Super Four with a win over Bangladesh on Saturday.

Another victory would improve their chances of making it to the final on September 17.

“With a team like India, you never know, but obviously they are playing three days in a

row,” assistant coach Naveed Nawaz told reporters yesterday.

“We have got a bit of a break since the last game.

“So I would say the boys are fresh for tomorrow. That can be good for us.”

Sri Lanka remain unbeaten in the tournament after winning both their group matches while India are still searching for their first win in the Super Four stage.

“If we plan to play good cricket, if we execute our plans and go into the best version of ourselves in the middle against India - obviously the result will be favourable for us,” Nawaz said.

‘Good under pressure’

Only India have won more Asia Cup titles than Sri Lanka, who have often spoiled the India-Pakistan party in the final.

In the last edition, they beat Pakistan to lift the title in Dubai.

“Our boys are very resilient when it comes

to handling pressure,” said Nawaz, pointing out that Sri Lanka have been without some of their first-choice players in the past two editions of the tournament.

One name to watch out for is up-and-coming fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana who has a wided bowling action.

The 20-year-old has made an impression with his slinging action and toe-crushing yorkers similar to his hero Lasith Malinga.

Pathirana shone for MS Dhoni’s Chennai Super Kings as they captured this year’s Indian Premier League title.

“I am sure MS and Chennai would have played a part in his development, but Pathirana is a product of Sri Lanka cricket,” said Nawaz, when asked about Dhoni’s part in brushing up Pathirana.

“He has played two Under-19 World Cups with us.

“He has been an identified product, and he has been in the development programmes of Sri Lanka Cricket.”

FOCUS

Receiving Ball of 2027 FIBA World Cup starting step to remarkable tournament: QBF chief

QNA
Doha

The President of the Qatari Basketball Federation (QBF), **Mohamed Saad al-Mughaiseeb**, considered the handover of the World Cup ball to Qatar as the kickoff towards hosting the 2027 FIBA Basketball World Cup.

Al-Mughaiseeb, who received the ball on Sunday on the sidelines of the closing ceremony of the 2023 Basketball World Cup in the Philippines capital, Manila, expressed in a statement to the Qatar News Agency (QNA) the hope to fulfil the aspirations of the international basketball community and the Qatari people in organising an exceptional championship befitting Qatar’s great reputation in hosting major sporting events worldwide.

The QBF president further explained yesterday that during the inspection visit conducted by the Qatari delegation to Manila to attend the World Cup, numerous meetings, joint workshops, and field visits were held with the organizing committee and International Basketball Federation (FIBA) to transfer the experience and lessons learned from the event



ground to 2027 FIBA Basketball World Cup.

The president of QBF added that they are looking forward to organizing an exceptional championship in accordance with Qatari standards, which are considered among the best standards for organizing sporting events worldwide.

FIBA announced Qatar’s victory in hosting the 2027 FIBA Basketball World Cup during its meeting held on April 28, 2022, in the Philippine capital, Manila.

Qatar will host the World Cup for the third consecutive time in Asia, following the 2019 edition in China and the 2023 edition in the Philippines, Japan, and Indonesia.

India’s Kuldeep says five-for against Pakistan memorable



India’s Kuldeep Yadav (second right) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Pakistan’s Fakhar Zaman (left) during the Asia Cup 2023 Super Four one-day international in Colombo. (AFP)

Colombo: India spinner Kuldeep Yadav yesterday said his match-winning five-wicket haul against Pakistan in the Asia Cup will remain a spell to “remember” even after retirement. Kuldeep, a left-arm wrist spinner, returned figures of 5-25 to help bowl out Pakistan for 128 while chasing 357 for victory in the rain-hit Super Four clash in Colombo.

The 50-over contest carried over into a reserve day set aside by the tournament, which remains a tune-up to the upcoming ODI World Cup in India.

