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# GULF TIMES

# SPORT



**TENNIS**

Alcaraz wins five-set Wimbledon thriller as Gauff, Raducanu ease through

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**EURO 2024**

# Merino strikes late as Spain beat Germany to reach semis

‘Well, I’m dead, really. The adrenaline is taking its toll on me now. It has been a special moment’

**AFP**  
Stuttgart, Germany

**A** Mikel Merino goal in the penultimate minute of extra time grabbed Spain a dramatic 2-1 win over Germany to send them into the Euro 2024 semi-finals and keep their dreams of a record-breaking fourth European Championship title alive.

After a fiery yet goalless first half, Spain's Dani Olmo latched onto an inch-perfect pass from 16-year-old Lamine Yamal to give La Roja the lead on 51 minutes.

Niclas Füllkrug struck the post with 14 minutes remaining but with the hosts staring at an exit, Florian Wirtz slammed in a Joshua Kimmich knock-down in the 89th minute to take the game to extra time.

With the game looking set for penalties, Olmo lofted a cross for Merino, who headed Spain to victory and a semi-final meeting with either France or Portugal.

“Well, I’m dead, really. The adrenaline is taking its toll on me now. It has been a special moment,” goalscorer Merino said after.

Olmo said he was “exhausted really”, adding: “It is a source of pride, what a great team we have, how we have fought until the end.”

Germany's elimination ends the hosts' hopes of a fairytale Euros victory after a decade of poor performances at major tournaments, while also lowering the curtain on Toni Kroos' stellar career.

“We played a good tournament but when you're so close, to be eliminated like that, it's bitter,” Kroos told ARD.



Spain's Mikel Merino scores their second goal against Germany in their Euro 2024 quarter-final in Stuttgart yesterday. (Reuters)

The battle between the two most successful Euros nations, with three titles apiece, was billed as a final come early, with the in-form Spaniards against Julian Nagelsmann's reborn hosts.

Spain nominated Kroos as Germany's most dangerous player pre-match but the midfielder had

a huge, even if unintended impact early, colliding with Pedri, who was then substituted with a leg injury for Olmo.

Germany, with the oldest squad at Euro 2024, struggled with Spain's speed during the first half, frequently coming into tackles a fraction too late, but the two

best chances of the opening half fell to the hosts - and both to Kai Havertz.

The Arsenal forward leapt highest to head a cross directly at Unai Simon early and then scuffed a tame shot at the goalie later in the half with just the 'keeper to beat.

Nagelsmann took off surprise

starter Emre Can for the pink-haired Robert Andrich, while the ineffective Leroy Sané was replaced by Wirtz.

The substitution who would make his mark however was Olmo, who gave Spain the lead six minutes into the second half, slicing through the sleepy Germany de-

fence to perfectly place a Yamal pass past Manuel Neuer into the bottom left corner.

The goal kicked Germany into gear with Wirtz particularly dangerous. The Bayer Leverkusen starlet linked with Füllkrug on the counter with a quarter of an hour remaining but the striker, under heavy attention from the Spanish defence, could only hit the post.

With 10 minutes remaining Nagelsmann made his final substitution, bringing veteran Thomas Müller from the bench.

But it was Wirtz - 13 years his junior - who made the difference, skimming a Kimmich header across the grass and in at the far post. Mikel Oyarzabal, on for Nico Williams, curled a 104th-minute shot just wide of the post and Wirtz did the same a minute later with the goal beckoning.

Germany appealed strongly for a penalty in the second period of extra time, after a Jamal Musiala shot hit Marc Cucurella's hand, but after a VAR check the original decision to not award a spot-kick stood.

Minutes later, Olmo curled in a cross for Merino, who leapt high to head the ball past Neuer and put Spain into the semi-finals.

Luis de la Fuente will be forced into changes for Tuesday's semi, after Dani Carvajal received his marching orders for hauling down Musiala for a second yellow card of the match.

Centre-back Robin Le Normand and captain Alvaro Morata will also be suspended for picking up yellows, with the Spain skipper earning a late caution for his celebrations in the aftermath of Merino's winner.

**FOCUS**

# France beat Portugal on penalties to set up semi against Spain

**AFP**  
Hamburg

**T**heo Hernandez scored the winning kick as Kylian Mbappe's France edged a tense Euro 2024 quarter-final clash with Portugal 5-3 on penalties after a goalless 120 minutes yesterday in what will likely be remembered as Cristiano Ronaldo's last-ever match at the tournament.

France were successful with all their penalties as they advance to a last-four showdown with Spain, while Portugal's Joao Felix was the only player to miss, sending his team's third kick against the post.

It is overdue success in a shoot-out for France after they lost the 2022 World Cup final on penalties to Argentina and went out of the last Euros three years ago in the same way, against Switzerland in the last 16.

They also lost on penalties in the last major tournament in Germany, going down to Italy in the final of the 2006 World Cup.

Mbappe, who missed the crucial kick against the Swiss, was already off the pitch by the time this shoot-out came around, having been replaced by Bardley Barcola midway through extra time.

