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Andy Murray a Wimbledon doubt after injury forces Queen's exit



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Albania dent Croatia's Euro 2024 hopes with dramatic draw

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CRICKET

De Kock, Rabada lead South Africa to 18-run win over USA at T20 World Cup

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HORSE RACING

Wathnan Racing's Leovanni claims Queen Mary Stakes

Agencies

Ascot, United Kingdom

Wathnan Racing's Leovanni won the Queen Mary Stakes (Group 2) at the Royal Ascot yesterday.

Ridden by James Doyle and trained by Karl Burke, Leovanni broke smartly from stall 10 and raced prominently among a group of horses on the far side before drawing clear to win the five-furlong £150,000 contest by a length and three quarters. The filly made a winning debut at Nottingham last month.

Mighty Eriu finished strongly up the stands' rail to take second, while Maw Lam, who made a slow start, came through for third, a further neck behind. The heavily backed favourite Kassaya was left looking for a gap on the stands' side and eventually finished twelfth. Doyle was quick to share the credit after the victory - his 19th Royal Ascot winner.



Connections of Leovanni celebrate after the Wathnan Racing-owned filly won the Queen Mary Stakes (Group 2) at Royal Ascot yesterday.

"It's been a lot of work from everyone behind the scenes, it's easy for me just riding them, but a lot of work has been put in by Richard Brown

(racing adviser to Wathnan Racing) and his whole team," he said.

He added: "I won this race before on a filly called Rizeena for

Clive Britain (2013) and I would say this filly has all the class that she had. The raw speed, the ability to relax, the temperament, being



Jockey James Doyle guided Leovanni to Queen Mary Stakes victory at Royal Ascot yesterday.

versatile with the ground. There is a lot to look forward to with her."

For trainer Burke it was his second Queen Mary Stakes victory in three years in the opener.

"I watched it live, so I would love to see a replay of it. From watching it live, it looked very smooth. James said that Leovanni travelled beautifully," Burke said.

FOOTBALL

Germany ease past Hungary to reach last 16 at Euros

Musiala 'our most important' player, says Germany captain Gundogan

AFP

Stuttgart, Germany

Jamal Musiala and Ilkay Gundogan scored as hosts Germany became the first team to qualify for the last 16 of Euro 2024 yesterday after beating Hungary 2-0 in Stuttgart.

Musiala struck for the second game running midway through the first half, much to the anger of Hungary players who felt a foul should have been awarded in the build-up to the goal. Gundogan grabbed his side's second on 67 minutes as Germany eased to a second successive win in Group A, making sure they will progress to the knockout phase at least as one of the best third-placed sides.

Gundogan lavished praise on Musiala, who was playing in his city of birth in German colours for just the second time.

"For me he's incredible. It's such a joy to play with him. He's someone who can do the unexpected in every single situation and is such a difference-maker for our team.

"He is maybe the most important one at the moment for us and at such a young age as well, especially when it comes to creating, putting in the final pass and scoring goals which is something he's added to his game as well."

Julian Nagelsmann's men can wrap up top spot when they play Switzerland in Frankfurt in their final group fixture on Sunday.

Hungary are starting at elimination after back-to-back defeats and must beat Scotland if they are to stand any chance of reaching the last 16. Germany unsurprisingly stuck with the same line-up that battered Scotland 5-1 in the first game of the tournament, ending a run of three major finals in which they had lost their opening match.

Hungary coach Marco Rossi made two changes following a



Germany's midfielder Jamal Musiala shoots to score his team's first goal during the UEFA Euro 2024 match against Hungary at the Stuttgart Arena in Stuttgart yesterday. (AFP)

disappointing 3-1 loss to Switzerland, bringing Marton Dardai into his three-man defence and starting Bendeguz Bolla at right wing-back. A dismal first half left Hungary with too much to do against the Swiss and Rossi admitted beating Germany would require a "perfect match" from his team.

Hungary almost struck in the opening seconds as Manuel Neuer raced out to take the ball off the toe of Roland Sallai. Kai Havertz outmuscled Willi Orban only to be superbly denied by Peter Gulacsi, who thrust out his right hand to deny the Arsenal attacker.

Robert Andrich's volley from the resulting corner was bravely headed behind by Bolla, but it wasn't long until Germany's persistence was rewarded. Musiala cushioned the ball through for Gundogan and the Germany captain kept the attack alive after jostling with Orban, knocking

it back for Musiala to slam in off the crossbar with a touch off Attila Fiola. Hungary were furious no foul was given for the contact between Gundogan and Orban that knocked the defender to the ground, the goal confirmed after a brief VAR check. Dominik Szoboszlai's curling free-kick drew a terrific stop from Neuer soaring to his right, the goalkeeper kicking away the follow-up as Hungary tried to scramble in the rebound.

