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EURO 2024

Yamal makes history as Spain sink France to reach final

BARCELONA WINGER, 16, BECOMES THE YOUNGEST EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP GOALSCORER



Spain's Dani Olmo celebrates their second goal yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Munich, Germany

Lamine Yamal, 16, became the tournament's youngest ever goalscorer as Spain came back to beat France 2-1 in Munich yesterday and reach the Euro 2024 final.

Trailing after Randal Kolo Muani headed in a Kylian Mbappe cross in the ninth minute, Spain turned the match around in a four-minute period, scoring twice against a side who had only conceded once in five previous games in this tournament.

Barcelona's Yamal, who turns 17 a day before Sunday's final against either the Netherlands or England in Berlin, equalised with a superb strike from outside the box, curling a long-range effort into the top corner and past the fingertips of an airborne Mike Maignan.

Spain took the lead on 25 minutes, Dani Olmo expertly gathering a loose ball and firing a low shot into the net with the aid of a deflection off Jules Kounde.

Masters of midfield game management, Spain shut up shop after taking the lead, frequently holding possession rather than attack on the counter, controlling the match and claiming the win.

Three-time champions Spain became the first team to win six games at a Euros and are one game away from a record-breaking fourth crown.

Finalists in three of the past four major tournaments, questions will be asked of how France failed to click up front despite boasting enviable attacking riches.

France had only scored three goals heading into the match, none of which were scored by a French player from open play and coach Didier Deschamps reacted, benching forward Antoine Griezmann for Ousmane Dembele.

Yamal created the first chance

of the match four minutes in, lofting a curling cross to an unmarked Fabian Ruiz, who headed over from point-blank range.

Four minutes later, Mbappe skated down the left flank and sent in a carbon copy of Yamal's cross, but Kolo Muani's header was on target to give France the lead.

While the pre-match doubts focused on Spain veterans Jesus Navas, 38, and Nacho, 34, who replaced suspended duo Dani Carvajal and Robin Le Normand, the younger Aymeric Laporte and Marc Cucurella were at fault for Kolo Muani's opener.

France's strike seemed to take the wind out of Spain's sails but it was the youngest player on the pitch who produce a piece of sublime brilliance to level the scores.

Collecting the ball well outside the box, Yamal cut inside, took one look at the goal and unleashed a perfect curling strike into the top left corner.

The goal made Yamal, who already has three assists at Euro 2024, the youngest scorer in the competition's history, beating the previous record by a year and a half.

Yamal's goal, 13 minutes after France's opener, ignited Spain's attack and La Roja took the lead four minutes later through Olmo.

Olmo leapt acrobatically to collect a cleared cross, shed a defender and smashed goalwards, his shot taking a deflection off Kounde before bouncing in.

France's best chance to force extra time fell to their captain with five minutes remaining, but Mbappe blasted well over with only goalkeeper Unai Simon to beat.

Spain's Lamine Yamal celebrates scoring a goal during the UEFA Euro 2024 semi-final against France at the Munich Football Arena in Munich yesterday. (AFP)



FOOTBALL

Al Gharafa sign Romania's Coman for three seasons

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Gharafa have confirmed yesterday the signing of Romanian player Florinel Coman from Steaua Bucharest to bolster the team for the upcoming 2024-2025 season. The initial contract is set for three seasons.

The player arrived in Doha two days ago to undergo the required medical examination before finalising the deal. He was warmly welcomed by Mujeeb Hamed, the team manager, and Eid al-Mulla, the media co-ordinator.

Coman plays as a winger and is the second player to join the Cheetahs after Spanish player Joselu from Real Madrid was announced. Having recently concluded his participation in the Euro 2024 tournament with his national team, where they were eliminated by the Netherlands in the round of 16 with a 3-0 defeat, Coman is now ready to start a new chapter with Al Gharafa.

Al Wakrah sign Scholz for two seasons

Al Wakrah SC signed a contract with Danish footballer Alexander



Scholz from Japan's Urawa Red Diamonds.

The club stated yesterday that Scholz signed a two-season contract, replacing Australian footballer Trent Sainsbury who left the team at the end of last season.

Al Wakrah SC previously signed Spaniard coach Miguel Ramirez who will lead the team starting next season.

The team will hold its abroad training camp in Spain from July 14-August 1, 2024.