Barcola, Ousmane Dembele, Youssouf Fofana and Jules Kounde also scored from the spot for France. Mbappe endured a frustrating evening as he continues to search for his best form in the



France players celebrate after winning the penalty shootout against Portugal in their Euro 2024 quarter-final in Hamburg yesterday. (Reuters)

competition but appears inhibited while wearing a mask to protect the nose he broke against Austria in France's opening game. At least he will get another chance to star in the semi-final, while Ronaldo, at 39, appears to have played at a Euros for the last time.

This has been his sixth European Championship, but he failed to add to his tournament record tally of 14 goals in Germany after misfiring in all of Portugal's five matches. He scored his penalty, Portugal's first, but Roberto Martinez's team go out having failed to find the net in over six hours of football. They beat Slovenia on

penalties in the last 16 after a goalless draw, but this time fell short in what was a disappointing game in Hamburg.

Neither of these teams had played anywhere close to their potential in their previous games at the tournament, but especially France, who got this far without any of their players scoring a goal in open play. Randal Kolo Muani's reward for coming off the bench to force the late own goal which allowed Les Bleus to beat Belgium in the last round was a place in the starting line-up.

Eduardo Camavinga also came in, replacing the suspended Adrien

Rabiot in midfield, while Antoine Griezmann was deployed as a number 10 behind Kolo Muani and Mbappe. France have been happy to sit off teams and rely on an excellent defence, while also struggling to play with any real intensity when in possession.

They had less of the ball in this game, an often disappointing contest, which did briefly come to life in the second half. Portugal began to cause problems with runners getting into the box from midfield, first when Bruno Fernandes had a shot saved by Mike Maignan just after the hour mark.

Vitinha was next to try his luck



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo looks dejected after the loss against France yesterday. (Reuters)

moments later as he got on the end of Rafael Leao's low centre. Maignan, determined not to concede a first goal in open play at the competition, saved his shot and reacted quickly to stop Ronaldo back-healing the ball in from close range.

France responded as Kolo Muani played a one-two with Kounde and went for goal, only for a vital Ruben Dias interception to save Portugal. Deschamps then withdrew Antoine Griezmann and sent on Dembele, who wasted no time in setting up a golden chance for Camavinga which the midfielder put wide.

After that, the game began to

drift inevitably towards extra time, in which Ronaldo squandered a good opportunity from substitute Francisco Conceicao's cutback.

That was more than Mbappe managed, and France's captain watched the end of extra time from the bench, as Maignan denied Nuno Mendes at the very end of 120 minutes and penalties followed. The shoot-out unfolded at the Portugal end of the Volksparkstadion, with Maignan not managing to make a save but not needing to. Portugal's Diogo Costa saved three Slovenia penalties in the last round, but could not stop any this time.

MOTORSPORT

# Norris edges Stroll in tight Silverstone practice battle

The 24-year-old home hero clocks a best lap of one minute and 27.420 seconds in his McLaren

AFP  
Silverstone, United Kingdom

Lando Norris showed no ill-effects from his recent brush with Max Verstappen as he topped the times in a closely-contested opening free practice yesterday for the British Grand Prix at Silverstone.

The 24-year-old home hero clocked a best lap of one minute and 27.420 seconds in his McLaren to outpace Lance Stroll in an Aston Martin by a tenth.

Oscar Piastri next in the second McLaren ahead of defending three-time champion Verstappen's Red Bull.

George Russell was fifth for Mercedes ahead of two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin, seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, in the second Mercedes, and Ferrari pair Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz.

Esteban Ocon was 10th for Alpine.

The top ten cars were separated by only half a second, offering the prospect of a close fight in qualifying today and in tomorrow's race, set to be run in unpredictable weather.

For Norris, it was a welcome return to work after five days of intense focus on his controversial collision with Verstappen in last Sunday's Austrian Grand Prix,

which resulted in both suffering punctures. Verstappen, who leads the title race by 81 points, finished fifth and Norris was forced to retire.

Yesterday's session began under an overcast sky with a breeze and a risk of rain, as four rookies were handed a 'test' chance to impress.

For Williams, Franco Colapinto became the first Argentine in F1 in more than two decades. Briton Oliver Bearman, took to the track for Haas, who he is joining as a permanent driver next year when he leaves the Ferrari academy. Frenchman Isack Hadjar drove Sergio Perez's Red Bull. Australian Jack Doohan, son of five time motorcycling world champion Mick, drove an Alpine.

Verstappen was quick to top the times ahead of Alonso before Yuki Tsunoda in his RB and then Hamilton took the initiative. Tsunoda then slid into the gravel at Luffield and the session was red-flagged.

After an eight-minute break, the action resumed with Russell on top in 1:28.156, two-tenths clear of Verstappen, both running on hard tyres, before Hamilton took over, by a margin of 0.003 seconds ahead of his team-mate.