A key block from Jonathan Tah foiled a second opportunity in quick succession for Szoboszlai, with Musiala then drilling into the side-netting at the other end.

Hungary had the ball in Germany's net in first-half stoppage time, but Sallai's effort was ruled out for offside after Neuer palmed away an Orban header. Gulacsi clawed away a deflected Toni Kroos drive early in the second half before Hungary forward

Barnabas Varga, who scored in the loss to Switzerland, nodded narrowly over from an inviting cross.

Germany picked apart the Hungary defence with a patient attack to double their lead just past the hour. Maximilian Mittelstaedt found space down the left and slid across a pass for Gundogan to sweep home from near the penalty spot. Niclas Füllkrug failed to get a finishing touch as Joshua Kimmich powered across the face of goal, with Gulacsi making smart saves to keep out Kimmich and Leroy Sane as Germany sought a third goal. Julian Nagelsmann withdrew his front three with the game under control to keep them fresh for the Switzerland clash.

Neuer had a nervy moment late on when he spilled a cross, but Kimmich cleared Orban's shot off the line to preserve the clean sheet for Germany - their first in eight games at the championship.

FOCUS

Shaqiri stunner moves Switzerland to verge of last 16

AFP

Cologne, Germany

Switzerland moved within touching distance of a place in the last 16 at Euro 2024 as Xherdan Shaqiri's stunning strike earned a 1-1 draw against Scotland yesterday.

Murat Yakin's side trailed to an early Scott McTominay goal that took a hefty deflection off Swiss defender Fabian Schaer.

But Shaqiri produced one of the goals of the tournament so far as the former Liverpool forward punished Anthony Ralston's woeful backpass with a brilliant curler from 20 yards.

With honours even in Cologne, the Swiss sit in second place in Group A with four points, two behind Hungary after the hosts beat Hungary 2-0 earlier on Wednesday.

Switzerland, who defeated Hungary 3-1 in their opener, are not mathematically certain to advance to the knockout stages but they are in a strong position heading into their last game against Germany. The Swiss have made the knockout stage in their last five major competitions. With the best four third-placed teams qualifying for the last 16, Scotland remain in the hunt to reach the knockout rounds of a major tournament for the first time.

Steve Clarke's team restored their pride with a battling display that erased the bitter taste of a wretched 5-1 loss to Germany in the tournament opener.

Scotland have only one victory in their last 11 games, but a historic last 16 berth is still a

possibility if they can improve their goal difference with a big win against Hungary.

Yakin had marched around the pitch an hour before kick-off gesticulating towards the red wall of Swiss fans in a bid to whip them into fever pitch, but it was Scotland who surfed the initial wave of emotion.

After the humiliation of their meek surrender in Munich, Scotland's fans were desperate for any sign of improvement, no matter how small, and winning their first corner of the tournament drew a primal scream from the Tartan Army. That ear-splitting din set the tone for a thunderous Scotland start as they flew into tackles and pressed Switzerland into misplaced passes.

From one of those untimely Swiss mistakes, Scotland captain Andrew Robertson launched the sweeping break that gave them the lead in the 13th minute.

Callum McGregor's clever overlap gave him space inside the Swiss penalty area and he teed up McTominay for a shot that was heading straight at goalkeeper Yann Sommer until Schaer needlessly stuck his foot out and diverted it into his own net. If there was more than a touch of good fortune about Scotland's opener, they failed to make the most of the momentum as Ralston gifted the Swiss their equaliser in the 26th minute. Playing a suicidal backpass without looking, Ralston sent Shaqiri clean through on goal and the 32-year-old caressed a sublime strike into the top corner from the edge of the area.



Switzerland's midfielder Xherdan Shaqiri (centre) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Scotland during the Euro 2024 Group A match at the Cologne Stadium in Cologne yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

World No.1 Suryakumar 'happy' to be in Barbados for test against Afghanistan

AFP
Bridgetown, Barbados

India batsman **Suryakumar Yadav** has welcomed the switch from New York to the traditional pitches of Barbados ahead of their opening match in the Super Eight part of the T20 Cricket World Cup against Afghanistan today.

The Indians, one of the favourites to win the trophy, topped Group A with their three wins over Ireland, Pakistan, USA – their match with Canada in Lauderhill was abandoned – all played on the “spicy” drop-in pitches of the temporary stadium near New York.

The move to Barbados takes the Indians on to the more traditional cricket territory of the West Indies.

“It’s not that we weren’t happy playing there (New York) but we were playing for the first time,” he said at a press conference held yesterday.

“So yes, the conditions were different and a little challenging as well.

“But we’ve played here, we know the conditions here, how

they react, how they act, so we are very happy to be here.

“It looks better.”

