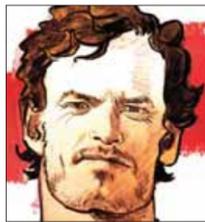


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Unfit Murray uncertain for Wimbledon and Olympics



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Injured Mbappe doing better every day, says Deschamps

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CRICKET

Rohit stars as India beat Australia to reach T20 World Cup semi-finals

Page 2

EURO 2024

Spain complete perfect group stage as Albania eliminated

FERRAN TORRES' EARLY STRIKE GAVE SPAIN'S SECOND-STRING SIDE A 1-0 WIN OVER ALBANIA

AFP
Düsseldorf, Germany

An early Ferran Torres strike gave Spain's second-string side a 1-0 win over Albania yesterday as the three-time champions finished the Euro 2024 group stage with a perfect record and the defeat eliminated their opponents.

Barcelona winger Torres finished off a fine move in the 13th minute in Düsseldorf to puncture the atmosphere in a stadium filled with a majority of noisy Albanian fans.

However, this game was not a cruise for a Spain team showing 10 changes to the side which started their 1-0 win over Italy four days earlier.

Spain had already secured top spot in Group B, but Albania knew they realistically needed a win to go through and that made for a frantic encounter at times, particularly as they pushed forward in the second half.

Despite their best efforts, Albania go home after picking up only one point and finishing bottom of a difficult section.

It is a regression for them from their debut European Championship appearance in 2016, when they also went out in the first round but did manage to win a game.

Beating a Spain side who have probably been the most impressive so far in Germany was always going to be a big ask for Albania, coached by former Barcelona left-back Sylvainho.

It is the first time since 2008 that Spain have won all three group games at either a World Cup or European Championship.



Spain's forward Ferran Torres (right) scores a goal past Albania's goalkeeper Thomas Strakosha during the UEFA Euro 2024 group B match at the Düsseldorf Arena in Düsseldorf yesterday. (AFP)

Coach Luis de la Fuente can now turn his full attentions to a last-16 tie in Cologne on Sunday against an as-yet unknown third-place finisher.

Centre-half Aymeric Laporte was the only Spain player to keep his place following the Italy game, with key midfielder Rodri suspended and everyone else given a breather.

Goalkeeper David Raya, defender Dani Vivian, left-back Alejandro Grimaldo and midfielder

Martin Zubimendi, all largely untested at international level, came in.

There was also a start for Jesus Navas, who was part of the Spain teams that won the 2010 World Cup and Euro 2012, and who is now 38.

Even Laporte was removed at half-time, replaced by Robin Le Normand, while Lamine Yamal and Alvaro Morata also appeared in the second half.

Albania, ranked 66th in the

world, knew it would be a big ask to beat Spain having lost all of their eight previous meetings.

Spain first threatened in the 12th minute when Mikel Merino's header was saved by goalkeeper Thomas Strakosha, and a minute later they were ahead.

Dani Olmo stepped into the space between the Albanian lines to receive a pass, and then fed a measured ball in behind for Torres to latch onto.

The former Manchester City

player timed his run perfectly and finished with precision too, his first-time effort going in off the far post.

Torres has made a habit of scoring at these tournaments, having netted twice at the last Euros and twice at the 2022 World Cup.

It took Albania until the final minute of the half to test Raya, the Arsenal shot-stopper flying to his right to parry a powerful strike by Kristjan Asllani.

Joselu hooked a Grimaldo cross

just wide moments after the restart for Spain, before the Albanian fans raised the noise levels as they became aware of events in the other match.

They were very close to equalising when substitute Armando Broja met an Asllani free-kick and tried to lob Raya, but the goalkeeper saved.

Asllani then fizzed an effort just wide, and Broja was again denied by Raya in stoppage time as Albania bowed out.

FOCUS

Zaccagni rescues Italy leaving Croatia in limbo

AFP
Leipzig, Germany

Mattia Zaccagni's superb last-gasp strike fired Italy into the Euro 2024 knock-outs with a 1-1 draw against Croatia in a fraught Group B clash yesterday.

Italy progress in second place behind winners Spain and will face Switzerland in the last 16, while Croatia are on the verge of elimination but could still progress depending on other results later in the week.

With only two points it is unlikely Zlatko Dalic's side will qualify as one of the four best third-place teams but it is still possible.

Croatia midfielder Luka Modric became the oldest goalscorer in the competition's history with his strike after 55 minutes, just 33 seconds after Gianluigi Donnarumma saved the 38-year-old's penalty.

It seemed enough for his team but Zaccagni whipped a brilliant strike into the top corner on the break in the 98th minute to send Italy through from what was dubbed a "group of death".

After shipping five goals in the first two games, Dalic opted to shore up the midfield by bringing in Mario Pasalic and Luka Susic amid four changes.

The coach also kept established trio of Luka Modric, Marcelo Bro-



Italy's Mattia Zaccagni celebrates scoring their first goal with teammates against Croatia at Leipzig Stadium, Leipzig, Germany, yesterday. (Reuters)

zovic and Mateo Kovacic despite their struggles in the 3-0 defeat by Spain and 2-2 draw against minnows Albania.