“I am feeling very happy,” Kuldeep said. “To take five wickets against a good team will always be remembered. When I stop cricket and retire, I will always remember that I took five wickets against Pakistan.”

He further added: “Because a side that plays spin well in

the sub-continent, to play well against them really motivates you.” Kuldeep, 28, overcame a threatening knee injury to return to the international game last year and since performed well in the Indian Premier League and for the national team. The bowler has made his way back as a regular in the Indian XI and remains a key bowler for the team in the World Cup starting October.

“One-and-a-half years has been amazing. Bowling really well and not thinking too much about the playing XI and all,” said Kuldeep. “Just enjoying my bowling. Every morning when I wake and think that whenever I get the opportunity I stay fit to deliver. All through IPL I have been working hard on my length that matters a lot for any spinner.”

The spinner has picked 146 wickets in 87 ODI matches since his debut in 2017.

RUGBY WORLD CUP

South Africa off mark as Wales avoid Fiji slip-up

'We had a little bit of dominance in first-half but we had to grind the win out'

AFP
Paris

Fly-half Manie Libbok was named man of the match as South Africa opened the defence of their Rugby World Cup title with victory over Scotland on Sunday as Wales held out against a spirited Fiji comeback.

Libbok's highlight was a second-half no-look assist for Kurt-Lee Arendse as the Springboks began their search for a record fourth Webb Ellis trophy in clinical fashion in the Marseille heat, winning 18-3.

Former World Player of the Year Pieter-Steph Du Toit had crashed over earlier in the tie for Jacques Nienaber's outfit in Pool B.

Their next major test to reach the quarer-finals will be world number one side Ireland on September 23, six days after facing Romania.

"I think it could have been a slippery one. Scotland are a good side, they are not number five in the world for nothing," Nienaber told the BBC.

"I thought we had a little bit of dominance in the first-half but we had to grind the win out."

Earlier in the game, Springboks centre Jesse Kriel avoided a yellow card despite making contact with the head of Scotland No. 8 Jack Dempsey during a tackle.

It was a similar incident which led to Tom Curry being shown a red card in England's victory over Argentina on Saturday, raising questions about consistency in refereeing decisions just three days into the tournament.

"It looked like a head-on-head collision and I was expecting the TMO (television match official) to come in," said Scotland head coach Gregor Townsend.

FIJI LATE COMEBACK

Wales began their campaign by overcoming Fiji 32-26 in Bordeaux, avoiding defeat to the



Scotland's fly-half Finn Russell (right) and South Africa's fly-half Manie Libbok vying for the ball during their Rugby World Cup Pool 'B' match at Stade de Marseille in Marseille, France. (AFP)

highest ranked side in Pool C.

Winger Josh Adams claimed one of four tries for Wales as experienced fly-half Dan Biggar crossed the 100-point mark for his country at World Cups, surpassing Neil Jenkins' 98-point record.

"You can never write Fiji off. Right at the end they could have won the game," Adams told S4C after his side led by 18 points with less than a quarter of an hour to play.

"We don't want another game like that," he added before next Saturday's match with Portugal.

Fiji, coached by ex-Newport lock Simon Raiwalui, had launched a late comeback thanks to tries from Josua Tuisova and Mesake Doge in the final seven

minutes but they were unable to repeat their famous 2007 World Cup victory over Wales.

The Pacific islanders had a lot of confidence before the game, especially after last month's first ever win over England, and they would have felt frustrated by referee Matthew Carley's reluctance to show yellow cards to ill-disciplined Wales. Fiji will now have to target next Sunday's game with Australia if they are to keep alive their hopes of a first quarter-final spot in 16 years.

Earlier in the day, 2019 World Cup hosts Japan beat debutants Chile 42-12 despite conceding a try after just six minutes in Toulouse in Pool D. Brave Blossoms lock Amato Fakatava crossed twice

but there was also a controversial tackling incident, reminiscent of Curry's dismissal. Just before the break, Los Condore captain Martin Sigren was shown a yellow card for a high-challenge on Japan's Kotaro Matsushima, where the two players' heads made contact.