Suryakumar, the world’s top-ranked batter in the short white-ball format, has never played in Bridgetown in the T20 format but did play two ODIs against West Indies there last year, making 19 and 24.

He struggled for runs in those group matches in New York making just two against Ireland and seven against Pakistan before a measured 50 not out from 49 balls – some way short of his average T20I strike rate of 168.06 – guided the Indians to a seven-wicket win over USA.

“I have been the world’s number one batsman for the past two years so you should know how to bat according to different conditions and how you can change your game to what the team needs at that time,” said the 33-year-old.

“If you can play like that, I think it displays good batsmanship. And I try to do that if the wicket is difficult.”

“I knew post-power play that finding boundaries was going to be difficult on that ground with the

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wind, with the slow outfield,” he said.

“So, we had a plan in mind after the power play that we’d just try and hit the gap and run hard,” Suryakumar added.

“It was a little difficult track to bat on, yes, but that day the situation was different.

“We had to be batting till the end, keeping the wickets in hand,” he said.

Against Afghanistan, and indeed Bangladesh who they face on Saturday, Suryakumar is sure to come up against more of a spin threat but the Mumbai Indians slugger is more than ready.

“That has always been my strong point,” he said.

“I mean, if the wicket is slow, the spinner is bowling, or if the wicket is good, that has always been my game.”

“We obviously have plans against Afghanistan. We are completely focused and know our own strong points really well.

“We do think about the opposition. But at the same time, at the end of the day, you should know what your strong points are and back it.”

MATCH REPORT

South Africa beat courageous USA after tense battle

De Kock smashes quickfire 74 while Rabada picks up 3 for 18

AFP
North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda

Quinton de Kock hit a blistering half-century as South Africa defeated a battling United States by 18 runs in their opening T20 World Cup second round clash yesterday.

The Proteas piled up 194-4 off their 20 overs after being put into bat before restricting the USA to 176-6 as the Super Eights stage got underway at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium.

However, the USA, who stunned former champions Pakistan in the first round, were close to another upset when Andries Gous (80 not out) and Harmeet Singh (38) put on 91 for the sixth wicket.

Opening batsman De Kock, his country’s leading run-maker in the format, reached his 15th T20 international fifty off 26 balls.

He was eventually dismissed for 74 with seven fours and five sixes in a 40-ball innings which was comfortably his best performance of the tournament.

In four previous visits to the crease at the World Cup, the 31-year-old had a best of just 20 against Sri Lanka. Skipper Aiden Markram also hit his tournament best of 46 from 32 balls with four boundaries and a six.

Markram and De Kock put on 110 for the second wicket and helped their team reach 101-1 off the first 10 overs. Slow left-arm seamer Harmeet brought the United States back into the match by removing De Kock and fellow batsman David Miller (0) in the space of two balls.

Markram’s innings was ended by impressive fast bowler Saurabh Netravalkar who finished with 2-21 from his four overs.



South Africa’s Kagiso Rabada (left) celebrates after USA’s Nitish Kumar was caught out during the ICC Twenty20 World Cup match against the United States at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda, yesterday. (AFP)

Heinrich Klaassen (36 not out) and Tristan Stubbs (20 not out) added an undefeated 53 for the fifth wicket. The United States enjoyed a bright start to their reply, reaching 50 in the first five overs before they struggled to contain the Proteas’ pace-spin attack.

Gous smashed leg-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi for three sixes in the 18th over to leave his team needing 28 off 12 balls. Rabada, however, conceded just two runs off the 19th over while also dismissing Harmeet to finish with 3-18. Harmeet made his runs from 22 balls with two fours and three sixes. Gous’s runs came off 47 balls and featured five

international Corey Anderson made a quick 12 before his stumps were scattered by Anrich Nortje one ball after cracking a six over mid-wicket. The USA limped to 73-4 off the first 10 overs before opener Gous and Harmeet suddenly reignited their team’s hopes.

Gous smashed leg-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi for three sixes in the 18th over to leave his team needing 28 off 12 balls.

Rabada, however, conceded just two runs off the 19th over while also dismissing Harmeet to finish with 3-18. Harmeet made his runs from 22 balls with two fours and three sixes. Gous’s runs came off 47 balls and featured five

fours and five sixes. Shamsi made for 50 runs off his four overs. West Indies and defending champions England are the other teams in Group 2 of the Super Eights. India, Australia, Afghanistan and Bangladesh comprise Group 1.