Luciano Spalletti's Italy beat Albania 2-1 but were dominated by Spain in a 1-0 defeat and the coach shifted to a 3-5-2 formation, dropping Juventus' Federico

Chiesa. Croatia dominated the opening exchanges against a defensive Italy side knowing a draw would send them through in second place behind group winners Spain. On his first start at the tournament 21-year-old RB Salzburg midfielder Susic forced a fine early save from Italy's Gianluigi

Donnarumma with a vicious drive from range.

Azzurri forward Mateo Retegui's header was deflected narrowly wide at the other end on a rare foray forward, with the two-time winners happy to slow the game down and waste time at corners and throw-ins as early as the



Croatia's Luka Modric became the oldest goalscorer in European Championship yesterday. (AFP)

20th minute. Croatia goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic made a stunning stop to thwart Alessandro Bastoni, found by Nicolo Barella's tempting cross, as the holders gained control without taking risks.

Dalic, who steered Croatia to the 2018 and 2022 World Cup final and semis respectively, threw on powerful striker Ante Budimir for the second half. It gave his team a focal point and they looked instantly more threatening and swiftly reaped their reward.

Italy substitute Davide Frattoni handled Andrej Kramaric's effort and after a VAR review Croatia were given a penalty. Donnarumma clawed out Real Madrid

midfielder Modric's effort but the veteran could not be denied 33 seconds later. The Italian goalkeeper made another fine save in the aftermath from Budimir as Croatia kept the pressure up and Modric smashed home the rebound from close range. He beat the previous record for oldest Euros goalscorer set in 2008 by Austrian Ivica Vastic by 32 days.

Modric was replaced with 10 minutes to go and even some Italy supporters afforded the playmaker an ovation, while they nervously eyed the ever-advancing clock.

Croatia thought they had progressed but Zaccagni broke their hearts in the eighth and final minute of stoppage time.

MATCH REPORT

Rampaging Rohit guides India into World Cup semis

THE 2007 WORLD CUP WINNERS FACE DEFENDING CHAMPIONS ENGLAND IN SECOND SEMI-FINAL

Reuters
Barbados

India marched into the T20 World Cup semi-finals yesterday as skipper Rohit Sharma's blistering 92 set up a 24-run victory over Australia, left on the brink of elimination.

Rohit clobbered eight sixes in his 41-ball blitz to lay the foundation for India's imposing 205-5, their highest total in the tournament, in Gros Islet, St Lucia.

Travis Head led Australia's chase with a belligerent 76 but India restricted them to 181-7 to remain unbeaten in the tournament and set up a semi-final against defending champions England in Guyana on Thursday.

The Super Eight clash between two former champion teams had assumed greater importance after Afghanistan stunned Australia on Saturday to throw Group 1 wide open.

Rohit has not been in the best of form but the India captain forced Starc out of the attack by hitting the fast bowler for four sixes in a 29-run over.

"There was a strong breeze. They changed their plan, so I had to open up the other side of the field," the player of the match said.

"It was a good wicket, and you want to try and back yourself to play those kinds of shots. I've been trying to do that for a few years now, and I'm glad it came off today. You've got to factor in the

breeze, and understand that the bowlers are smart as well, and open up all sides of the field. When you keep an open mind and not just think of one shot, you can access all areas of the field.

"The fifties and hundreds don't matter, I wanted to bat with the same tempo and carry on. You want to make big scores, yes, but at the same time you want to make the bowlers think where the next shot is coming, and I think I managed to do that today," Rohit added.

"It's quite satisfying, especially when you play like that. We knew the threat of this opposition, but we kept doing the things we know best, and we can take a lot of confidence from that. (A score of) 200 is obviously a good score, but when you're playing on grounds like this where wind is a factor, anything is possible, but I thought we used the conditions very well.

"It was very pleasing to see how we were getting through those overs and getting the wickets at the same time. Kuldeep, we understand the strengths he has, but you have to use it when you need it.

"The pitches in New York were seamer-friendly, but we knew he would play a big role later. We don't want to do anything different (in the knockouts), we want to play the same way, understand what the individuals need to do in a given situation, and play freely.

"So far we've been doing that consistently, and semi-finals, we have to try and do the same thing. It'll be nice (to play England).



India's captain Rohit Sharma hits a 6 during the ICC Twenty20 World Cup Super Eight match against Australia at Daren Sammy National Cricket Stadium in Gros Islet, Saint Lucia, yesterday. (AFP)

Nothing changes for us, we want to focus on what we can do as a team, and take the game on," the Indian skipper added.

Josh Hazlewood had drawn first blood as he bounced out Vi-

rat Kohli for a duck after Australia elected to field.

Pat Cummins, who had claimed back-to-back hat-tricks in his last two games, was pressed into service to end the batting carnage.

Rohit greeted the seamer by depositing his first ball on the roof of the stadium for a monster six, en route to a 19-ball fifty.

India raced to the 100-mark in the ninth over but Starc returned

to deny Rohit what could have been the first hundred by a batter in this tournament. Suryakumar Yadav (31) and Shivam Dube (28) produced breezy cameos and Hardik Pandya made 27 not out to propel India to their first 200-plus total of the tournament.