An extra positive for Japan is captain Kazuki Himeno is set to return from a calf injury in time for next Sunday's encounter with 2003 champions England.

After a three-day break, Thursday sees hosts France play their second game of the competition when they face Uruguay, who stunned Fiji in 2019, in Lille.

Les Bleus clinched an impressive tournament-opening success over New Zealand on Friday.

GOLF

China's Ruoning becomes World No. 1

AFP
Washington

China's Yin Ruoning became the world number one in women's golf on Sunday by finishing third at the LPGA Queen City Championship.

The 20-year-old became only the second Chinese woman to claim the world number one ranking after Feng Shanshan, who reached the summit from November 2017 to April 2018.

"It means a lot. For me it's like dream come true," Yin said.

"I've got goosebumps. World number one is the big step on the way to chasing Shanshan."

Yin will play on a Chinese team coached by Feng in the Asian Games, which open on September 23 on home soil at Hangzhou.

"I didn't get a lot of chance to chat with Shanshan," Yin said. "But I'm looking forward to going back to China and play the Asian Games and spend more time with her, considering she's the head coach on our national team."

Yin, who needed a top-four result to overtake American Lilia Vu for the top spot, missed out by two strokes on a playoff for the Queen City title between Australia's Minjee Lee, who won the title with a birdie on the second extra hole, and England's Charley Hull.



Ruoning Yin waves after putting on the fourth green during the final round of the Kroger Queen City Championship in Cincinnati, Ohio. (AFP)

But Yin fired a final-round five-under par 67 to finish third on 14-under 274 at Kenwood Country Club in Cincinnati, Ohio, and become the fifth different player atop the rankings this year.

"It's just amazing," Yin said. "My mind is blank right now!"

Second-ranked Yin won her first major title in June at the Women's PGA Championship, two months after collecting her first LPGA victory at the LA Open.

Others atop the rankings this year included New Zealand's Lydia Ko, Americans Vu and Nelly Korda and South Korea's Ko Jin-young.

Murray has 'huge motivation' to still be in Britain's Davis Cup team

Andy Murray says he has "huge motivation" to be a member of Great Britain's Davis Cup team despite questioning whether he deserved his place after his early exit at the US Open. The former world number one is in a five-man team for this week's group stage in Manchester, along with Cameron Norrie, Dan Evans, Jack Draper and Neal Skupski. Speaking after his recent disappointing second-round loss to Grigor Dimitrov at Flushing Meadows, the Scot said other players deserved a place in the team event ahead of him. But the 36-year-old three-time Grand Slam champion, who has slipped to 41st in the world rankings, cut a more positive figure at a press conference at the AO Arena yesterday. "At that moment, straight as I came off the court, I wasn't in a great place after losing in a Slam," he said.

"I said (to British team captain Leon Smith), if I'm not needed, I completely get that. But, for whatever reason, he asked me to come and I said I would come. "I've always loved playing Davis Cup and any event where you're competing for your country. We have a great group of guys, I love being part of this team." He added: "I do genuinely believe the team can win the event. That's huge motivation to be a part of it. I want to help the team in any way I can, whether that's on the court or off. We'll see what happens."

Britain have been drawn in a strong group with Australia, France and Switzerland and must finish in the top two to book their spot at the finals week in Malaga, southern Spain, in November. (AFP)

Blanc axed by struggling Lyon: club

Laurent Blanc has left his post of coach at Ligue 1's bottom side Lyon "by mutual consent", the club announced yesterday. "Lyon and Laurent Blanc have decided, by mutual consent, to end their collaboration as of today," the club wrote in a press release. "Lyon would like to thank Laurent Blanc and his staff for their commitment and professionalism over the past 11 months at the helm of the professional team."