Al Ahli announce signing Mitrovic and Exposito



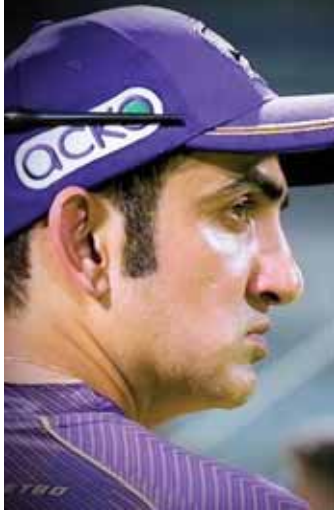
Al Ahli club have announced signing Croatian defender Matej Mitrovic, coming from Croatian club Rijeka, to join Al Ahli's first football team, starting next season. The club said in a statement on its official website: "Mitrovic signed his joining contract with the club in the presence of Arif Abdul Rahman al-Abdullah, the club's general manager, and Abdul Rahman

Mohamed, the team manager, to be part of the club's football team for the sports season (2024-2025)." Mitrovic, who is 30 years old, has great experience as he played with several clubs, including Belgian Club Brugge, with whom he participated in the Champions League, Turkish club Besiktas, and Croatian Rijeka, in addition to his participation with

the first Croatian national team in a number of matches. Mitrovic is scheduled to participate in Al Ahli's training in the coming hours in preparation for next season. A few days ago, Al Ahli club signed Spanish player Eric Exposito for three seasons to strengthen their ranks. Al Ahli finished last season in tenth place in the league standings with 23 points.

ANNOUNCEMENT

India name Gambhir new head coach



AFP
New Delhi

India's cricket board named **Gautam Gambhir** as head coach yesterday, with the former opener taking over from Rahul Dravid, tasked with building on their recent World Cup triumph.

Gambhir said it was "an absolute honour" to take India's top cricketing job.

"I have always taken pride while donning the Indian jersey during my playing days, and it is going to be no different when I take up this new role," Gambhir said in a statement.

The 42-year-old Gambhir takes

over from batting great Dravid, who finished his stint with the T20 World Cup title in Barbados last month.

Jay Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) called Gambhir a "fierce competitor and a brilliant strategist", and said he had been "unanimously" chosen to be the head coach.

Gambhir scored over 10,000 international runs during his 13-year-long international career for India since his ODI debut in 2003.

"We believe he will bring the same tenacity and leadership to his role as head coach," Shah said, adding Gambhir "will bring out the best in our players".

He is the only Indian - and one of four international cricketers including Don Bradman, Jacques Kallis and Mohamed Yousuf - to have scored centuries in five successive Test matches.

"Modern-day cricket has evolved rapidly, and Gautam has witnessed this changing landscape up close," Shah added.

A talented left-handed batter Gambhir, a talented left-handed batsman who played a key part in India's ODI World Cup win in 2011, recently coached Kolkata Knight Riders to an IPL crown.

"Having endured the grind and excelled in various roles throughout his career, I am confident that Gautam is the ideal person to steer

Indian cricket forward," Shah said.

"His clear vision for Team India, coupled with his vast experience, positions him perfectly to take on this exciting and most sought-after coaching role."

Gambhir now takes over a team with heightened expectations after their T20 triumph, their fourth World Cup title and first major crown since the 2013 Champions Trophy.

BCCI president Roger Binny said Gambhir's appointment marks a "new chapter for Indian cricket", praising his "experience, dedication, and vision for the game".

India's white-ball tour of Sri Lanka in late July will be Gambhir's first assignment as coach of the national team.

India also awaits a T20 captain after Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli retired from the shortest format soon after a thrilling win over South Africa in the World Cup final in Barbados on June 29.

Shah also offered his "sincere thanks and gratitude" to Dravid, ending his coaching career on a high.

"Under his guidance, Team India emerged as a dominant force across formats, including being crowned ICC Men's T20 World Cup champions," Shah said.

"His strategic acumen, persistent efforts to nurture talent and exemplary leadership have instilled a culture of excellence within the team and that is also the legacy he leaves behind."

CRICKET

Ashes countdown behind Anderson exit, says Stokes

No fast bowler has taken more than Anderson's 700 Test wickets

AFP
London

England captain Ben Stokes said yesterday the need to build a side capable of winning an Ashes series in Australia lay behind the decision to call time on James Anderson's extraordinary Test career.

The 2025/26 Ashes may still be some 18 months away but England are determined to field a pace attack both experienced and fit enough to withstand the strain of a five-match series in Australia.

As a result, the first Test between England and the West Indies at Lord's starting today, will mark 41-year-old paceman Anderson's 188th and final appearance in the five-day game after a record-breaking career spanning two decades.

No fast bowler has taken more than Anderson's 700 Test wickets and only India batting hero Sachin Tendulkar has played more matches at this level.

England have also dropped Jonny Bairstow after exactly 100 caps and left out Ben Foakes as well, with debutant Jamie Smith now installed as wicketkeeper.

Fast bowler Gus Atkinson, a Surrey team-mate of Smith, will also be making his Test debut this week, with rising star Shoaib Bashir chosen as England's first-choice spinner instead of the more experienced Jack Leach.

England last won the Ashes in 2015 and haven't triumphed in Australia since 2010/11.

"Look at where we've got to go in 18 months' time, to Australia," Stokes told a pre-match press conference at Lord's. "We want to win that urn back."