Arshdeep Singh rattled Australia by removing David Warner in the first over in what could be the opener's last game in an Australia shirt. Skipper Mitchell Marsh (37) joined Head and they counter-attacked to put Australia's chase back on track.

Axar Patel leapt to take a stunning one-handed catch at deep square leg to dismiss Marsh but Head raced to a 24-ball fifty.

Kuldeep Yadav castled the dangerous Glenn Maxwell (20) and Jasprit Bumrah effectively sealed India's victory when he dismissed Head with a clever change of pace.

"It's so disappointing. We know we still have a chance to make the semis but today, India got the better of us," Marsh said. "They got off to a flyer, Rohit Sharma is very hard to stop when he's in that mode. He deserves all the credit for that."

BRIEF SCORES

India 205-5, 20 overs (Rohit Sharma 92, Suryakumar Yadav 31; Mitchell Starc 2-45, Marcus Stoinis 2-56) **v Australia 181-7, 20 overs** (Travis Head 76, Mitchell Marsh 37; Arshdeep Singh 3-37, Kuldeep Yadav 2-24)

Toss: Australia
Result: India won by 24 runs

SPOTLIGHT

South Africa edge West Indies, reach semi-finals



South Africa's Tabraiz Shamsi (left) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of West Indies' Sherfane Rutherford during the ICC Twenty20 World Cup Super Eight match at Sir Vivian Richards Stadium in North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Antigua

South Africa held their collective nerve to edge West Indies by three wickets under the Duckworth-Lewis method in a rain-disrupted shootout for a semi-final spot at the Twenty20 World Cup in Antigua yesterday.

The unbeaten Proteas joined England in the last four as Group 2 winners when Marco Jansen (21 not out) smashed a six down the ground off the first ball of the final over to get South Africa to their adjusted target of 123.

Left-arm spinner Tabraiz Shamsi had earlier taken 3-27 as tournament co-hosts West Indies were restricted to 135-8 before the rainstorm swept in to stop play.

Spinner Roston Chase (3-12) took three wickets late in the South African innings to set up a dramatic finish and give a glimmer of hope that West Indies might keep alive their quest for a third title.

"There's a lot of relief ulti-

mately to get through to get to the semi-final," said South Africa captain Aiden Markram.

"I suppose it's been the story of our (tournament), get ourselves into tricky positions and sort of by hook or by crook get over the line."

The South Africans won the toss and elect to bowl first in a decision that was quickly vindicated when danger men Shai Hope and Nicholas Pooran were dismissed inside the first two overs with just five runs on the board.

Kyle Mayers, brought into the West Indies squad as an injury replacement on Saturday, steadied the innings in a partnership of 81 for the third wicket with Chase.

Both had some fraught moments - Chase was dropped on 11 and Mayers survived an lbw call on review - before Shamsi separated them in the 12th over when Mayers slashed the ball to Tristan Stubbs at deep cover point to depart for 35.

West Indies under-par

That was the last partnership of note in an innings of fits and starts, Chase (52) and Sherfane

Rutherford (0) falling victim to Shamsi's wrist spin, and Andre Russell thumping a couple of big sixes before being run out for 15.

West Indies knew they were under-par and needed a big bowling effort and Russell gave them a great start.

He struck with the first delivery of the innings to remove Reeza Hendricks caught behind down the leg side before having the other South Africa opener, Quinton de Kock, caught at backward square leg for 12 five deliveries later.

The crowd at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium came to life but any momentum the West Indies had built was lost when the skies opened immediately and play was delayed for 90 minutes.

Stubbs and Markram resumed on 15-2 and took the tally to 42 before local quick Alzarri Joseph struck with his second delivery to remove the captain for 18.

Joseph's pace did for Heinrich Klaasen (22) in the eighth over but the other West Indies bowlers were proving expensive and the South Africans were now just

a run-a-ball away from their target.

Chase came on in the 12th over to bowl David Miller for four and then sent back Stubbs (29) and Keshav Maharaj (2) and ensure the chase went into the 17th and final over.

"I think credit must be given to the boys, I think they fought to the very end," said West Indies skipper Rovman Powell.

"As a batting partner, this is one performance we'll try our best to forget. It was a commendable bowling effort, we said that we're just gonna give it our all and whatever happens, happens."

BRIEF SCORES

West Indies 135-8 off 20 overs (Roston Chase 52, Kyle Mayers 35; Tabraiz Shamsi 3-27) **v South Africa 124-7 off 16.1 overs** (target: 123 off 17; Tristan Stubbs 29, Heinrich Klaasen 22, Marco Jansen 21 not out; Roston Chase 3-12, Andre Russell 2-19, Alzarri Joseph 2-25)

Toss: South Africa
Result: South Africa won by three wickets on the DLS method

South Africa's Shamsi hits out at 'ridiculous' T20 World Cup critics

North Sound, Antigua and Barbuda: South Africa leg-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi lambasted his team's "ridiculous" critics after the Proteas won another T20 World Cup nail-biter to reach the semi-finals.

Shamsi claimed 3-27 in Sunday's three-wicket win over two-time champions West Indies as South Africa chalked up a seventh win in seven games at the tournament.

The 34-year-old took the wickets of dangerous opener Kyle Mayers and top-scoring Roston Chase in his four overs.