Sainz then surged to the top midway into the session with a lap in 1:27.925, staying there until Verstappen trimmed that by two-tenths on mediums. Russell, also on mediums, slotted into second,



McLaren's Lando Norris (also inset) during practice for this week's British Grand Prix at Silverstone Circuit, Silverstone, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

just 0.009 adrift of the Dutchman. With 20 minutes remaining, Valtteri Bottas tried softs on his Sauber, as Bearman had done to take eighth, setting a trend that saw Piastri on softs going top for McLaren, 0.098 clear of Verstappen - a mere blink.

Norris, who had taken a cautious approach, then took over in 1:27.420, ahead of Stroll by 0.134 while the luckless Piastri slowed to

a halt with a hydraulics problem, just short of the pit entry. He was rescued by track marshals.

In the final minutes, Leclerc survived a scare when he almost hit Stroll's Aston Martin when the Canadian changed lanes at Becketts.

"I nearly crashed with Lance," the Ferrari driver reported.

In another close brush with danger, Norris avoided Hadjar in the closing seconds.

CYCLING

# Pogacar stays on course for Giro/Tour double as Evenepoel wins time trial



A young spectator holding a placard faces down UAE Team Emirates' Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey as he cycles during the 7th stage of the 111th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 25.3km individual time trial between Nuits-Saint-Georges and Gevrey-Chambertin, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters  
Gevrey-Chambertin, France

Tadej Pogacar stayed firmly on track for a Giro d'Italia/Tour de France double as he extended his lead over defending champion Jonas Vingegaard and put some painful memories behind him in a thrilling individual time trial yesterday.

The Slovenian, who has thrown the first punches in the race's opening days and gained time over Dane Vingegaard in the first high mountain stage, took second place in the 25.3km solo effort against the clock that was dominated by Remco Evenepoel.

The 24-year-old Belgian, the time trial world champion, won the seventh stage in 28 minutes and 52 seconds to beat Pogacar by 12 seconds.

Another Slovenian, Primož Roglič, was third, 34 seconds off the pace, with Vingegaard in fourth place three seconds further back as the 'Big Four' showed their strength on the roads through the Burgundy farms.

The results kept the race wide



UAE Team Emirates' Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar celebrates on the podium. (Reuters)

open. "I'm pretty happy with my performance today. I was cooked on the climb but then I regained some pace," Pogacar said.

"I'm more confident after the Giro and I see that I can be better than at the Giro. Last year I lost 1:38 on Jonas (in a time trial), today I gained 25 seconds, for me it's really good but Remco showed he was not the TT world champion by chance."

While Vingegaard might be

Tour double since the late Marco Pantani in 1998.

Yesterday, the test was as psychological as it was physical for Pogacar, who last year was humiliated by Vingegaard in the third week's time trial before cracking in the mountains the next day.

The UAE Emirates rider, who this year can rely on a team who seem superior to Vingegaard's Visma - Lease a Bike, was ahead of his rival at all three check points.

It was Evenepoel, however, who crushed the field with a skilful and powerful ride, managing to win despite suffering what appeared to be a minor mechanical issue some two kilometres from the finish line.

"I thought I was getting a flat tyre. I panicked a little bit but I only lost four, five seconds there," said Evenepoel. "However it's a dream come true, it was a big goal for me and for the team. It's crazy, I don't think it has sunk in yet."

The 2022 Vuelta champion, who has little experience in the high mountains, is second overall, 33 seconds behind Pogacar, with Vingegaard in third place, 1:15 off the pace. Roglič is fourth, 1:36 behind Pogacar.

## Pakistan to host Bangladesh, England and West Indies Tests

**Karachi:** Pakistan yesterday announced Test matches against Bangladesh, England and the West Indies - as well as a one-day tri-series - in a jam-packed schedule lasting until February next year.

Bangladesh will first visit Pakistan in August for two Tests, followed by three Tests against England in October and then two against the West Indies in January.

Following that, Pakistan will host a tri-series one-day in February in the build up to the eight-nation Champions Trophy tournament they will also host later in February and March.

England will tour Pakistan for the second time in two years.

England made their first Test trip to Pakistan for 17 years in 2022 when Ben Stokes's side won the series 3-0 at the same venues they will visit later this year.

Just a week after England's home summer programme finishes on September 29, following their white-ball series against Australia, the first Test against Pakistan will start in Multan on October 7.

The Karachi Test gets under way on October 15, with the series concluding in Rawalpindi with a match beginning on October 24.

England and Wales Cricket Board chief executive officer Richard Gould said yesterday in a statement: "We're really excited to be returning to Pakistan for this three-match men's Test tour in October.

"Our last men's Test tour of Pakistan produced some memorable matches and I'm sure fans can look forward to more exciting cricket across this forthcoming series."

England have three Tests against New Zealand scheduled for December and also have limited-overs assignments against the West Indies in November and India in the new year.

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Mohsin Naqvi - also the

country's serving interior minister - said the timetable shows the nation's commitment to host international play.