"We don't want to be standing



England's James Anderson is seen posing for a team group photo ahead of the Test series at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (Reuters)



England's Ben Stokes during the press conference. (AFP)

still. I want to keep making this team push themselves as hard as they possibly can."

Stokes has had a good long while to ponder England's future since a 4-1 series loss in India

earlier this year. "I think it's been five months since we played a Test match - that's a lot of time to think about how you can take the team forward," said Stokes.

"I've been captain now for two years, so for me it's about progressing this team. You sometimes have to put personal relationships and things to the side."

'Whole package'

The 33-year-old all-rounder added: "I don't want to say I'm stubborn, but one thing I'm very clear on is that I know that these decisions are best for the team, from my point of view, and that comes with responsibility of being a captain."

Stokes paid tribute to Anderson by saying he was an "incredible ambassador for fast bowling" and the "whole package".

Anderson, set to mentor England's quick for the rest of the season following his Lord's farewell, proved he was still a force to be reckoned with by taking seven wickets for Lancashire against Nottinghamshire last week.

"He's an amazing bowler, there's no doubt that he could still go out there and play Test cricket because he is good enough," said Stokes, who stressed he was good friends with Anderson.

"When we spoke with Jimmy, we laid it out with him and gave him the reasons and he totally understood it."

"This week will all be about Jimmy and rightly so, but I can tell you that his main focus is about going out there, taking wickets and trying to win this game for England as much as he can," Stokes said.

West Indies captain Brathwaite urges debutant Louis to 'think big' against England



West Indies' Kraigg Brathwaite during a practice session at Lord's Cricket Ground, London, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

London: West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite has encouraged debutant Mikyle Louis to put no limits on his ambitions ahead of facing England at Lord's. Louis, a 23-year-old batsman, will become the first cricketer from his home island of St Kitts to represent the West Indies in their 96 years in Test cricket when the series opener at Lord's starts today.

He joins a largely novice top order where Kirk McKenzie, Alick Athanaze and Kavem Hodge have just nine caps between them.

But Brathwaite, very much the senior player in the side ahead of his 90th Test, urged his teammates to avoid being over-awed at the 'Home of Cricket'.

"Mikyle is a nice guy, a very joyful spirit. I know he'll do extremely well, playing international cricket for many years," Brathwaite, 31, told a pre-match press conference at Lord's yesterday as he announced his side.

"My advice to all the younger boys in the group, like Mikyle making his debut, is don't just expect to play for West Indies, expect to be the first to score 30 hundreds."

That mark has in fact been achieved by two West Indies greats in Brian Lara and Shivnarine Chanderpaul but Brathwaite added: "You've got to think big, you know. Don't think too small. I think they're young and exciting."

"The more games they play the better. They have a lot of talent and we are fully 100 per cent behind them."

Brathwaite's predecessor as skip-

per Jason Holder will bat at six on his comeback to the side after almost a year out of Test cricket, while left-arm spinner Gudakesh Motie provides a contrast to a pace attack featuring the exciting Shamar Joseph.

Guyana quick Joseph made his name with a stunning performance against Australia in January, taking 7-68 with a broken foot to steal an upset win in Brisbane.

"It was a big positive for us, to get a win, because it shows we could get the job done," said Brathwaite.

"The key for us as a group is to do it consistently."

"We could take a lot of stuff from that game both as batsmen, because we have some guys doing well, some important partnerships."

"Then the bowlers were outstanding. Shamar was the star, but pretty much all the bowlers, produced a very, very good effort and we caught well as well."

He added: "We've got to look forward to this (match), then the other (two) Test matches this series. We've just got to believe in ourselves."

SQUADS

West Indies: Kraigg Brathwaite (capt), Mikyle Louis, Kirk McKenzie, Alick Athanaze, Kavem Hodge, Jason Holder, Joshua Da Silva (wkt), Gudakesh Motie, Alzarri Joseph, Shamar Joseph, Jayden Seales

England: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (C), Jamie Smith, Chris Woakes, Gus Atkinson, Shoaib Bashir, James Anderson.

MOTORSPORT

Toyota Gazoo Racing deliver commanding performance at Rally Poland

Toyota Gazoo Racing (TGR) World Rally Team (WRT) secured a remarkable one-two victory at the 2024 FIA World Rally Championship's (WRC) Rally Poland.

Reigning world champions Kalle Rovanperä and co-driver Jonne Halttunen took victory in the No 69 GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid Electric Vehicle despite minimal pre-event preparations, while Elfyn Evans and Scott Martin secured a well-deserved second place win in their No 33 GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid Electric Vehicle.

Akio Toyoda, TGR-WRT Chairman, said: "This was the first event in Poland since 2017 when Toyota came back to WRC. I sincerely appreciate Kalle and Jonne for accepting the team's sudden request and driving with the strong intention of supporting the team. They surprised us by achieving such a great result, doing the maximum preparation possible in a very short amount of time."