Four days earlier, he had conceded 50 runs on the same ground as the United States threatened a shock victory and he was dropped for the victory over England.

"In the previous game I bowled later in the innings and I went for 50 and there were certain critics coming out from the woodwork, speaking about pressure and how I can't handle pressure," said Shamsi.

"I think in a quarter-final match I hope that was enough pressure for me to respond to."

Shamsi said he was dismayed by the criticism he and his team have faced in their campaign.

"It's just a little bit ridiculous when it's ex-players," said Shamsi. "When they were on the field they did the same things. As cricketers we know sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't."

South Africa topped their first round group as well as their pool in the second stage Super Eights with defending champions England also going through to the last four.

However, it has been a roller-

coaster ride for the Proteas who are still without a world title after a succession of painful near-misses. At this tournament, they have had to dig deep to preserve their winning momentum.

They defeated the Netherlands by four wickets after being 12-4 at one stage chasing just 104 to win. A four-run win over Bangladesh followed before they avoided what would have been a seismic shock in a one-run victory over Nepal.

"Obviously most of the games have been a lot closer than we would have personally liked," added Shamsi.

"But the amazing thing is that this new Proteas team always seems to get over the line. We've been put under huge pressure basically in every single game that we've played and the boys have managed to find a way to win no matter what the situation, no matter how close the game.

"So that's really pleasing for us as a unit, and in a funny way we're looking forward to it."

For co-hosts West Indies, the exit from their own World Cup was a crushing disappointment.

They had swept through the first round with four wins in four games but lost to England and South Africa in the Super Eights.

"We are disappointed because we think we had the personnel within our room to actually win a home World Cup," admitted captain Rovman Powell.

"Over the last 12 months or so we have played fantastic cricket. It's maybe one of the first times a West Indies team is ranked number 3 in T20 in the world and that must say something."

FOCUS

England spinner Bashir concedes 38 in one over

England spinner Shoaib Bashir had a spell to forget when he conceded 38 runs in an over in a County Championship match between Surrey and Worcestershire yesterday in which Dan Lawrence smashed five consecutive sixes.

Lawrence had notched up his century before Bashir bowled the 128th over of the innings. The former England batter charged down the pitch and smashed the first ball out of the ground.

Three straight sixes followed

and the fifth was a slog-sweep over mid-wicket, leaving Bashir scratching his chin.

Lawrence tried to join an elite group of players who have hit six sixes in an over but Bashir's next delivery was well wide of leg stump, the wicketkeeper also missing the ball as it rolled to the boundary for five wides.

Bashir then bowled a no ball for which the penalty is two runs in County Cricket and Lawrence took a single before Bashir completed the over with a dot ball.

TENNIS

Murray uncertain for Wimbledon, Olympics

AFP
London

Confusion surrounded the Wimbledon fate of two-time former champion **Andy Murray** after back surgery appeared to rule him out of this year's tournament.

The Scot had been aiming to make a farewell appearance at the grass court Grand Slam, which he won in 2013 and 2016.

However, the 37-year-old will need an expected six weeks to recover from a spinal cyst operation, with Wimbledon starting on July 1.

He now also faces a race against time to be fit for next month's Paris Olympics, with Murray twice a gold medallist in the singles.

The ATP Tour, in a post on X, formerly Twitter, said Sunday that Murray had been ruled out of Wimbledon.

But the post was subsequently deleted, with neither Murray nor his management company yet to confirm if he will be appearing at Wimbledon. The ATP

post said: "After an operation on a spinal cyst, Andy Murray is sadly out of Wimbledon. Rest up and recover Andy, we'll miss seeing you there."

Murray managed just five games before a back injury forced him to withdraw from his second-round match against Australia's Jordan Thompson at the Queen's warm-up event in London on Wednesday.

The former world number one, who plays with a metal hip, struggled from the start of his match against Thompson and said afterwards he had a feeling of weakness in his right leg and had lost co-ordination.

"I never had that loss of co-ordination, control and strength in my leg before," Murray said shortly after retiring from his match with Thompson.

"I've been struggling with my back for a while - I had lost the power in my right leg so lost all motor control, I had no co-ordination and couldn't really move."

Asked then about his prospects of playing at Wimbledon, he added: "Like all tennis players, we have degenerative joints and stuff in the back, but it's all

predominantly been left-sided for me my whole career.

"I have never had too many issues with the right side.

"So maybe there is something that can be done between now and then to help the right side."

Murray underwent minor back surgery in 2013 and following a first-round loss at the recent French Open he said he would need treatment to address soreness.