BRIEF SCORES

South Africa 194-4 in 20 overs (Quinton de Kock 74, Aiden Markram 46, Heinrich Klaassen 36; Saurabh Netravalkar 2-21, Harmeet Singh 2-24) **v USA 176-6 in 20 overs** (Andries Gous 80 not out, Harmeet Singh 38; Kagiso Rabada 3-18)

Toss: USA **Result:** South Africa won by 18 runs

ANNOUNCEMENT

Williamson steps down as New Zealand captain after T20 World Cup exit



New Zealand’s captain Kane Williamson plays a shot during the ICC Twenty20 World Cup match against Papua New Guinea at Brian Lara Cricket Academy Stadium in Tarouba, Trinidad and Tobago. (AFP)

Reuters
Auckland

Kane Williamson has stepped down as captain of New Zealand’s white-ball teams and opted out of a national contract for the 2024/25 season following the Black Caps’ early exit from the T20 World Cup.

Williamson’s decision marks the end of an era for a New Zealand team which made the semi-finals of the previous three T20 World Cups and the 2021 final but ultimately missed out on a maiden white-ball title.

Fast bowler Lockie Ferguson has also indicated he will not take up a national contract, New Zealand Cricket (NZC) said yesterday, following the team’s failure to make the Super Eight phase at the ongoing tournament.

One of the world’s top batsmen and a campaigner of more than 350 internationals in Tests, one-day and T20 cricket, Williamson will continue to play for New Zealand in all three formats.

However, he has opted to take up a contract outside of New Zealand in January, meaning he will be unavailable for part of the home summer.

“Pursuing an overseas opportunity during the New Zealand summer means I’m unable to accept a central contract offer,” the 33-year-old said in a statement.

“Playing for New Zealand is something I treasure, and my desire to give back to the team remains undiminished.

“My life outside cricket has changed however – spending more time with my family and enjoying experiences with them at home or abroad is something that’s even more important to me.”

Williamson’s likely destination in January is a T20 franchise league, with competitions running in several countries including Australia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates.

He gave up the Test captaincy to Tim Southee in 2022, and there will be another changing of the guard as New Zealand look to rejuvenate before the next T20 World Cup in Sri Lanka and India in 2026.

Fast bowler Trent Boult, who opted out of a national contract in 2022, confirmed last Friday he had played his last T20 World Cup following the team’s elimination from the tournament.

NZC said Williamson would be available for eight Tests leading into Christmas and the ICC Champions Trophy in Pakistan in February-March.

The board said Williamson’s decision to opt out of a contract would not hurt his chances of selection, a departure from its usual policy which favours contracted players.

“We’re happy to make an exception for our greatest ever batter – especially as he remains so committed to the team,” said NZC CEO Scott Weenink.

“This is a good way to help keep Kane in the international game so that he continues to play a major role for the Black Caps – both now and in the years to come,” Weenink added.

ENGLAND’S TOPLEY READY FOR DEATH-OVERS BOWLING DUTIES

Barbados: Reece Topley assumed new ball duties on his return to the England side after missing the first two group matches at the T20 World Cup but the left-arm seamer says he can also be a strong death-bowling option for the defending champions.

The towering seamer opened the bowling against both Oman and Namibia as England made

the Super Eight stage of the tournament. Jofra Archer and Chris Jordan are England’s preferred bowlers in the final overs of an innings but Topley also relishes bowling at a stage when batters throw caution to the wind. “It’s nothing new, I’ve done it in an England shirt before,” he told reporters ahead of the Group 1 game against tournament

co-hosts West Indies. “I actually really enjoy it because it’s kind of like the time where you get your rewards for bowling well up top and keeping it tight. “It’s the time when wickets fall. So it’s quite exciting in that respect and I don’t think there’s anything to be feared.” Apart from regular yorkers, Topley’s armoury includes a back-of-the-hand slower delivery

and wide yorkers – all of which can come in handy in the final overs. The 30-year-old did not think death-overs bowling required a different mindset. “If you bowl well at the death, you get rewards. If you don’t bowl well, you get hit. “I don’t think it differs to any sort of stage in the game to be honest.”

SWIMMING / US OLYMPIC TRIALS

Smith registers backstroke world record

Reuters
Indianapolis

Regan Smith set the 100m backstroke world record at the US Olympic trials in Indianapolis yesterday, touching the wall first in 57.13 to shave 0.2 seconds off Australian Kaylee McKeown's previous mark.

With just over a month to go before the Games, Smith's win in the final sealed her place on the US team and sets up a Paris showdown with McKeown, who swam 57.33 in Hungary last year.

"I'm so proud of myself," Smith said amid cheers from thousands of fans at Lucas Oil Stadium.

"Backstroke is hard for me sometimes but to fight back like this and get that back means a lot." Katharine Berkoff was second with a time of 57.91.

Smith, a three-time Olympic medalist who took bronze in the event at the Tokyo Games, still has two more events to contest at the trials and said she would not get

too carried away celebrating her world record.

"We're going to take a couple minutes here to be really proud of what we accomplished and then it's back to work," she said.

"I've got more things that I want to accomplish this week."