Toyoda added: "Lastly, I am really thankful to Elfyn and Scott

for securing the valuable second place! Thanks to them, TGR was able to achieve a one-two finish. I believe that achieving a one-two finish in this rally, which marks the halfway point of the season, is very meaningful towards the manufacturers' title. They have been strong in our home rallies, so I am expecting their strong performance in the second half of the season, which includes our home rallies in Finland and Japan! The team will continue to fight together in the second half of the season."

Rovanperä and Halttunen's latest victory also marks their debut at Rally Poland. Standing in for team-mates Sébastien Ogier and Vincent Landais following their withdrawal due to an unfortunate road collision, the No 69 crew undertook an intense pre-event race schedule to prepare for the rally's fast gravel stages.

Rovanperä was fourth overall after a challenging first full loop of stages on Day One, but he soon started to show the speed he's famed for on flat-out gravel roads.



Quickest in six out of seven stages across the longest day of the rally, Rovanperä took an advantage of 9.4s into Day Three. Third-fastest in the rally-ending Power Stage, Rovanperä took victory by 28.3s: the 13th and perhaps most impressive WRC victory yet for the No 69 GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid Electric Ve-

hicle driver.

Evans and Martin were strong contenders for the win throughout the rally, delivering a solid performance. They were only 0.4 seconds behind their teammates midway through Day Two, before encountering technical issues in the first stage of the afternoon.

Evans reclaimed second place on the morning of Day Three and pushed to maximise their score despite further difficulties. Nonetheless, he managed to reclaim lost ground and finished with a strong second place.

Over the years, Toyota has been participating in many different

forms of motorsports, including Formula One, the World Endurance Championship (WEC), and the Nürburgring 24 Hours endurance race.

Toyota's participation in these events was overseen by separate entities within the company until April 2015, when Toyota established TGR, to consolidate all of its motorsports activities under one in-house brand. Representing Toyota's belief that 'the roads build the people, and the people build the cars', TGR highlights the role of motorsports as a fundamental pillar of Toyota's commitment to making 'ever-better' cars. Harnessing years of experience gained under the extreme conditions of various motorsports events, TGR aims to forge new technologies and solutions that bring the freedom, adventure, and joy of driving to everyone.

The eighth round of the 2024 FIA WRC is Rally Latvia (July 18-21), a brand-new event for the WRC that features more high-speed gravel roads.

TENNIS

Medvedev stuns Sinner to reach Wimbledon semis

The former US Open champion sets up last-four date with defending champion Carlos Alcaraz

AFP
London

Daniil Medvedev stunned stricken world number one Jannik Sinner in five sets to reach a second successive Wimbledon semi-final yesterday as Donna Vekic ended the magical run of New Zealand qualifier Lulu Sun.

The fifth-ranked Medvedev triumphed 6-7 (7/9), 6-4, 7-6 (7/4), 2-6, 6-3 to avenge his Australian Open final loss to Sinner in January.

His four-hour victory also ended a five-match losing streak against the Italian as Medvedev reached his ninth Grand Slam semi-final.

The 28-year-old former US Open winner will face defending champion Carlos Alcaraz who beat Tommy Paul of the United States for a place in Sunday's final.

The Spanish world number three, seeking a fourth Grand Slam title, beat his 12th-seeded opponent 5-7, 6-4, 6-2, 6-2 under the No. 1 Court roof.

Sinner, a semi-finalist in 2023, yesterday required medical treatment early in the third set as he appeared dazed and unsteady on his feet.

He had his blood pressure taken before undergoing a medical timeout.

"I knew if I wanted to beat Jannik it needs to be a tough match. He's not a guy you can beat easy anymore," said Medvedev.

"I felt at one moment he was not feeling that good but he started feeling better so I'm happy I managed to still stay at a high level.

"It's always tricky because you want to play more points to make him suffer a little bit more but in a good way."

In a tight first set in which neither man gave up a break point, Medvedev edged ahead in the tie-break on the back of a lung-busting 33-shot rally.

However, he squandered a set point and his game suddenly fell apart, serving up a double fault as Sinner pocketed the opener.

The mercurial Russian levelled the quarter-final before Sinner summoned the tournament physio after falling a break down in the third set.

After a 10-minute delay, the



Russia's Daniil Medvedev in action during his quarter-final match against Italy's Jannik Sinner on the Centre Court at All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, London, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

22-year-old resumed play and thrilled the Centre Court crowd when he bravely clawed his way back to 5-5.

He then wasted two set points which allowed Medvedev to sweep through the tie-break.

However, the Italian was undaunted and levelled the quarter-final before Medvedev finished the fresher of the two players, breaking in the fourth game of the final set on his way to victory.

Defending champion Alcaraz yesterday shrugged off the loss of the first set to beat Paul and set up a repeat Wimbledon semi-final with Medvedev.

The Spanish world number three, seeking a fourth Grand Slam title, beat his 12th-seeded opponent 5-7, 6-4, 6-2, 6-2 under the No 1 Court roof.