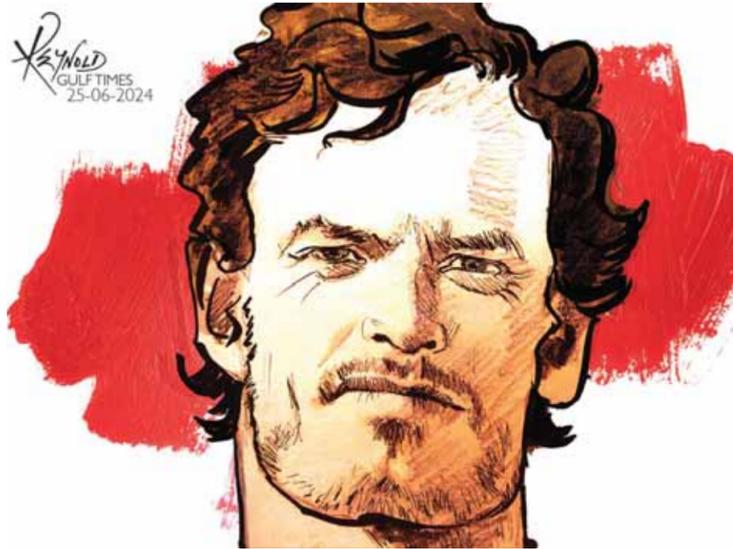
The three-time Grand Slam champion only returned to competitive action in May after nearly two months out with an ankle injury.

He had been due to play singles and doubles with his brother Jamie at Wimbledon before potentially ending his career at the Olympics in Paris.

Murray has had previous back injuries and underwent surgery in 2013, while also suffering from soreness in recent weeks.

Queen's - a tournament he has won five times - was just his fourth event following almost two months out with an ankle injury.

Raymond
GULF TIMES
25-06-2024



GOLF

Scheffler bests Kim in playoff to win at Travellers

The American wins for sixth time on the PGA Tour this year

Reuters
Cromwell, Connecticut

World No. 1 **Scottie Scheffler** won the first playoff hole with a par to capture the Travellers Championship on Sunday at Cromwell, Connecticut, defeating South Korea's Tom Kim.

Scheffler and Kim finished at 22-under-par 258, two strokes clear of other contenders.

Scheffler won for the sixth time on the PGA Tour this year, all since the beginning of March. He prevailed for the second time in three weeks, capturing the Memorial Tournament prior to last week's struggles at the US Open.

Scheffler shot 5-under 65 in the final round, but Kim's 66 with a 10-foot birdie putt on the last hole forced the extra golf.

On the last hole of regulation, Scheffler left his approach on the left fringe and two-putted from there.

Kim's approach shot was within a couple of inches of the hole before rolling back before he converted the must-make putt to extend the tournament.

The duo played No. 18 again in the playoff, with Kim's approach short and in a bunker. After blasting out, he couldn't roll in a long par putt.

Tom Hoge (62) and Sungjae Im (66) shared third place at 20 under.

Scheffler had birdies on Nos. 13-15 before three pars.

As many as a dozen golfers made the turn at TPC River Highlands with a reasonable chance at winning the tournament.

There were several golfers within three shots of the lead for



Scottie Scheffler of the US poses with his wife Meredith, their young son and family after putting in to win on the 18th green during a playoff during the final round of the Travellers Championship at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut. (AFP)

stretches of the day, while four golfers were tied at one point on the backside.

Tee times were pushed up more than two hours after weather-related interruptions Friday and Saturday, so golfers played in threesomes.

Hoge, who tied his career low and was a co-leader when completing his round, made six birdies and one bogey on an eventful backside. Kim was even for the day through 12 holes before four

birdies across the final six holes.

Akshay Bhatia, who joined Scheffler and Kim in the final group, shot 69 for a fifth-place tie at 18 under.

Tony Finau (66), Patrick Cantlay (65) and Justin Thomas (66) also finished at 18 under. Finau had taken the lead before his tee shot on the par-3 16th splashed into the water and he took a 5 on the hole. Cameron Young, who shot 59 on Saturday, was off to a brilliant start with birdies on the

first four holes in the final round and it looked like he might rise to the top. But he began the back side at 2 over through three holes, with a bogey on No. 10 and a double bogey at No. 12 before ending up with 66.

Young tied for ninth at 17 under with Shane Lowry of Ireland (67), Brian Harman (62) and Wyndham Clark (63).

Austria's Sepp Straka had the day's best score at 61, putting him at 12 under and tied for 23rd.

Amy leaves no doubt, wins Women's PGA Championship

Sammamish, Washington: Amy Yang of South Korea held off the field at the KPMG Women's PGA Championship for her first career major title on Sunday in Sammamish, Washington.

The 34-year-old Yang, who arrived at Sahalee Country Club on Sunday morning with a two-shot lead through 54 holes, shot an even-par 72 to card a 7-under 281 for the week. She defeated Lilia Vu (71 Sunday), Jin Young Ko of South Korea (71) and Miyu Yamashita of Japan (73) by three shots.

Yang had five prior victories on the LPGA Tour, most notably at the CME Group Tour Championship last November. She twice finished as a major runner-up, at the 2012 and 2015 US Women's Open tournaments. This week was her 75th start in a major.

"I always wanted to win a major and I came close several times, and I started doubting myself if I'm ever gonna win a major before I retire, because I've been on tour quite a while," Yang said on the NBC broadcast. "I am so grateful and very, very happy to win a major."

Yang at one point held a seven-shot advantage over the field. Her fifth and final birdie of the day, a 4-foot birdie tap at the par-3 13th hole, put her at 10 under when the next-closest golfers stood at 3 under.

After a bogey at the par-4 16th, Yang landed her tee shot at the par-3 17th into the water. She made double bogey to slip to 7 under but still had plenty of cushion for the final hole.