Smith previously set the mark at the 2019 world championships in South Korea but said she was not sure she would ever reach those heights again.

"There were many years that went by after 2019 where I thought that I would never do that ever again," the 22-year-old told reporters.

"That was a long time coming and it took a lot of practicing and improving my confidence."

With help from a sports psychologist, Smith is now brimming with confidence headed to Paris where she thinks the record could be broken again.

"I think 56 is a possibility for sure, whether it's me or whether it's one of my competitors, who knows.



Regan Smith of the United States competes in a preliminary heat of the women's 200m butterfly on Day Five of the 2024 US Olympic Team Swimming Trials at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, Indiana. (AFP)

"But I'm not going to sell myself short. That was an amazing race but it wasn't a perfect race."

Smith's world record was the second of the trials after Gretchen Walsh set a new mark in the women's 100m butterfly on Saturday, touching in 55.18.

Bobby Finke was a predictable winner in the 800m freestyle final, clocking 7:44.22 to book his ticket to Paris where he will defend his gold medal from Tokyo.

"I'm going to be able to take the experience from last time and all the world championships that we

had leading up to this," Finke said at the stadium, which is home to the NFL's Indianapolis Colts.

"The crowd here is amazing, first time in a football stadium. I see people all around, which is really exciting, my family is here.

"To be able to harness all that

energy and put it into the race, especially such a long one, is always fun."

Finke, a relative unknown before making his breakthrough in Tokyo, said getting onto the team a second time was harder than the first. "All the pressure I was feeling coming into this race, to finally get my hand on the wall and see the Olympic rings next to my name was a relief," he said. "I'm very excited I get to do it again."

Luke Whitlock finished second and will likely join two-time gold medalist Finke in the pool at Paris for his first Games. Caeleb Dressel advanced to the final of the 100m freestyle, finishing in 47.82, behind Jack Alexy's time of 47.08. The seven-time Olympic gold medalist abruptly pulled out of the world championships in Budapest in 2022 due to a health issue and failed to qualify for the world championships in Japan last year but has been on the comeback trail of late. The 27-year-old will look to book his ticket to a third Games in the eight-man final.

TENNIS

Murray pulls out with injury after 5 games at Queen's

MURRAY'S FAREWELL APPEARANCE AT WIMBLEDON DOUBTFUL

AFP
London

Andy Murray could only manage five games before injury forced him to retire from his second-round match at Queen's yesterday, casting a shadow over a possible farewell appearance for the British tennis great at Wimbledon.

Following his very first serve of the match, against Australia's Jordan Thompson, the 37-year-old Murray's hip and right leg seemed to give way.

He served out the game, virtually on one leg, and after dropping the first two games he held for 1-2

Murray, who competes with a metal hip and has struggled with an ankle injury and a back issue this year, had a medical time-out at the changeover.

The Scot, twice a Wimbledon champion and five times a Queen's winner, came out for the fourth game but was unable to chase down anything out of reach and rolled in gentle first serves.

Murray, who has plummeted to 129th in the world rankings, eventually withdrew at 4-1 down with the official explanation a back injury.

The former world number one has spoken of wanting to retire either after Wimbledon or the Paris Olympics, with Murray a two-time gold medalist.

But yesterday's injury could scupper the three-time Grand Slam winner's plans, with Wimbledon starting in under a fortnight.

"I could see he had a problem in the warm-up and then his first serve," said Thompson. "I thought, 'hit the ball in and make him run!'"

"I actually learned that from him, when he was playing, and if a guy was hurt or cramping or something, he'd always use a drop



Britain's Andy Murray speaks with a doctor during his singles round of 16 match against Australia's Jordan Thompson at the ATP Championships at Queen's Club in west London yesterday. (AFP)

shot or just try and take it up the line."

The 30-year-old added: "I learned a lot of things watching him play, so it's an honour to share the court with him, but it's just sad that it ended like that."

Korda knocks out Dimitrov
Meanwhile, Sebastian Korda maintained his impressive start to the grass-court season as he defeated former champion Grigor Dimitrov, the third seed, with a hard-fought win.

The 23-year-old American advanced into the last eight with a 6-4, 3-6, 7-5 victory over his Bulgarian opponent, who took the Queen's title back in 2014.

"It was a big struggle," said Korda. "We were both serving well and waiting for our chances and there weren't many.

"But when they came, I tried to

take them," added Korda, beaten in last week's final at 's-Hertogenbosch - another warm-up event for Wimbledon - by Australia's Alex De Minaur.

Korda will next play Rinky Hijikata after the Australian qualifier defeated Italian Matteo Arnaldi 7-6 (7/0), 7-6 (9/7) to reach his third four-level quarter-final of the season.