Foreign teams did not play in Pakistan from 2009-2015 after militants attacked the Sri Lankan team bus, wounding seven touring players and killing eight people. "These series are vital part of our strategy to strengthen Pakistan's position in international cricket and ensure long-term sustainability for sport in the country," Naqvi said in a statement.

With improved security, Pakistan has hosted major cricketing countries including Australia, New Zealand, England and South Africa in the last four years.

The Champions Trophy tournament will be the first major cricket event in the country since it co-hosted the 1996 World Cup with India and Sri Lanka.

The PCB said match dates for the competition - taking place from February 19 to March 9 - will be announced later.

**PAKISTAN'S HOME SEASON 2024-25**

**Aug 21-25:** First Test vs Bangladesh, Rawalpindi

**Aug 30 - Sept 3:** Second Test, Karachi

**Oct 7-11:** First Test vs England, Multan

**Oct 15-19:** Second Test vs England, Karachi

**Oct 24-28:** Third Test vs England, Rawalpindi

**Jan 16-20:** First Test against West Indies, Karachi

**Jan 24-28:** Second Test vs West Indies, Multan

**Feb 8:** Pakistan v New Zealand, Multan

**Feb 10:** New Zealand v South Africa, Multan

**Feb 12:** Pakistan v South Africa, Multan

**Feb 14:** Final, Multan

**CHAMPIONS TROPHY 2025**

**Feb 19 - Mar 9**

A view of the National Stadium in Karachi which will host three Tests in the next six months, the Pakistan Cricket Board said yesterday.

## I WISH I COULD PLAY FOREVER, SAYS TEARFUL MURRAY AT WIMBLEDON FAREWELL

**London:** Andy Murray suffered a losing start in his farewell to Wimbledon on Thursday, weeping openly in front of his adoring fans before admitting: "I wish I could play forever." Murray, a two-time singles champion at Wimbledon, and brother Jamie were defeated 7-6 (8/6), 6-4 by Rinky Hijikata and John Peers of Australia in the first round of men's doubles. It was the first episode of a retirement three-parter - the 37-year-old Murray is scheduled to play mixed doubles with Emma Raducanu at Wimbledon before he retires at the Paris Olympics. After having a metal hip inserted in 2019, suffering ankle damage this year and undergoing surgery to remove a cyst from his spine which ruled him out of singles at Wimbledon, Murray has reluctantly accepted the writing is on the wall. His career has yielded three Grand Slam titles, two Olympic golds, a Davis Cup and the world number-one ranking. "Look it's hard because I would

love to keep playing but I can't. Physically it is too tough now, all of the injuries, they have added up and they haven't been insignificant," he said. "I want to play forever, I love the sport and it's given me so much. It's taught me loads of lessons over the years I can use for the rest of my life. I don't want to stop so it is hard." He added: "It was obviously really special to play with (brother) Jamie. "We never got the chance to do it before (at Wimbledon). It was a bit of a race to get out here. Physically, it wasn't easy but I am glad we did it." Tears flowed when video tributes were paid to Murray by a number of stars including Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal. "You were never alone," said eight-time Wimbledon champion and 20-time Slam champion Federer, the man defeated on Centre Court when Murray claimed Olympic gold in 2012. "While you carried your own dreams, you also carried theirs."

Nadal, the 2008 and 2010 champion at the All England Club and the holder of 22 majors, said: "We were proud to play against you." Seven-time Wimbledon champion and the winner of 23 women's Grand Slams Serena Williams told Murray: "Your golden days belonged to everybody." Career-long rival Novak Djokovic was courtside on Thursday to witness Murray's emotional evening in the spotlight. "Sometimes it looked like you against the world," said Djokovic, the holder of 24 Slams and seven Wimbledon titles in admiration of a man born a week before him in 1987. Murray received a standing ovation when he walked onto Centre Court alongside his brother, older by 15 months and a winner of two Grand Slam men's doubles titles. Family members including mother Judy, father William, wife Kim and daughters Sophia, eight, and six-year-old Edie, watched from the players' box. The famous arena has witnessed some of Murray's most dramatic



Britain's Andy Murray reacts after the men's doubles first round match with his brother Jamie Murray against Australian pair John Peers and Rinky Hijikata at Wimbledon on Thursday. (AFP)

moments. His tearful 2012 Wimbledon final loss to Roger Federer was followed by Olympic gold just weeks later. "I'm not saying I'm the most outgoing or bubbly personality, but I think people probably saw how much I cared about the sport for the first time maybe," said Murray of that defeat to the Swiss great.

In 2013 Murray claimed his first Wimbledon title, ending a 77-year wait for a British male champion, and added another three years later. On Thursday, the former world number one was treated to ecstatic cheers even when it was announced it was his turn to serve. Hardly surprisingly, Murray ap-

peared stiff in his movement, not helped by the chilly temperatures, which dipped to 18 degrees Celsius (64 degrees Fahrenheit). The brothers had a set point in the opener, which they were unable to convert. They battled gamely, even leading 2-0 in the second set with Murray grimacing on serve. Murray treated his fans to his trademark, nerve-tingling roar that has regularly bounced around Centre Court for the best part of two decades when he unleashed a winning forehand. The euphoria was brief as the Australian pair moved towards victory. After his emotional speech to the crowd, Murray left to a guard of honour which included Djokovic, John McEnroe and Martina Navratilova. His legacy is assured, with the brightest star of tennis's new generation adding his tribute. "Andy! Such an inspiration and example for everyone! what a career and what a legacy!" wrote defending Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz on X.