Amy Yang of South Korea poses with the trophy after winning the 2024 KPMG Women's PGA Championship at Sahalee Country Club in Sammamish, Washington. (AFP)

"It's all the hard work our team did together and I'm so grateful for that. All four rounds it was tough out there, but I just trusted what I prepared and I did my best all week," said Yang, who shot 70-68-71-72 during a week when only 13 players finished under par.

Vu, who won last week's Meijer LPGA Classic, birdied her final hole to forge a tie with Ko for second place. Yamashita joined them with a birdie on the last hole as well.

Vu is the No. 2 player in the world rankings and won two majors last season.

Hatton wins LIV event



Tyrrell Hatton (fourth right) of Legion XIII celebrates his LIV win at The Grove in Nashville, Tennessee. The Englishman fired a 6-under 65 to get to 19-under 194 for the week. (USA TODAY Sports)

ATHLETICS

World Champion Lyles wins 100m at US trials to qualify for Paris Olympics



American sprinter Noah Lyles (second from right) celebrates after winning the 100m in 9.83 during the US Olympic Team Trials at Hayward Field in Eugene. (USA TODAY Sports)

AFP
Eugene, United States

World 100 metres champion **Noah Lyles** claimed a measure of redemption by winning the 100m at the US athletics trials on Sunday, booking his ticket to the Paris Olympics.

Three years after failing to reach the Tokyo Olympics in the 100m over a trials finals flop, Lyles won in a personal best 9.83 seconds at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon.

"Three years ago I got second to last. This year I came and won it," Lyles said.

"Part of the plan. Nothing changed. Might be a shock to everybody else but when you know the goal, you know the goal."

Kenny Bednarek, the 200m Olympic runner-up at Tokyo, ran a personal best of 9.87 to finish second with Fred Kerley, the 2022 world 100m champion, third in 9.88.

"On to the next one at the Olympic Games,"

Kerley said. "We're ready to go put on a show."

Christian Coleman, the 2019 world 100m champion, missed out on a chance at 100m gold, finishing fourth in 9.93 in a race with a wind at 0.4m/sec.

Lyles settled for 200m bronze at Tokyo after being the favourite for gold but last year captured world titles in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay and is fancied for gold once more in France.

"If I didn't get that third place in Tokyo, I wouldn't have had that desire, I wouldn't have had that fire burning, I wouldn't have accomplished what I have accomplished in the past," Lyles said. "And now we constantly look to the future with open eyes because anything can happen."

Lyles, 26, led all semi-final qualifiers from Saturday preliminary heats in 9.92 then won his semi-final heat in a wind-aided (3.0m/sec) 9.80 to lead all eight qualifiers for the final.

Bednarek reached Paris after a near miss in the Tokyo trials.

"I just stayed calm and collected and executed my race. That's all I needed to do," Bednarek said. "I got edged out in the Tokyo Olympic trials but I'm finally getting the hang of the 100 and the sky is the limit for me."

Athing Mu, the Tokyo Olympic women's 800m champion who returned to competition in heats after a nine-month hiatus, was the fastest qualifier for today's final, winning her semi-final heat in 1:58.84.

"I felt way more in control this race," Mu said. "It was helpful this one was at a faster pace so I know what it's going to be like in the final."

Sam Kendricks won the men's pole vault by clearing a meet record 5.92m, breaking his old mark by .01, with Tokyo Olympic runner-up Chris Nilsen sharing second with Jacob Wooten on 5.87.

Quincy Hall, third in last year's worlds, won his men's 400m semi-final heat in 44.42 to lead all finalists.

Quincy Wilson, 16, qualified for the final in an under-18 world record personal best of 44.59.

EURO 2024

Mbappe doing better every day, says Deschamps

'The bruising has come down and he is getting used to the mask'

AFP
Dortmund, Germany

France coach Didier Deschamps yesterday revealed Kylian Mbappe was getting "better every day" but did not confirm if his captain would start today's last Euro 2024 group game against Poland.

"He is doing better every day. He is doing better today than yesterday and the day before that. That is obvious because he has been training," Deschamps told reporters in Dortmund, where France and Poland will meet in the Group D finale.

"The bruising has come down and he is getting used to the mask. He is as eager to play tomorrow as he was eager to play against the Netherlands."

Mbappe did not play any part in last Friday's 0-0 draw with the Netherlands in Leipzig after suffering the broken nose late in his team's opening 1-0 win over Austria in Duesseldorf a week ago.

He did not undergo an operation on the injury but will need to wear the protective mask when he returns to the side.

Deschamps added: "He does not find that the mask limits him but it does restrict his vision a little. He needs to get used to it, even though the technology nowadays allows these masks to be as thin as possible."

France come into the game in second place in the group and with their place in the last 16 in little doubt.

However, the 2022 World Cup runners-up need to better the Netherlands' result at the same time against Austria - or at least win by a wider margin - in order to take top spot.

They are keen to get their superstar forward back on the pitch given their only goal so far in two matches was an own goal.

France's forward Kylian Mbappe, wearing a protective mask, takes part in a training session at the Home Deluxe Arena Stadium in Paderborn, western Germany, yesterday, on the eve of their UEFA Euro 2024 Group D match against Poland. (AFP)



"We all know how good a finisher Kylian is," said N'Golo Kante, alongside his coach at yesterday's press conference.