The announcement ended days of speculation, with a source close to Blanc telling AFP earlier on Tuesday: "It's over."

After finishing third last season, Lyon have started the new campaign with three defeats and a draw, leaving them propping up the table. They also missed out on European competition for the second year running. Blanc, who won the 1998 World Cup as a player and was in charge of the national team between 2010 and 2012, replaced Dutchman Peter Bosz in October 2022 and still had a year on his contract.

The team for next Sunday's Ligue 1 match against Le Havre will be prepared by one of Blanc's assistants, Jean-Francois Vulliez, while Lyon's new American owner John Textor hunts for a successor. Former Italian international midfielder Gennaro Gattuso, who has been out of work since leaving Valencia at the start of the year, and Oliver Glasner who left Eintracht Frankfurt at the end of last season, have both been linked with the job. Former Senegal international Habib Beye, who is currently in charge at Paris-based third-tier club Red Star, is also believed to be in the frame.

'Maximum respect for Rubiales resignation'

Spain men's coach Luis de la Fuente said yesterday he "respects" former football federation president Luis Rubiales' decision to resign after causing outrage by kissing a Women's World Cup player on the lips.

Rubiales stood down from his post on Sunday, three weeks after forcibly kissing Spain midfielder Jenni Hermoso after her side won the World Cup on August 20 in Sydney. The incident provoked unprecedented uproar and Rubiales was provisionally suspended by FIFA for 90 days, while a judge at the country's top criminal court opened an investigation into Rubiales earlier yesterday.

"(I have) maximum respect for the decision of Luis Rubiales," De la Fuente told a news conference ahead of Spain's Euro 2024 qualifier against Cyprus in Granada. The coach, 62, did not want to talk about the Rubiales scandal, which he too was criticised for after applauding the former federation president during a fiery defensive speech in which he pledged not to resign.

De la Fuente said he wanted to focus on football and did not know any details about the process of electing a successor to Rubiales. "I think that the calmer we professionals are, the better," added De la Fuente. "I don't know about (election) times, we will keep thinking about football, football and football."

"If God wants it, we'll be working at Euro 2024 and only thinking about that."

Spain thrashed Georgia 7-1 in Tbilisi on Friday and are second in qualification Group A, behind leaders Scotland. Barcelona winger Lamine Yamal, 16, became Spain's youngest ever player and goalscorer in the emphatic triumph.

"The veterans take care of the new players and give them all kinds of assistance," said De la Fuente.

FOOTBALL

Klinsmann in trouble after no wins with South Korea

AFP
Hong Kong

South Korea face Saudi Arabia in a friendly at Newcastle United's St James' Park today with Jurgen Klinsmann under severe pressure after a wretched start as coach.

The German legend was only appointed in February but his South Korea side have failed to win in the five games since, losing twice and drawing three times.

The latest disappointment was a drab 0-0 stalemate away at an equally off-colour Wales last week, after which skipper Son Heung-min came to the defence of 59-year-old Klinsmann.

"I understand where fans come from, as someone who's been on the national team for a long time," the Tottenham Hotspur forward told reporters in Cardiff.

"I am not saying the coach is always right, but I also don't think fans are always right either."

South Korea reached the last 16 of the Qatar World Cup before being outclassed 4-1 by Brazil, after which coach Paulo Bento said he would not carry on.

The Korea Football Association launched a protracted search for his successor before settling on Klinsmann, a World Cup winner as a player but whose coaching career has never hit the same heights.

Many South Korean fans were underwhelmed by the appointment and performances since have only added to those misgivings.

Klinsmann, whose previous coaching job was a short stint with Hertha Berlin more than three years ago, started with a 2-2 home draw with Colombia, before home defeats to Uruguay and Peru.

Then came a 1-1 home draw with El Salvador and the goalless stalemate with Wales, the result and listless nature of the performance piling the pressure on former United States coach Klinsmann.