### TENNIS

# Alcaraz wins a 5-set thriller as Gauff advances

The Spaniard has reached the last 16 of a Slam for the 10th time

AFP  
London

**D**efending champion Carlos Alcaraz defeated close friend Frances Tiafoe in a roller-coaster five sets to reach the Wimbledon last 16 yesterday as US Open winner Coco Gauff breezed through. Alcaraz came through 5-7, 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-2 on the back of 16 aces in his 55 winners in a Centre Court thriller that stretched to the best part of four hours. "Always a big challenge playing against Frances," admitted Alcaraz, who was also pushed to five sets by the American in the semi-finals of the 2022 US Open on his way to a first Grand Slam title. "He is a really talented player, really tough to face and he has shown again that he deserves to be at the top and fight for big things." Alcaraz, who is bidding to become only the sixth man to capture the French Open and Wimbledon titles back-to-back, has now reached the last 16 of a Slam for the 10th time. The world number three will next take on either Ugo Humbert of France or Brandon Nakashima of the United States. Women's world number two Gauff ended the run of British qualifier Sonay Kartal, who had defied her humble ranking of 298 to reach the third round of a Slam for the first time. Gauff won 6-4, 6-0, allowing her opponent just eight points in the second set. Despite the loss, Kartal, who had arrived at the All England



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in action against Frances Tiafoe of the USA during their third-round match at Wimbledon Championships in London yesterday. (Reuters)

Club with just over \$18,500 from her 2024 efforts on court, will go away with a windfall of more than \$182,000. "This is my first time playing a British player here so I was little nervous because I knew you'd be for her, which is understandable," said Gauff. "Thankfully you guys were pretty nice to me so that helped," Gauff added. Gauff will face American compatriot Emma Navarro for a place in the quarter-finals. Tommy Paul, the US men's 12th seed, made the fourth round for second time with a 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 win over Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan. It was Paul's eighth successive win on grass after he claimed the

Queen's Club title on the eve of Wimbledon. "I'm having fun on the grass," said Paul. Grigor Dimitrov, who was a semi-finalist 10 years ago, defeated 37-year-old Gael Monfils in straight sets. Two-time quarter-finalist Madison Keys, the 12th seed, reached the second week for the fifth time with a straight-sets win over Marta Kostyuk. Keys goes on to face French Open runner-up Jasmine Paolini, who had never won a match at Wimbledon before this year. Seventh-ranked Paolini saw off former US Open champion Bianca Andreescu in straight sets. Lulu Sun became the first woman from New Zealand since

1959 to reach the last 16 with a straight-sets victory over China's Zhu Lin. Sun, 23, who had to come through qualifying to make her debut at the All England Club, won 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (8/6). "Practically more sheep and deer than people," joked Sun, who next faces either Britain's former US Open champion Emma Raducanu who beat Greek ninth seed Maria Sakkari yesterday. Raducanu reached the last 16 of a Grand Slam for the first time since her 2021 US Open triumph when she defeated world number nine Sakkari. The 21-year-old British star defeated her Greek opponent 6-2, 6-3 for only her second win over a top-10 player.

### SPOTLIGHT

## World No. 1 Sinner beats Kecmanovic to reach the fourth round

Reuters  
London

**J**annik Sinner switched to cruise mode at Wimbledon as the world number one breezed past unseeded Serb Miomir Kecmanovic 6-1 6-4 6-2 for a place in the fourth round on a damp yesterday. After his dogfight with fellow Italian Matteo Berrettini ended shortly before the 11pm local curfew on Wednesday, the 22-year-old wasted little time under the roof on Centre Court. A backhand rocket earned Sinner the early break and set the tone for the opening set, which he sealed in 21 minutes dropping only one late game. Kecmanovic came into the match with an uphill task having never beaten Sinner in three previous meetings and the 24-year-old did well to delay the inevitable in a tight second set. He was soon staring down the barrel, however, as Australian Open champion Sinner broke for 5-4 before blasting three aces en route to tightening his vice-like



Italy's Jannik Sinner returns against Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic on the fifth day of the 2024 Wimbledon Championships in London yesterday. (AFP)

grip with a two-set lead. The winners continued to flow from Sinner's racket as the lanky top seed raced to another huge lead in the third set and Kecmanovic put himself out of his misery with an error.