Carlos Alcaraz, the defending Queen's champion who won his third Grand Slam at the French Open earlier this month, was due on court later to face Britain's Jack Draper.

Medvedev makes early exit in Halle grasscourt event

Last year's Wimbledon semi-finalist Daniil Medvedev suffered his first loss of the grasscourt season yesterday, going down 6-3 2-6 7-6(5) to Zhang Zhizhen in

the Halle Open second round. Russian third seed Medvedev made a shaky start but fought back in the second set, powering down five aces and breaking China's Zhang twice.

The former US Open champion paid a heavy price for double faults in the third set, however, as Zhang, ranked 42nd, came through long rallies in the tiebreak to clinch his first win against a top-five ranked opponent on grass and reach the quarter-finals.

"It was a really tough match," Zhang said. "Last time I lost to him in a third set tiebreak. When we went into a third set tiebreak today I was thinking, perfect moment for revenge."

Zhang will next face American Christopher Eubanks, who beat defending champion Alexander Bublik 7-6(5) 4-6 6-3.

GOLF

Scheffler eyes another title glory at Travellers



Scottie Scheffler during the Pro-Am prior to the Travellers Championship at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut. (AFP)

Reuters
New York

After snapping his streak of 11 straight top-10 finishes, Scottie Scheffler looks to return to the top of the leaderboard this week at the Travellers Championship in Cromwell, Connecticut.

The World No. 1 tied for 41st place and finished 14 strokes behind US Open winner Bryson DeChambeau last week at Pinehurst, North Carolina. His top-10 streak began at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am from Feb. 1-3 and included a Masters championship and four other wins.

"Just a long week," Scheffler said of his result at Pinehurst No. 2. "I didn't have my best stuff and that's a pretty difficult golf course to try and make a lot of birdies and play some good golf around when you don't have your best stuff."

Scheffler spoke with reporters yesterday at TPC River Highlands, where he is making his fifth career start and coming off a T4 finish in 2023.

After putting together 41 straight rounds at par or better this season, Scheffler arrives at the Travellers on a streak of five straight rounds over par.

"Well I didn't really think about

it very much when I was shooting under par, so I'm probably not going to think about it too much when I'm shooting over par," he said. "Just one of those deals. Like, I was playing good and I was able to survive kind of the harder golf courses."

"... It's just kind of those weird little stats. Like, I think I shot over par a couple times at Colonial and I finished second. So it's not like, you know, I played that bad and shot over par. It's kind of one of those deals that just out of sight, out of mind."

Likewise, Scheffler said he wasn't too concerned about the high temperatures expected this weekend in Connecticut.

"As far as the heat goes, I'm from Texas so it's actually cold up here to me," he said. "I was a little chilly this morning when I got out there on the course."

Scheffler's not-so-secret weapon this week is caddie Ted Scott, who was on the bag for Bubba Watson when he won the Travellers in 2010, 2015 and 2018.

"This is a golf course that he's had a lot of success on, so if there's a difference of opinion I'm probably going to lean towards him a little bit more than myself, just because I haven't had the success on this golf course specifically," Scheffler said.

FOCUS

Rahm feeling good at LIV event in Nashville

Reuters
New York

Jon Rahm is ready to put his best foot forward at this weekend's LIV Golf Nashville tournament.

The Spanish captain of Legion XIII GC withdrew from last week's US Open with a foot infection that also forced him to pull out of LIV Golf Houston in the second round.

"I'm feeling good," Rahm said during yesterday's media session in Nashville. "The main reason for the withdrawal from the two events was the infection I had and just to be precautionary toward not making it worse and seeing what steps I can take to prevent that from happening in the future.

"The wound is still there. I'm not going to show any graphic pictures, but it's still there. It's manageable now. I'm not going to really make it worse. A lot of things to follow up from what happened

to make sure it heals properly and it doesn't happen again."

Rahm, who has dropped to No. 9 in the Official World Golf Ranking, said he feels prepared to hit the links on Friday at The Grove.

"I feel ready to walk and hit it," Rahm said. "I haven't been able to do much. It doesn't take much for me to feel ready to compete. Looking forward to it. Just happy that I'm here."

The two-time major winner spent last weekend watching his fellow LIV golfer Bryson DeChambeau defeat his Ryder Cup teammate Rory McIlroy to win the US Open at Pinehurst, North Carolina.

"I thought it was quite a show from the comfort of my home," Rahm said.

"It's a very enjoyable tournament to watch. I haven't gotten the chance to enjoy a major from start to finish like that and to get to see a lot of golf was really fun, and to see how everything unfolded."

OSAKA AMONG FOUR GRAND SLAM WINNERS GRANTED WIMBLEDON WILDCARD

London: Japan's **Naomi Osaka** was one of four Grand Slam champions granted a wildcard yesterday into the main draw for next month's women's singles at Wimbledon.