"It is a massive plus for us to have Kylian. I had sort of forgotten he was wearing a mask.

"He helped us win our training game today. He looked dangerous and was decisive.

"He feels good and I hope that will be the case during the match."

Lewandowski not yet ready to retire from Poland team

Poland star Robert Lewandowski indicated yesterday he will continue his international career beyond the team's last game at Euro 2024 against France.

The Barcelona forward is Poland's all-time record goal-scorer but will turn 36 in August, and will be almost 38 at the next World Cup in North America in 2026.

However, he appears deter-

mined to play on and not bow out after a disappointing tournament in Germany in which Poland were the first team to be eliminated following defeats in their opening two matches.

"Tomorrow is not my last game," Lewandowski told reporters on the eve of today's match in Dortmund, after saying that an emerging generation of young players had given him "extra energy".

"I will be 36 soon. I still have that fire inside of me and nobody outside can affect my decision. It will just be me and my family," said the striker who made his name at Borussia Dortmund a decade ago.

"One day I will wake up and maybe think it is time to retire but today I feel this team has a future," Lewandowski said.

"I know things have not worked out before and during this tournament but we were in the group of death.

"It has not been easy but that doesn't mean we can't come back much stronger in the future."

Lewandowski, who has won more than 150 caps, is playing at his fourth European Championship and has also appeared at two World Cups.

He missed Poland's opening game at this year's Euros after suffering a thigh injury in a friendly against Turkey a week before the tournament began.

Absent from the 2-1 loss against the Netherlands, he only appeared as a substitute in their next match, a 3-1 defeat by Austria.

"I wanted to be fully fit so it was tough being unable to help the team on the pitch," he said before declaring himself ready to start against the 2022 World Cup runners-up.

"I am ready to play from the beginning. I think I can cope with playing 90 minutes."

Arnautovic finally enjoying Euros as Austria eye knockouts

Austria captain Marko Arnautovic said yesterday his third European Championship has been "amazing" after disappointing previous experiences in the tournament, as his team eye a last-16 place. Arnautovic was part of the Austria squad that managed just one goal and one point at Euro 2016, before they suffered an extra-time last-16 defeat by eventual champions Italy at the Covid-delayed finals three years ago. A victory against the Netherlands in Berlin today would secure a top-two finish in Group D, while a draw would almost certainly at least wrap up a spot in the knockout phase as one of the best third-placed sides. "When I played my first Euros, that wasn't great. Second one was Covid so that wasn't great, but this one has been amazing, lots of fun," said Inter

Milan striker Arnautovic. "The optimal scenario would be to win tomorrow and then we'll see but most important is the game tomorrow." Arnautovic only came on as a substitute in the opening 1-0 loss to France, but started and scored in the 3-1 win over Poland which put Austria on the brink of going through.

He started his professional career as a teenager in the Netherlands with FC Twente and says it will be a special moment personally to face the Oranje. "It was my second home, I went there when I was very young," said the 35-year-old, who counts Dutch among the six languages he can speak. "I learned a lot from the country and from the people there so yes it's special tomorrow... Dutch people are very nice, I lived with a host family, they treated me very well

and everything in those three years was a great experience."

Austria can only go through as group winners with a victory if France fail to beat already-eliminated Poland in the other final Group D game. A second-place finish would leave them next facing the runners-up of Group E, which features Belgium, Romania, Ukraine and Slovakia. "I prefer to finish first but we have to win and France not to, and it's not very likely for both of those things to happen," admitted coach Ralf Rangnick.

"I would take second place, third place is too complicated, I looked at it but I gave up because it's too complicated.

"The main goal is to get to the last 16 and then after the last few games we'll see."

PREVIEW

Serbia ready to 'change history' against Denmark

AFP
Munich, Germany

Serbia coach Dragan Stojkovic said his side was ready to overturn their poor record against Denmark today in order to keep their hopes alive of qualifying for the Euro 2024 knockouts.

Serbia, taking part in their first Euros as an independent nation, lost 1-0 to Group C rivals England in their opener.

A Luka Jovic equaliser in the fifth minute of stoppage time in Thursday's 1-1 draw with Slovenia kept Serbia's hopes alive going into the decider with Denmark in Munich.

Serbia have lost three matches out of three against Denmark but Stojkovic said: "We believe it's time to change this history.

"The mood is good but why wouldn't it be? A festival of football is waiting for us," Stojkovic said yesterday.

England, who face Slovenia, are top of the group on four points. Slovenia and Denmark are both on two, while Serbia has one. "We knew that England and Slovenia were important games, but the most important match for us is Denmark."

The 59-year-old added the Danes are "a really organised team who run a lot and sacrifice a lot".

Stojkovic indicated Serbia would make some changes to their starting XI, having started slowly in both of their matches so far, but backed his squad's

depth. He brought Jovic off the bench with just under half an hour remaining and the AC Milan striker made the crucial difference. "You need a gun on the bench you can activate later. In modern football the bench is so important, even sometimes more important than the players who start!"