### FOCUS

## Samuel Eto'o fined by CAF for ethics violation

AFP  
Cairo

**T**he Confederation of African Football (CAF) said yesterday they had fined Cameroon football federation president Samuel Eto'o a total of \$200,000 for a brand deal they determined to be an ethics violation. The former Barcelona and Inter Milan star had been accused of "alleged manipulation of football matches", of which the CAF disciplinary board found there was "insufficient proof", the organisation said in a statement. But they determined Eto'o had

"violated the principles of ethics, integrity and sportsmanship" by accepting a paid brand deal with an online gambling company, and dealt him a fine of \$200,000. In a statement, Eto'o's lawyers said the decision was "surprising in several respects". "The alleged facts do not result from a competition organised by CAF," said the ex-player's lawyers. They further added that CAF did not have the jurisdiction to hand down the ruling, particularly when "CAF has neither a code of ethics nor an ethics commission". Eto'o is set to "appeal the decision before CAF's appeals board", according to his lawyers. The former international striker is 43.

## WORLD AQUATICS SUMMONED TO US INQUIRY INTO CHINESE SWIMMERS

**Lausanne:** The executive director of World Aquatics (WA) has been summoned to testify in the United States over the controversy surrounding Chinese competitors who failed doping tests, the international swimming body confirmed yesterday. WA said it wanted to stress that Brent Nowicki "has only been asked to testify as a witness" ahead of potential US action against the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). "World Aquatics can confirm that its executive director, Brent Nowicki, was served with a witness subpoena by the United States government," WA said in an e-mail to AFP, without saying who had issued the summons. "It would not be appropriate for World Aquatics to provide more detail on who is running the American investigation," said the statement.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation responded to an AFP question about its role by saying: "Per our standard practice, the FBI does not confirm nor deny the existence of an investigation." The case stems from revelations in April that 23 Chinese swimmers failed tests for the heart drug trimetazidine in 2021. WADA responded to the reports of the latest development in the investigation by saying in a statement it was "disappointed to learn that the US Department of Justice is now investigating the 2021 contamination case of 23 swimmers in China." The swimmers were allowed to compete at the Tokyo Olympics, where they won three golds, after WADA accepted the Chinese explanation that the positive results were caused by food contamination at their hotel. WADA said it "reviewed the

Chinese swimmer case file diligently, consulted with scientific and legal experts, and ultimately determined that it was in no position to challenge the contamination scenario, such that an appeal was not warranted." "We stand by that good-faith determination in the face of the incomplete and misleading news reports on which this investigation appears to be based." Eleven of the Chinese swimmers are set to compete in the Paris Olympics which start at the end of July. In May, a US House of Representatives Committee on China asked the country's Justice Department and the FBI to look into the case under a law, named after Russian whistleblower Grigory Rodchenkov, that allows investigations of suspected doping outside the United States.

### BOTTOMLINE

## Golovkin in World Boxing's corner to keep sport in the Olympic Games

Reuters  
Lausanne

**F**ormer-middleweight world champion Gennady Golovkin will rely on his power of persuasion and not his feared fists to convince Kazakhstan's boxing federation that World Boxing is the best hope to keep the sport on the Olympic programme. Recently appointed president of Kazakhstan's National Olympic Committee, the political ring may be an unfamiliar one for Golovkin but with boxing's future as an Olympic sport on the ropes, he is viewing the fight as one of the most important of his career. Golovkin told Reuters he would push the country's boxing federa-



tion to join the US backed World Boxing which launched in April last year as an alternative to the International Boxing Association led by Russian Umar Kremlev. Having failed to complete reforms on governance, finance and ethical issues the IBF was last June stripped of its recognition by the International Olympic Commit-

tee. The boxing tournaments at the Paris Olympics this summer are being organised by the IOC but it has said it will not be doing so at the Los Angeles Games in 2028. "We on our part are trying to convince them (Kazakhstan boxing federation) to join the World Boxing and we try to insist on that," Golovkin said, through an interpreter. "We are trying to do that and we will try to continue to push them to that decision." "It's the federation of boxing of Kazakhstan that makes this decision and it is their freedom of choice." "Their decision. "I do not have any weight from a legal standpoint, I cannot influence the decision of the federation and they are going through their own process."

## COPA AMERICA

# Martinez rescues Argentina in shootout victory

Martinez saves Messi blushes in win over Ecuador to reach semis



Argentina's goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez saves a spot kick from Ecuador's Angel Mena in a penalty shootout during the Conmebol 2024 Copa America quarter-final at NRG Stadium in Houston. (AFP)

Reuters  
Houston

Goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez was the hero, saving two penalties and Lionel Messi's blushes as holders Argentina defeated Ecuador in a penalty shoot-out to book their place in the Copa America semi-finals on Thursday.

A Lisandro Martinez header had put world champions Argentina 1-0 up ten minutes before half-time but Kevin Rodriguez headed in a stoppage-time leveller for Ecuador, who had risen to the occasion in front of 69,456 fans at Houston's NRG Stadium.

Messi missed the opening penalty, chipping against the bar, but thanks to heroics from Martinez, Argentina recovered to win the shoot-out 4-2 and progress into the semi-finals where they will face the winner of Friday's match between Venezuela and Canada.