The 26-year-old, a former world number one and twice winner of both the Australian and US Opens, will be playing in the main draw of Wimbledon for the first time in five years after becoming a mother. So too will former Australian Open champion Caroline Wozniacki, who also once topped the world rankings, with the 33-year-

old Dane another recipient of a wildcard. Wildcards are given by the All England Club to players who are not ranked high enough to qualify directly into the main draw.

Wozniacki, disappointed to miss out on a wildcard at the French Open, told Britain's PA news agency: "I have so many special memories. I won junior Wimbledon back in 2005, so it's a long time ago. There's something so special about playing on Wimbledon's Centre Court that you can't replicate anywhere else." Germany's Angelique Kerber, the

2018 Wimbledon champion and another former world number one who took time out from tennis to start a family, has also received a wildcard entry into the tournament.

Another wildcard went to home favourite Emma Raducanu, who made her breakthrough run to the fourth round of Wimbledon in 2021 - shortly before her triumph in winning that year's US Open as a qualifier. It will be the first time in two years that Raducanu, 21, has been on the grass courts of Wimbledon following wrist and ankle surgery in 2023.



Qatar reach main round of IHF World Beach Handball



A Qatar player goes on the attack against Uruguay at the IHF World Beach Handball Championship in China's Pingtan Island. The Qatari team yesterday qualified for the main round of the championship after defeating Uruguay (2-0) in Group D. With this victory, Qatar occupy third place in the group behind Germany and the US, thus securing a spot in the main round of the tournament that ends on June 23. The Qatari team's participation in the world championship is its seventh in a row. The first was in Turkiye in 2010.

Qatar bag silver at Jr Asian Bowling Championship



Qatar's Ibrahim al-Muraikhi and Talal al-Marri clinched the silver medal in the doubles competition at the 23rd Asian Junior Bowling Championship in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The Qatar duo scored 2,571 points finishing behind the Singapore pair, who claimed gold medal after amassing 2,585 points. Kuwait's Nasser al-Kandari and Adel Ali, came in third place with 2,526 points.

EURO 2024

Spirited Albania strike in extra time to hold Croatia 2-2

BOTH COUNTRIES NEED TO WIN LAST GROUP GAME TO PROGRESS

AFP
Hamburg

Albania left Croatia in danger of a group-stage exit from Euro 2024 after a thrilling 2-2 draw yesterday as Albania's Klaus Gjasula scored at both ends, including a dramatic injury-time equaliser. After a disappointing 3-0 loss to Spain in their opener, Croatia were behind again when Qazim Laci gave Albania an early lead in Hamburg.

But Croatia improved after making two half-time substitutions and Andrej Kramaric levelled with 16 minutes remaining, before Gjasula put through his own net. The Albanian midfielder became the last-gasp hero, though, slotting into the bottom corner in the fifth minute of injury time to snatch his team a point.

Croatia, World Cup semi-finalists in 2022, will now likely need to win their final Group B match against holders Italy on June 24 to reach the knockout phase for a fifth straight major tournament.

"We will believe until the very end, to give our best as we did in this match," said forward Kramaric. "Unfortunately we didn't win but we hope to be a bit luckier against Italy."

Albania have won plenty of plaudits with their performances against both Italy, in a 2-1 defeat, and Croatia, but could not hold a lead in either game and will probably have to beat Spain to keep their last-16 hopes alive. "We have to go forward but we have to fight for every single point," said Albania coach Sylvinho.

"It's important for our lives, the life of the country, the federation. I'm proud of the players so we have to enjoy the moment."

Croatia's 'golden generation' were ultimately made to pay for



Albania's Klaus Gjasula (second from left) celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's second goal during the UEFA Euro 2024 Group B match against Croatia at the Volksparkstadion in Hamburg yesterday. (AFP)

a poor first-half display and are on the brink of bowing out from major tournament football in limp fashion. Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic opted against a change in formation from the Spain defeat, sticking with his midfield trio of Luka Modric, Mateo Kovacic and Marcelo Brozovic.

But he brought in Ivan Perisic at left-back, moving Manchester City's Josko Gvardiol into central defence. The smell of smoke from flares filled the air outside the stadium as the supporters of both teams created one of the best atmospheres of the tournament so far.

Albania scored the fastest goal in European Championship history after just 23 seconds against Italy and they made another quick start. It took until only the 11th minute for Sylvinho's men to break the deadlock this time, as Sparta Prague midfielder Laci ghosted into the area unmarked

to nod home an inch-perfect, in-swinging cross from Jasir Asani.

Croatia tried to impose their passing game, but Albania were constantly in their faces and continued to look the more dangerous side, with right-back Elseid Hysaj firing off target.