Despite boasting Asia's finest attacker in the



talisman Son, South Korea conjured up just one shot on target against the 35th-ranked Welsh.

South Korea have scored four times in five matches under Klinsmann, who was a prolific striker as a player in his pomp.

But it is what the former Germany skipper and coach is doing off the pitch that has equally angered fans.

South Korean supporters and media accuse him of reneging on a pledge to move to the country, saying he spends more time at home in California than he does in South Korea.

Klinsmann's media duties away from the South Korea job have also been touted by critics as more evidence that he is not sufficiently committed to the job.

Choi Dong-ho, a commentator and director of the Center for Sports Culture research group, said Klinsmann appeared "negligent".

"Considering his limited familiarity with Korean players, he should at least be watching all K League games in person rather than be-

ing 'briefed' by other coaches while he stays abroad," said Choi.

Failure to beat Saudi Arabia, who are ranked 54th in the world to South Korea's 28, would leave Klinsmann clinging to his job after less than seven months in charge.

"Klinsmann's seeming lack of urgency in light of poor performances hasn't sat well with South Korean fans, many of whom have already begun calling for the German tactician's head," Yonhap news agency said on Monday.

Klinsmann insists that the team is in transition and his focus is on the Asian Cup, which takes place in Qatar in January-February.

"How prepared are they mentally for a big tournament? Can they deal with all the pressure, all the expectations and all those different elements?" Klinsmann said after the Wales draw.

"It's a growing process," he added. "And I'm pleased overall with what the players showed, and we'll keep growing game by game."

TENNIS

Djokovic downs Medvedev to win record-tying 24th Slam

Serb beats opponent 6-3, 7-6, 6-3 on return to Flushing Meadows, claims third major of 2023 at US Open

AFP
New York

Novak Djokovic defeated Daniil Medvedev in straight sets on Sunday to win his fourth US Open and a record-equalling 24th Grand Slam singles title, cementing his claim as the greatest tennis player in history.

The 36-year-old Djokovic won 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 to become the oldest men's champion in New York in the Open era and match Margaret Court's all-time mark for most Grand Slam victories.

"I don't know where to start. It obviously means the world to me," said Djokovic, wearing a white jacket with the number 24 on his chest during the trophy presentation. "It's hard to describe. I'm really living my childhood dream to compete at the highest level in this sport.

"I never imagined I would be standing talking about 24 Grand Slams but the last couple of years I've felt I have a chance and I have a shot at history and why not grab it."

The Serbian is the first man to win three Grand Slam events in the same season four times, crowning his impending return to world number one in the most fitting of ways inside Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The victory added to his wins at the Australian and French Opens earlier this year, with the only blemish his five-set defeat to Carlos Alcaraz in the final of Wimbledon in July. "You know, some people who are born, he's a genius. He's one of kind. Not too many people in this world like him in sport-wise," said Djokovic's coach, Goran Ivanisevic.

"This is one of the biggest achievement in the sport history."

Medvedev suffered his fourth loss in five Grand Slam finals, all of which were against Djokovic or Rafael Nadal.

"First of all I want to ask Novak: What are you still doing here? Come on!" quipped Medvedev.

"I don't know when you are planning to slow down a little bit.

"I mean, 24. I feel like I have not a bad career and I have 20 titles. You have 24 Grand Slams. Wow!" Medvedev defeated Djokovic in

DJOKOVIC FACTFILE

Name: Novak Djokovic
Date of birth: May 22, 1987
Place of birth: Belgrade
Professional debut: 2003
Career earnings: \$169,791,880
Highest ranking: 1 (388 weeks in total from Monday)
Career honours
Total ATP titles: 96
Grand Slams: 24
Australian Open (10) - 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2023
French Open (3) - 2016, 2021, 2023
Wimbledon (7) - 2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022
US Open (4) - 2011, 2015, 2018, 2023
ATP Tour Finals (6) - 2008, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2022
Davis Cup (1) - 2010
Year ending World No. 1 (7) - 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2021

straight sets in the 2021 final to prevent the Serbian from becoming the first man to win all four Grand Slams in the same year since Rod Laver in 1969.