Messi's botched 'panenka' brought back memories of his miss in the shoot-out loss to Chile in the 2016 Copa final but luckily for him goalkeeper Martinez was in the mood to repeat his own past.

He pulled off superb diving saves to deny Angel Mena and Alan Minda and get his team in front before Nicolas Otamendi slotted home the decisive fourth kick. It was a major scare for the tournament favourites but not for the first time they had their goalkeeper to thank for the relief of victory.

Martinez had saved three spot-kicks in a 3-2 penalty shootout victory for Argentina over Colombia in the semi-final of the 2021 Copa America and famously saved two in the World Cup final win against France in Qatar.

"I told the lads before the shoot-out that I wasn't ready to go home, this team deserves to go all the way to the final," the goalkeeper told Argentine television after the team had celebrated on the field.

"I feel so connected to the people, I had my family nearby and these are special moments. This group deserved to continue, it's exciting," he said.

Ecuador were left crestfallen after a match in which they had created enough opportunities to have won the game.

Felix Sanchez's team made a bright start, dominating the ball

in midfield and stretching the Argentine defence at times.

Moises Caicedo had an early opportunity, latching on to a header from Enner Valencia, but his shot was tame and easily dealt with by Argentine keeper Martinez.

Then Moises Caicedo threaded a clever pass through to the impressive Jeremy Sarmiento but Martinez was out quick to save with an outstretched foot and Kendry Paez blasted the loose ball over the bar.

Argentina gradually got a foothold in the game but it was not until the 28th minute that they had their first opening when Enzo Fernandez headed wide a Nahuel Molina cross from the right.

Seven minutes later, they had the lead however, Messi driving in a corner which Alexis Mac Allister met at the near post with a flick-on and Lisandro Martinez arrived with a powerful header that Ecuador keeper Alexander Dominguez was unable to keep out.

Fernandez soon had a chance to double the lead but fired a left-foot shot wide at the back post and Argentina went in at the break with a single goal lead.

Ecuador were given a lifeline in

the 62nd minute when Rodrigo De Paul was ruled to have handled inside the box but Valencia's penalty struck the outside of the post. But in stoppage time, Ecuador stunned the 15-times Copa champions when Kevin Rodriguez glanced in a header from a John Yeboah cross.

There was a VAR review, looking at whether Jordy Caicedo had interfered in an offside position at the back post but the goal stood.

Moments later Jordy Caicedo had a great chance to win the game but he glanced a left-wing cross wide from a great, central position. That meant the drama of a penalty shoot-out and the chance to upset the defending champions slipped away.

"We are digesting the defeat," said Spanish coach Sanchez, who despite coming so close was pleased with the way his young side had pushed the Argentines all the way.

"Overall, the balance is positive. We played the toughest opponents and we have shown that the team can compete against everyone. I'm happy with this group of players. They want to do well and give joy to the fans," he said.

## PREVIEW

## Montella promises to make Türkiye even more proud after Demiral ban

Reuters  
Berlin

Türkiye's pride will not be dented by the suspension handed to defender Merih Demiral for a political gesture when they take on the Netherlands in the quarter-finals at Euro 2024 today, coach Vincenzo Montella said.

European soccer's governing body UEFA announced yesterday that the 26-year-old centre back, who celebrated a goal against Austria by making a gesture with his fingers, would be suspended for two games, thus missing the clash with the Dutch. "We consider it unfair, this ban, because it was not a political gesture - it was interpreted as such, but it was just something that was not properly understood," Türkiye's Italian coach Montella told reporters.

"But this will not put a break on the Turkish pride. Actually, we will be more passionate, more proud. We want to make the country proud, and I'm sure we will all be highly motivated, and this goes for the fans as well." With Berlin boasting one of the biggest Turkish diasporas in the world, Montella expects strong support in the stands.

"Our fans have been extraordinary so far, full of passion. They really have conveyed to us all the passion and love, from the hotel to the stadium, back to



Türkiye's midfielder Arda Güler (left) and head coach Vincenzo Montella attend a training session in Barsinghausen yesterday. (AFP)

the hotel. We have always been very correct as well. And that's what I expect from them tomorrow - great support!"

The 50-year-old coach said players and fans alike must control their feelings on Saturday, especially when it comes to Demiral's ban. "They must show that Turkish pride, they must be close to the team and support us, even when we are having hard times. Now regarding Merih, we have to manage our emotions before the match, during the match, internal emotions, external emotions," he said.

"We are the youngest team at the tournament, and emotions factor in when you play these matches. Some players are more experienced, they're used to playing certain matches, they're used to preparing for these matches and they have a bit of an edge."

## Koeman demands Dutch silence fervent Turkish fans at Euros

Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman wants his team to quiet Türkiye's raucous fans in their Euro 2024 quarter-final clash today in Berlin. With a large Turkish diaspora across Germany, Vincenzo Montella's side have been fervently backed this summer and Dutch defender Daley Blind said the clash at the Olympiastadion will feel like an "away" game.