Alcaraz was slow out of the blocks, broken twice by the in-

form American in a 72-minute first set.

Paul raced into a two-game lead in the second set as Alcaraz again faltered on serve but the Spaniard got back on level terms and broke again to level the match.

Three breaks in the third set put the world number three in charge and he stepped up another gear in the fourth set, winning 92 percent of first-serve points and making just four unforced errors.

'Tough start to quarter-final'

Alcaraz, seeking to become just the sixth man to capture the French Open and Wimbledon titles back to back, said it had been a tough start to his quarter-final against the recent champion at Queen's.

"If I'm struggling a little bit to find the solutions, if the opponent is playing great tennis and I don't get him in trouble, I believe at the



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz in action during his quarter-final against Tommy Paul of the US. (Reuters)

end that I'll be able to come back and be able to find solutions," he said.

Looking forward to his match

against Russian fifth-seed Medvedev, whom he beat last year on his way to winning his first Wimbledon title, he said: "Hope-

fully I'm going to get the same result.

"He just won against Jannik Sinner, the best player right now, so I know that he's in really good shape so I have to play my best, I have to believe in myself and try to keep going if I want to beat him."

Vekic reaches last-four

Sun went down 5-7, 6-4, 6-1 as Vekic reached the last four of a Grand Slam for the first time at the 43rd attempt and after 12 years on tour.

"I felt like I was dying out there in the first two sets but I just kept going, hoping to have a chance and it came in the end," said 28-year-old Vekic.

Sun, ranked 123rd in the world, was playing her eighth match of the tournament, including qualifying, in two weeks and the strain eventually told.

"She played well. Maybe if I could have moved faster, maybe if I didn't have the cramps, who knows what would have happened," said Sun, who will rise into the top 60 thanks to her All England Club run.

Vekic will face Italian seventh seed Jasmine Paolini who beat 17th-ranked Emma Navarro.

Paolini blazed past American Navarro 6-2 6-1, becoming the first Italian woman to make the Wimbledon semi-finals.

The 28-year-old's victory ensured she eclipsed compatriots Camila Giorgi (2018), Francesca Schiavone (2009), Silvia Farina Elia (2003) and Laura Golarsa (1989), who had all reached the quarter-finals at the grasscourt Grand Slam in the Open era.

"It's unbelievable, it's amazing to get the win in this special court. I'm so happy to be in the semi-final. I don't know what to say in this moment," a grinning Paolini said.

"It's a dream to be here in this position... I was watching finals when I was a kid, on this court.

"I have to say today I played a really good match, she's a really tough opponent, I lost (to) her three times in the last year, so it was tough."

"In the semi-finals you have to play tough opponents, and she's playing amazing," Paolini said.

"I hope to enjoy the next match, to give 100% and I'm going to fight on every ball. I'm just so grateful to be here another time, in front of you guys."

French marathon runner Frere suspended for two years

Paris: French marathon runner Mehdi Frere, selected for the Paris Olympics, has been banned for two years for breaching anti-doping rules, his lawyer told AFP yesterday.

"He was suspended for a period of two years by the disciplinary tribunal of World Athletics," lawyer Laurent Fellous said.

Fellous said he was attempting to appeal the ban at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) and believes a decision before the Olympics is possible.

"We'll be able to refer the matter to the Court of Arbitration for Sport as part of an accelerated procedure, with the aim of ob-

taining an arbitration award by July 26, the opening day of the Olympics," said his lawyer.

"I think it's do-able," he added.

Frere, 27, is accused of missing three anti-doping tests in the space of a year, a so-called "whereabouts" offence.

He was suspended for the Olympics "subject to conditions" and had to sit out the European Championships in June while his whereabouts case was being considered.

Frere recorded a personal best of 2hr 05min 43sec in 2023 and finished 20th in the World Cross-Country Championships this year.

CYCLING

Philipsen bosses Tour sprint on 'mental rest day'

AFP
Saint-Amand-Montrond, France

Belgian Jasper Philipsen won a mass sprint ahead of Eritrean Biniam Girmay on a flat 10th stage he described as a "mental rest day" in the Tour de France yesterday.

Tellingly there was no escape from the peloton after riders had their first actual rest day on Monday, and while the pace was slow the final sprint on the 187.3km ride south from Orleans was explosive.

Last year's green jersey winner Philipsen won by a clear margin to close the gap on current occupant Girmay, who has 267 points to the Alpein rider's 193.

Philipsen, 26, was guided to victory by team-mate and world road race champion Mathieu van der Poel.

"When you have a world champion to lead you out in your Tour de France sprint it is magnificent," said Philipsen after hitting a speed of 75kph (46.6mph).

"He managed to do exactly what we wanted. It's something special, all credit to him," he said of Van der Poel, who will be one of the favourites for the Olympic road race in Paris next month.