The underdogs could have doubled their advantage just after the half-hour mark, but Kristjan Aslanovic was denied by Dominik Livakovic when face-to-face with the Croatia goalkeeper.

Albania striker Rey Manaj passed up another excellent opportunity, failing to get enough purchase on his free header in first-half added time to seriously trouble Livakovic.

Dalic responded by making two changes at the interval, bringing on 21-year-old Luka Sucic and Mario Pasalic for the ineffective Lovro Majer and Brozovic.

Those substitutions brought

about a quick improvement from Croatia, as Albania goalkeeper Thomas Strakosha made a good save to keep out Sucic's left-footed shot, before Pasalic headed over seconds later.

Croatia finally found a way through in the 74th minute as substitute Ante Budimir picked out Kramaric inside the box and he cut inside before sending a composed finish inside Strakosha's near post.

The turnaround appeared to be complete two minutes later as Sucic's close-range effort was blocked, but rebounded off the unfortunate Gjasula and into an empty net.

Albania did not give up, missing a series of late chances as it appeared Croatia would cling on.

Gjasula had other ideas though, sweeping a loose ball home before a chaotic denouement that saw both sides throw bodies forward in search of a winner, to no avail.

FOCUS

'World class' England a bigger challenge now for Denmark, says Schmeichel

AFP
Frankfurt, Germany

Kasper Schmeichel believes England have improved since ending Denmark's dream run at Euro 2020 as the Three Lions aim to book their place in the last 16 of the European Championship when the sides meet again today.

After edging past the inspired Danes 2-1 in the semi-final three years ago, Gareth Southgate's men lost the final on home soil to Italy on penalties.

But they are one of the favourites to win the competition for the first time in Germany thanks to the development of Jude Bellingham, Phil Foden, Declan Rice and Bukayo Saka among others since the last Euros.

"I think England were a world class side when we met them (at Euro 2020), they got to the final of a major tournament," Schmeichel told reporters on Wednesday.

"And when you look at some of the additions and the experience they've gained they are a better side now than ever, at least in the time I've played against them. We're going to have to be on top of our game to beat them."

Denmark were left feeling aggrieved after a controversial penalty edged the semi-final three years ago England's way.

Schmeichel, though, said he is not seeking revenge.

"I'm not the kind of person to look back three years for motivation. The biggest motivation for myself is we are playing another Euros with Denmark. The biggest motivation is imagining celebrating a win for our fans after they have travelled all that way."

Denmark rode a wave of emotion three years ago after their opening game at Euro 2020 nearly ended in tragedy when Christian Eriksen suffered a cardiac arrest on the pitch.

Eriksen scored in their opening game in Germany this time round, but Denmark were held 1-1 by Slovenia to continue a disappointing run in recent years.

Kasper Hjulmand's men crashed out of the 2022 World Cup at the group stages and are at risk of another early exit should they fail to shock England.

"For me it's important that Denmark dream about achieving something big," said Hjulmand. "Are we favourites? No. Is it a failure if we don't win the Euros? No. But we have to have the ambitions and dreams because that sets the standard. If we don't dream something is wrong."

Denmark could be handed a major boost with the return of captain Simon Kjaer after the AC Milan defender missed their opening game due to injury.



England's coach Gareth Southgate (right) speaks with assistant coach Steve Holland (centre) while supervising his team's training session at the UEFA Euro 2024 in Blankenhain yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Italy to take the game to Spain, says coach Spalletti

AFP
Gelsenkirchen, Germany

Luciano Spalletti said yesterday his Italy team will try to take the game to Spain as the two teams prepare for the biggest match so far of Euro 2024.

The Azzurri have played Spain at each of the last four Euros and will face a serious test of their credentials as reigning champions on Thursday in Gelsenkirchen.

Spain hammered Croatia 3-0 in their opening Group B match and alongside hosts Germany looked the most accomplished team in the opening round of fixtures.

And Spalletti is keen to see how Italy measure up against a newly direct La Roja after coming into the tournament as a team in transition. "We want to see how good we are against one of the best

teams in the world," Spalletti told reporters. "We want to play with a positive attitude, possession football and try to dictate the rhythm of the match."

Spalletti took the Italy job after Roberto Mancini jumped ship to Saudi Arabia last summer, only a few months after guiding Napoli to their first Serie A title since 1990. That historic triumph was the crowning glory of the 65-year-old's long and eventual coaching career but he admitted the match is "one of the most important matches of my career."

"The players will understand when they get to my age that they'll want to have stories to tell," added Spalletti. "This is one of those matches that gives them the chance to create that story."

Italy are locked on three points with group leaders Spain following their opening 2-1 win over Albania.



Italy's head coach Luciano Spalletti attends a training session during the UEFA Euro 2024 at the Hemberg-Stadion in Iserlohn yesterday. (AFP)