"I've got some experience against Turkish teams, the atmosphere is always great," Koeman told a news conference yesterday. "We just need to keep the ball and they will become quiet. You need to be cool, business-like and play your game."

The Netherlands started slowly at the Euros, creeping through the group phase as one of the best third-place teams, but thrashed Romania 3-0 in the last 16 in a much brighter display.

"The last match was at a really good level football-wise, if we keep that level then it can be a really good tournament for us," continued Koeman, who captained the Dutch to their sole Euros triumph in 1988. "Every match is difficult, all the big teams have struggled in different matches to win them - England scored in the last seconds, Portugal won on penalties. You have to fight for it." Netherlands were hurting from a 3-2 defeat by Austria in their final group game which Koeman called "appalling" and responded strongly against Romania. The former Barcelona coach said they did not need that kind of inspiration to play well against Türkiye. "If you want to have a good game, you don't need to have a defeat first - not an Austria all over again," said Koeman.

"You need to do it by yourself, the players are standing in front of a semi-final, it's an opportunity to progress in this tournament." Dutch defender Denzel Dumfries agreed with his coach. "I don't need extra-motivation for this game, it's a Euros quarter-final, it's great to be here...and none of the other players need it either," said the Inter Milan full-back. "We will need to have good possession and enough energy."

## EURO 2024



Switzerland's head coach Murat Yakin attends a training session in Stuttgart yesterday. (AFP)

## Switzerland living in the moment, want more to celebrate against England

Reuters  
Dusseldorf, Germany

Switzerland are enjoying a moment to live for after an impressive run at Euro 2024, with the players in the mood for more and confident they can trouble pre-tournament favourites England, their coach said yesterday.

Switzerland are aiming to make history by winning a place in the semi-finals of a major tournament for the first time, having delivered a statement of intent by holding Germany to a draw and knocking out holders Italy in the round of 16.

"We are happy just to be in this moment, to be doing this. We have played well and we were able to create problems for big opponents," coach Murat Yakin told a press conference on the eve of their quarter-final against England for the chance to face Netherlands or Türkiye in the last four.

"We are in good shape, we have a lot of self-confidence, and we have shown in several games that we can play against big teams," he said.

"We played against the defending champion, we played well against the hosts, Germany. And so we will cause problems for the English." Yakin confirmed pivotal playmaker Granit Xhaka was fit to face England in Dusseldorf, despite an adductor problem, and expected a great game from his captain.

England and Switzerland have reached the quarter-finals after sharply contrasting per-

formances so far. The Swiss have been unflappable, credited with smart tactics, strong defence and fluid attacking that has won the hearts of the public back home.

England have been under fire since day one, however, with discontent among fans over lacklustre, at times rudderless, performances, with players failing to replicate their club form and coach Gareth Southgate criticised over his selections.

Yakin said his team enjoyed eliminating neighbours Italy and wanted to give Switzerland more reasons to cheer.

"Our country celebrated with us. That's the kind of moments we live for," he said. He smiled when asked if the England match would be the game of his life. "The last games I've been asked that question," he said. "And I hope I'll be asked the question again next week."

Defender Fabian Schar, who has spent the past six years at Newcastle United, backed his Switzerland team against England but said their opponents were stacked with quality and should not be written off.

"No matter how they played, they are in the quarter-finals. So nobody's interested how they played in the group," he said.

"They have a lot of quality and any time they can hurt their opponents. So we need to be prepared for that."

Schar was also asked his opinion on speculation that his club manager Eddie Howe was a contender to become England manager if Southgate is steps down from the job.

"I'm really happy to have him as a manager. Hopefully he stays at Newcastle," he said.

## UEFA made commonsense decision with Bellingham fine, suspended ban: Southgate

England manager Gareth Southgate believes UEFA made the correct decision in handing midfielder Jude Bellingham a fine plus a suspended ban that means he is clear to play against Switzerland in the quarter-finals at Euro 2024. Bellingham was fined 30,000 euros (\$32,470) and handed a one-match ban that was suspended depending on good behaviour for one year after a crotch-grabbing gesture following England's 2-1 win over Slovakia in the round of 16. The 21-year-old scored a stunning bicycle kick to equalise late in normal time that helped keep England in the tournament, and an immediate suspension would have been a big blow to Southgate's team. "I thought it was a commonsense decision," Southgate said yesterday on the eve of England's last-eight clash with the Swiss. "When you score a goal of the quality that he did, at the age that he is, you are going to get a rush of adrenaline."

Bellingham, who has scored two of England's four goals in the tournament, said his gesture was a laugh with friends. European soccer's governing body UEFA said it was "violating the basic rules of decent conduct."

"There was no intent in the gesture towards anybody but communication he has with his family," Southgate said. "From our perspective we thought it (the punishment) was a sensible outcome."

Asked if he had spoken with the Real Madrid midfielder about the incident, Southgate said: "I speak to our players all the time so don't feel the need to spend extra time with Jude. He is aware of the investigation and he is an intelligent guy."