After Monday's day without racing, the 172 remaining riders embarked from the city of Orleans past the statue of Jeanne d'Arc and the historic city's giant cathedral.

"It was maybe a mental rest day," Philipsen said apologeti-



Alpein-Deceuninck's Jasper Philipsen in action with riders before crossing the finish line to win stage 10 of the 111th Tour de France from Orleans to Saint-Amand-Montrond - Orleans, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

cally. "There was a bit of joking and riders chatting with friends," he added.

Low balmy skies and a temperature of 28 degrees Celsius (82 degrees Fahrenheit) persuaded the bunch to pace themselves across the vast wheat plains to the south of Orleans.

It was slow enough for Briton Tom Pidcock to unwrap a sandwich from silver foil, while beside him Pavel Sivakov spotted the open door of a camping car and gracefully launched his water bottle through it.

Before today's potentially explosive stage, man-to-beat Tadej Pogacar protected his 33-second overall lead over Remco Evenepoel with defending champion Jonas Vingegaard at 1min 15sec in

third. "Tomorrow will be full gas (very fast)," predicted yesterday's winner.

The so-called Fab Four of Pogacar, Evenepoel, Vingegaard and Primož Roglic are locked in a tense and tetchy struggle at this halfway stage, with no obvious favourite yet.

In his Giro d'Italia-Tour double bid Pogacar may have expected to be further ahead given how much effort he has invested.

"I'm looking forward to the Pyrenees and I know them well," said Pogacar, adding that he lived near Nice where the race ends and had studied those hills well.

Evenepoel looks fresh and calm and is giving off a far happier vibe than the three others.

Two-time winner Vingegaard

is riding into form and winning a war of nerves as he tails Pogacar relentlessly, but has suffered an early blow with the 1min 15sec deficit.

Pogacar's compatriot Roglic is waging a dark horse run in fourth at 1min 36sec but is priming his form for week three.

Any hopes of a record-extending 36th stage win for Mark Cavendish dissolved when he lost his sprint train on a tight corner in the final kilometre.

At the same finish line on stage 13 of the 2013 Tour, 39-year-old Cavendish managed to cross an echelon in strong winds, but yesterday he was outside the chase at the finale.

Today's 211km ride continues south of France.

FOCUS

Golfer Luiten's Paris Games spot reallocated

Dutch golfer Joost Luiten may have won a court case to get into the Paris Olympics but his unused quota spot has been filled and the International Olympic Committee will not make an exception, the International Golf Federation (IGF) said yesterday.

Luiten took the Netherlands' National Olympic Committee to court last week after they denied him from entering the men's golf event despite being eligible, believing his world ranking, which was 147th at the time, gave him little chance in a 60-player field.

But when the IGF, which uses the Official World Golf Ranking as a method of determining eligibility, received notification of Luiten's court ruling in the Netherlands and his entry from the Nether-

lands' National Olympic Committee his unused quota spot had already been reallocated.

"Nevertheless, in an effort to support Luiten, the IGF sought an exception from the IOC to increase the field size of the men's Olympic golf competition from 60 to 61 competitors to include Luiten, however the request was denied by the IOC today," the IGF said in a statement. "The IGF has advised Luiten of the IOC's decision, and he has not informed the IGF whether he intends to pursue this matter further."

The top 15 world-ranked players are eligible for the Olympics, with a limit of four players from a given country. Beyond the top 15, players are eligible based on the world rankings, with a maximum of two players from each country.

EURO 2024

'England now dreaming of history, not fearing failure'

'We've got a lot of players who have experienced big games at international and club level'



England manager Gareth Southgate, players Phil Foden, Cole Palmer and Eberechi Eze during a training session in Blankenhain, Germany, yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Dortmund, Germany

England manager Gareth Southgate believes his side have been freed up by edging closer to a first ever major final on foreign soil at Euro 2024 after struggling to deal with the weight of expectation earlier in the tournament.

The Three Lions arrived in Germany as one of the favourites thanks to a richly-talented squad and an upturn in their fortunes under Southgate. England are into a third semi-final in four tournaments, where they will face the Netherlands in Dortmund today.

But they have never reached a final outside of England or won the European Championship before.

Southgate's men have been heavily criticised for their performances at Euro 2024, where they have won only one of their five games in 90 minutes.

But he said his players showed signs of what they are capable of in a quarter-final win over Switzerland on penalties after needing a late Bukayo Saka equaliser to send the game to extra time.

"One of our strengths over the last eight years has been less fear, less inhibition but at the beginning the expectation weighed heavily," said Southgate at his pre-match press conference yesterday.

"We couldn't quite get ourselves in the right place and in the end what was impressive was the players ground results out."

"Now we are into that moment

in the tournament where it is what is possible? What is achievable? Rather than, what could go wrong?"

"That is different for a player. This is now the chance to make history, first time to make a final not held in England. We are trying to break new ground and that is difficult, but the players have responded brilliantly."