Djokovic admitted to feeling overwhelmed on that occasion, but there was little evidence of nerves as he quickly took command of Sunday's championship match.

The second seed – who missed last year's US Open because of his refusal to be vaccinated against Covid-19 – burst out of the gate with a confident hold sealed by successive aces and struck at the first opportunity, punishing Medvedev for a double-fault to break for a 2-0 lead.

A third ace consolidated his advantage before Medvedev got on the board in the fourth game.

The pair traded holds largely untroubled until Djokovic again put pressure on Medvedev as the third seed served down 2-5.

Medvedev dug in to twice stave off set points, but Djokovic calmly made the set his the following game.

Medvedev dethroned last year's champion Alcaraz with a "12 out of 10" performance in the semi-finals, but he struggled to replicate his very best consistently against an imperious Djokovic.

Attempting to be the first player to beat the top two seeds en route to the title since 1975, Medvedev once more repeatedly found himself under the pump early in the second set.

He was able to resist, hitting a

sweeping volley to fight off break point as he secured a gutsy hold for 4-3 before finally asking questions of Djokovic, who was showing signs of fatigue.

A leaping overhead gave Medvedev his first break chance of the contest the very next game, but Djokovic responded with a brilliant scoop on the half-volley to save it.

Djokovic wobbled serving at 5-6, double-faulting twice as Medvedev brought up set point. But Djokovic was waiting as Medvedev went cross-court, and put away the volley to force a tie-break.

Medvedev seemed to have the momentum on his side after winning an astonishing rally to nose 5-4 ahead only for Djokovic to bag the next three points, snatching a marathon 104-minute second set and closing in on a historic triumph.

"Should have won it," Medvedev said of the second set. "Should have won it, but sometimes tennis is not that easy."

Djokovic sportingly offered to help Medvedev to his feet after the Russian took an awkward tumble early in the third set, but there was no such goodwill when two break points came about soon after.

Medvedev pumped a backhand long to hand Djokovic a 3-1 advantage. He gave the break straight back, but Medvedev faltered again and there was no mistake second time around as Djokovic wrapped up the title before the emotions streamed out.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates with the trophy after defeating Russia's Daniil Medvedev in the US Open final in New York. (AFP)

FOOTBALL

Deschamps not surprised by Flick sacking

AFP
Dortmund

France manager Didier Deschamps said yesterday he was not surprised by the sacking of his Germany counterpart Hansi Flick.

Speaking to the media ahead of today's friendly between the sides in Dortmund, Deschamps said he felt sorry for Flick but explained "all coaches know what to expect if the results are not right".

Flick became the first manager to be sacked in German history after a poor run of form which included just one win from six games since Germany's group stage exit at the Qatar World Cup.

"There are always high expectations on Germany," the 2018 World Cup-winning coach told reporters. "I wish Hansi all the best"

Despite the sacking, Deschamps said Euro 2024 hosts Germany still posed a threat.

"There are great players in the



France's coach Didier Deschamps addresses a press conference yesterday, on the eve of the friendly against Germany in Dortmund. (AFP)

team. They come from the best clubs in the world."

France forward Antoine Griezmann said he was "surprised" by Germany's poor results.

The Atletico Madrid player told reporters Germany "just needs to find the right formula" to return to the elite, with the side made up of "big players from big clubs who can ensure German football shines again".

Griezmann, 32, also revealed his "main goal" was to end his career playing in Major League Soccer, while telling reporters he could also imagine joining the dozens of players who have moved to Saudi Arabia.

The forward, who has a contract at Atletico until the summer of 2016, said he could "very well" understand players who had made the move to the Saudi Pro League.

"We're talking about incredible sums of money here. They're thinking about their children, their grandchildren.