Stojkovic played 84 games for Yugoslavia and then Serbia and was part of the Yugoslavian side excluded from Euro 1992 in Sweden, which was won by Denmark. Denmark coach Kasper Hjulmand said the Danes said they knew what to expect against Serbia. "It's obvious the way they play football and it's been obvious for a long time. They're style is transparent - and when they're good, they're really good."

Whoever finishes first in the group will face one of the best third placed sides, while runners-up will take on hosts Germany. Hjulmand however said "we have one focus here and we can talk about scenarios after the game".

Denmark midfielder Christian Eriksen will become the most capped player in the nation's history with 133 appearances if he plays today, just three years after suffering cardiac arrest while on the pitch at the previous Euros.

Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg called Eriksen "a fantastic guy and a great player" and said "tomorrow he's setting a milestone not only with Denmark but with himself."

'England have to reach 'different level' to meet Euros objective'



England manager Gareth Southgate said his objective of winning the Euros has not changed, but acknowledged the Three Lions need to be much-improved when they meet Slovenia yesterday. Despite taking four points from their opening two games, England's performances in a 1-0 win over Serbia and 1-1 draw with Denmark have been fiercely criticised for failing to deliver on their tag as pre-tournament favourites.

"We've always known we are one of the team who can win the tournament," Southgate told reporters at his pre-match press conference.

"We haven't changed our objectives. We know to do that, we have to show a different level to what we have so far."

Slovenia have drawn their opening two games and realistically need to take something from the match in Cologne to have any chance of reaching the last 16.

England's Declan Rice said his team are wary of the threat posed by Slovenia striker Benjamin Sesko, who had been linked with a move to join the midfielder at Arsenal, before recently extending his contract with German club RB Leipzig. "I have watched Slovenia and they have been really good, they have strong players who are really fast. The main talking point is Sesko - he's been a massive target for clubs round Europe," said Rice.

"They are going to come at us and try to win and shock the world."

BOTTOMLINE

USA and Uruguay make winning starts to Copa campaigns

AFP
Arlington, United States

Christian Pulisic scored one goal and set up another as the United States launched their Copa America campaign with a clinical 2-0 victory over Bolivia on Sunday.

Also in Group C, Darwin Nunez was on target as 15-time Copa winners Uruguay beat Panama 3-1 at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami, offering a reminder of their status among the favourites.

US captain Pulisic curled in a superb early goal before teeing up a second for striker Folarin Balogun just before half-time at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

"We came out flying with a lot of intensity," Pulisic said.

"Obviously an early goal helped us a lot, but all around a pretty dominant performance."

US coach Gregg Berhalter had warned his team against complacency against a Bolivia side who had won only one game in nine previous editions of the Copa America since 1999.

Pulisic was clearly in no mood to

let the South Americans improve that record, firing the hosts into the lead after only three minutes.

Receiving the ball from a corner on the left, Pulisic darted towards the edge of the area and whipped a rasping shot goalwards.

Bolivia goalkeeper Guillermo Viscarra got a hand to it but could not stop the ball flying into the roof of the net.

Despite that early breakthrough the US struggled to convert their dominance into chances and were frustrated by a combative Bolivian team who had three players booked in the first 31 minutes.

Leonel Justiniano, Gabriel Villamil and Luis Haquin were all shown yellow cards in an indisciplined start by Bolivia.

The US doubled their lead in the 44th minute and once again Pulisic was heavily involved.

Picking up the ball near half-way, the AC Milan forward accelerated towards the penalty area and squared to Balogun, who took a touch to drag defender Jesus Sagraedo wide before drilling a low shot into the bottom corner.

The superior movement of the US forward line continued to



Luis Haquin of Bolivia and Christian Pulisic (right) of United States vying for the ball during the Copa America Group C match in Arlington, Texas. (AFP)

cause problems after the restart.

Balogun just failed to get a toe on a low shot by Tim Weah in the 50th minute and had the ball in the net moments later but was adjudged marginally offside.

Pulisic then drew a fine save

from Viscarra in the 60th minute after weaving into the penalty area and unleashing a ferocious shot.

Substitute Ricardo Pepi should have made it 3-0 in the 65th minute, moments after coming on for Gio Reyna, but saw his shot

from an Antonee Robinson cross roll wide. Pepi was then denied a goal in the 90th minute after a desperate double save by Viscarra. Marcelo Bielsa's Uruguay began in trademark fashion, swarming opponents Panama and pressing re-

lentlessly. Maximiliano Araujo put Uruguay ahead in the 16th minute with a beautifully executed left-foot shot into the top corner.

Panama keeper Orlando Mosquera had to be at his best to deal with the wave of attacks, parrying a fierce Nunez blast and then producing an outstanding save to keep out a header from Giorgian de Arrascaeta. Mosquera's reflexes served him well again in the 29th minute when he denied Nunez from close range, the Liverpool striker having connected on a low cross from Federico Valverde.

It was a very different story after the break, though, with Uruguay looking a little tired and Panama enjoying some sustained pressure.

But Bielsa's side gave themselves breathing space when Nunez doubled their lead in the 85th minute, showing his superb technique to volley home a half-clearance from inside the box.

Matias Vina's perfectly timed header from a Nicolas de la Cruz free-kick put an end to the contest, although Panama received some reward in the final minutes with Michael Amir Murillo finishing off a swift break.