England's only previous European Championship final was three years ago when they missed out agonisingly on penalties to Italy at Wembley.

Harry Kane has been captain for almost the entirety of the Southgate era in charge and believes his side can lean on that experience against a Dutch side in their first Euros semi-final since 2004.

"We've got a lot of players who have experienced big games at international and club level," said Bayern Munich striker Kane.

"You use that experience over the course of your career to prepare the best way possible to control nerves and excitement tomorrow night will be not different."

"We had a goal, a target of what we think it is achievable and step-by-step we've been getting closer to that target."

"We've got ourselves in a great spot and we've got a big game to reach back-to-back finals in the European Championships which would be an amazing achievement."

Southgate has all of his 26-man squad available with Luke Shaw pushing for his first start of the tournament. The Manchester

United left-back made his first appearance for club or country since February as a substitute against the Swiss.

Marc Guehi looks set to return from suspension in place of Ezri Konsa, but Southgate looks set to stick with the 3-4-2-1 formation he used in the quarter-final.

Netherlands hit by travel chaos ahead of semi

The Netherlands' planned pre-match press conference ahead of today's Euro 2024 semi-final against England was cancelled yesterday after the Dutch had their travel plans disrupted.

Ronald Koeman's men were due to travel to Dortmund from their base in Wolfsburg by train but were unable to do so due to a blockage on the line. Instead, the Dutch were forced to fly but were unable to fulfil their media duties due to their late arrival.

"Due to disruption of the Netherlands' planned team travel to Dortmund, their arrival has been significantly delayed and therefore no press conference will take place," said a statement from the Dutch football association.

England boss Gareth Southgate said he did not think the disruption would have any impact on the outcome of the semi-final.

"We don't play until 9pm (1900GMT) tomorrow. I'm sure they will still get dinner when they arrive," said Southgate at his own pre-match press conference.

"They've got plenty of time. I don't see it having any impact on the game."

From Koeman's free-kick to Euro 96: Five Netherlands v England clashes

The Netherlands and England meet in the last four of Euro 2024 today with both teams eyeing a place in this weekend's final in Berlin. There was a time when the two nations met regularly on the international stage, but the match in Dortmund will be just the second competitive game between the sides this century. AFP Sport looks back at their most notable past encounters:

Van Basten hat-trick: The 1988 European Championship remains the only major international tournament that the Netherlands have won, and will always be remembered for Marco van Basten's stunning goal in the final against the Soviet Union. It also remains a low point for England, the only time in which they have gone to a major tournament and lost every game. Both sides lost their opening match before they clashed in Duesseldorf in the group phase, and the Dutch came out on top thanks to a Van Basten hat-trick. England had chances, with Gary Lineker and Glenn Hoddle both hitting the post. Van Basten's opener for the Netherlands was cancelled out by a Bryan Robson equaliser just after half-time, but two goals in five second-half minutes allowed Van Basten to complete his hat-trick and sealed a 3-1 Dutch win.

Draw at Italia 90: The nations were again drawn in the same group at the 1990 World Cup in Italy, and many of the players involved in 1988 again featured in this meeting in Cagliari, among them current Dutch boss Ronald Koeman. The sides had each drawn their opening match, with England being held by Ireland and the Netherlands by Egypt. This time England kept Van Basten quiet in a 0-0 draw, and it was England who would top the group on the way to reaching the semi-finals. The Dutch, meanwhile, were beaten by West Germany in the last 16.

England miss out on USA 94: England have failed to qualify for just one World Cup since the 1970s, and it was the Netherlands who denied them a place at USA 94. Graham Taylor's England had a poor campaign,

taking just one point from two games against Norway, who topped the group. They squandered a two-goal lead at home to the Dutch at Wembley, but when they went to Rotterdam for the return fixture - their penultimate game in the group - England still had qualification in their own hands as they were above the Dutch. With Paul Gascoigne suspended, England fell behind to a free-kick just after the hour mark by Koeman - who the visitors felt should have been sent off earlier on - before Dennis Bergkamp sealed a 2-0 Dutch win. England beat San Marino in their final game but a Dutch win in Poland ensured they qualified instead. It was a disastrous campaign for Taylor, captured in a warts-and-all TV documentary. Taylor later resigned, while the Dutch reached the World Cup quarter-finals.

Shearer, Sheringham double act: The nations met again in the group stage at Euro 96. Both teams had taken four points from their first two matches before clashing at Wembley, where Alan Shearer opened the scoring with a penalty and added another goal early in the second half, in between a brace by Teddy Sheringham. Patrick Kluyvert's late goal for the Dutch made the final score 4-1 as England - who had current boss Gareth Southgate in defence - won the group and the Netherlands squeezed through in second place ahead of Scotland. The Dutch lost on penalties to France in the last eight, while England were beaten in a shoot-out in the semi-finals by Germany, with Southgate missing the crucial kick.