"I think going there is normal."

FOCUS

Southgate reveals Scotland soft spot as 'great sporting rivalry' turns 150

AFP
Glasgow

England manager Gareth Southgate revealed yesterday he once supported Scotland at the 1978 World Cup as the old rivals prepare to do battle in a friendly to mark the 150th anniversary of their first meeting.

Scotland have not beaten the Three Lions since 1999, but go into today's clash in front of a home crowd at Glasgow's Hampden Park full of confidence as they close in on qualification for next year's European Championship. Steve Clarke's men have won all five of their Euro 2024 qualifiers, including at home to Spain and away to Erling Haaland's Norway. Clarke believes the test of facing England is a "benchmark" of how far his side have progressed.

And Southgate is looking forward to savouring the hostile atmosphere at Hampden, despite having once had a soft spot for Scotland himself. "This is horrendous, what I'm going to say here ahead of tomorrow, but I was supporting Scotland in 1978 because we hadn't qualified," said the England boss.

"Then we were back in in 1982 and all of a sudden for me then onwards it was all about England." He added: "Great fixtures, I've met so many of the former players over the years, worked



with some of them, played with some of them. It's a fabulous game. "I know it's a rivalry and people will be wary of it crossing a boundary, but it's a brilliant sporting rivalry and a great game to be involved in."

Scotland's place at Euro 2024 could even be sealed while they are in action should Norway and Georgia draw in Oslo.

But Clarke insists his full focus is on ending his nation's poor recent record against their local rivals. England lead the overall head-to-head 48 wins to 41, but have been even more dominant in recent times.

Scotland's 1-0 success at Wembley 24 years ago in a Euro 2000 playoff, which England still won 2-1 on aggregate, is the only time the Three Lions have lost in the last 12 meetings stretching back to 1986. "Now we see what we can do against a team that's nominally a pot one team, always in the later stages of tournaments," said Clarke.

'Those times are over': Voeller honest about scope of Germany rebuild

Nine months before Euro 2024 kicks off in Germany, the hosts have turned to Rudi Voeller to get the team back on track before today's friendly against France after coach Hansi Flick was sacked. Flick became the first Germany coach in history to be relieved of his duties after his side slumped to a 4-1 loss to Japan in Wolfsburg on Saturday, the latest in a run of poor results which included a group-stage exit at the World Cup in Qatar last year. The German Football Association (DFB) have turned to 1990 World Cup winner Voeller to take over on an interim basis for the friendly against 2022 World Cup finalists France in Dortmund. While Voeller's first point of call will be to inject some pride and stability into the struggling team, his broader task is to right the ship before next year's European Championship on home

soil. Voeller was asked in Dortmund yesterday about whether the well-known statement, commonly attributed to England's Gary Lineker, that 'football is a simple game with 11 v 11, and Germany wins at the end' still rang true. "Those times are over" Voeller said, "we've been booted out at the group stage in the World Cup twice in a row." "In the meantime other countries and associations have caught up." Voeller, who was part of the Flick set-up as the DFB's sporting director, was also appointed on an interim basis after Germany's disastrous group stage exit at Euro 2000. He took the side all the way to the final at the 2002 World Cup, before losing 2-0 Brazil, but 63-year-old Voeller said on Sunday this time he will not be in the hot seat for long.

Speaking yesterday, Voeller said his appointment was a "one-time thing" and he would not stay on, regardless of the result against France. "The most urgent task is to hire a national coach who will quickly get the team back on track and prepare us for the big European Championships next year," Voeller said. He said the sacking was "not an easy moment for me... I joined in February to support Hansi Flick so that he could be successful." "I firmly believed that as a national coach he could manage to get our team back on track." Germany captain Ilkay Gundogan said the players were feeling "a mixture of disappointment, sadness and frustration" that their performances cost the coach his job. "I feel like I let Hansi down and the other players feel that way also." (AFP)