Dutch win Nations League semi: The only competitive meeting of the teams since Euro 96 came in the semi-finals of the inaugural UEFA Nations League in 2019. Southgate was already England's manager and Koeman was in his first spell as Dutch coach as the teams clashed in Guimarães, Portugal. Marcus Rashford put England ahead from a penalty but Matthijs de Ligt levelled, taking the game to extra time. Kyle Walker's own goal gave the Dutch the lead and Quincy Promes sealed a 3-1 victory for the Netherlands, who would lose the final to hosts Portugal.



Netherlands' Wout Weghorst with his teammates during a training session in Wolfsburg yesterday. (Reuters)

FOCUS

Ex-Liverpool striker Bellamy appointed Wales head coach

AFP
London

Craig Bellamy has been appointed as the new head coach of the Wales national football team on a contract until 2028, the Football Association of Wales (FAW) announced yesterday.

Bellamy has replaced Rob Page, who was sacked following Wales' failure to qualify for Euro 2024.

The 44-year-old former Liverpool, Newcastle and Wales striker leaves Burnley, where he was assistant to former manager Vincent Kompany last season as they were relegated from the Premier League. "I will give my full commitment to develop this team and I am passionate to bring continued success into Welsh football," Bellamy told the FAW website. "I can't wait to get started with our Nations League games in September."

The FAW's chief football officer, Dr David Adams, said: "I am absolutely delighted to announce Craig as our new head coach. "We undertook a thorough recruitment process for the new men's nation-



al team head coach and Craig was identified as the standout candidate. "We are all looking forward to the Nations League games and working with Craig to deliver success for Welsh football."

Burnley chairman Alan Pace added: "I want to thank Craig for all his hard work during his time at Burnley and wish him the best for his new position as Wales manager. Craig has been a very important part of our wonderful journey the last two years. I've admired his leadership, knowledge and passion."

Page guided Wales to their first World Cup in 64 years in 2022 and to the second round of Euro 2020 but failed to reach this year's Euros, losing in a penalty shoot-

out to Poland in a play-off. But he subsequently oversaw one of the most embarrassing results in Wales' history, a 0-0 draw with Gibraltar in a friendly and then suffered a 4-0 hammering at the hands of Slovakia. Wales' next game is the opening match of their Nations League campaign against Turkey on September 6, with a trip to Montenegro three days later.

Bordeaux relegated to third tier amid takeover talks

Cash-strapped Bordeaux, who are in talks with Liverpool owners Fenway Sports Group, were provisionally relegated to the third division yesterday because of lack of financial guarantees, the French football league (LFP) announced.

"This decision was expected, there is no surprise," a source close to the club said after a meeting with French football's financial watchdog, the DNCG.

Club owner Gerard Lopez did not attend the meeting but representatives of US group Fenway, owners of the Boston Red Sox baseball team and Premier League football club Liverpool, were present and have appealed the decision.

SPOTLIGHT

New football hierarchy raises the bar at Man United: Ten Hag

Reuters
Manchester, England

Manchester United have raised the bar with changes to the football hierarchy and are in a strong position to move forward, manager Erik ten Hag said less than a week after signing a contract extension.

Ten Hag led United to a thrilling FA Cup final victory over holders Manchester City to help silence speculation around his job and somewhat salvage a disappointing season that saw them finish a worst-ever eighth in the Premier League.

The 54-year-old signed a new contract on Thursday to extend his stay at the club until 2026, giving the Dutchman another chance to restore the record 20-times English champions to former glories. He said he is excited for the upcoming season.

"Very, otherwise I wouldn't extend my contract," Ten Hag said in an interview yesterday for the team's website.

"I'm here now for two years. As I said, I came here to win, to



win titles, trophies. We won two trophies (FA Cup and 2022-23 League Cup), after a dry (spell) of six years, so we are in a good direction.

"Now, with the new ownership coming in, they can help us. They are very supportive. We've made a process, which we've constructed across the summer and we are in a very good position, a very strong position to go and attack."

Since British billionaire and INEOS chairman Jim Ratcliffe took charge of football operations, Dan Ashworth began work as sporting director. The new football hier-

archy also includes Jason Wilcox, who has been the club's technical director since April.

"We are so pleased that around the football, around the first team, we have a strong structure that will help us," Ten Hag said.

"They are really supportive and that will help us in many ways, like in scouting and recruitment, like in the departments of medical and performance."

"They will be so supportive and that will raise the bar."

Injuries delivered a huge blow to United's 2023-24 season, particularly on the back line with veteran defenders Harry Maguire and Luke Shaw both sidelined for much of the campaign.

A team spokesperson confirmed yesterday that United are exploring various options, amid reports they are keen on a major overhaul of the defence.

Ten Hag hopes the team can carry momentum from their FA Cup win into the upcoming campaign.

"(The FA Cup final) was a brilliant day, it was one of the best days, for many persons," he said as the team gathered at Carrington Training Centre yesterday.