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TENNIS

Musetti sets up Wimbledon semi-final duel with Djokovic

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EURO 2024

Watkins stuns Netherlands as England reach final

'WE ARE IN THE FINAL AND THAT IS ALL THAT MATTERS. WE ARE READY FOR SPAIN'

AFP

Dortmund, Germany

Ollie Watkins struck a stunning injury-time winner as England beat the Netherlands 2-1 yesterday to set up a Euro 2024 final showdown with Spain in Berlin.

It was an incredible finish to an evening that began badly for England, as Xavi Simons gave the Netherlands an early lead in the semi-final in Dortmund.

However, England were soon level through a Harry Kane penalty following a contentious VAR call by German referee Felix Zwayer, and the match looked set to drift towards extra time until Watkins struck.

"We are in the final and that is all that matters. We are ready for Spain," said Watkins.

On for Harry Kane, Watkins received a pass from fellow substitute Cole Palmer with his back to goal in the first minute of stoppage time, turned and fired low into the far corner to leave the Netherlands completely stunned.

It has rarely been a convincing campaign from Gareth Southgate's England side, but they are through to their second consecutive European Championship final as they dream of finally winning a first major trophy since 1966.

To do that they will surely have to perform better than at any point so far in Germany as they face an outstanding Spain team.

Spain will also have had an extra 24 hours to prepare for the final, having defeated France 2-1 on Tuesday.

The Netherlands had been hoping to repeat their triumph at the last Euros held in Germany, in



England's Ollie Watkins celebrates scoring their second goal against the Netherlands in Euro 2024 semi-final in Dortmund yesterday. (Reuters)

1988, but their current side lacks anyone with the star quality of Marco van Basten or Ruud Gullit.

A victory for them would have seen this Euros conclude with the same final as the 2010 World Cup. Instead they now go home.

England had got to this stage despite not winning any of their last four matches in 90 minutes, and having been taken to extra time by Slovakia and Switzerland.

That might have given the Dutch an edge physically, after the Oranje shrugged off finishing third in their group to brush aside Romania and then see off Turkiye.

England welcomed back Marc Guehi in defence after suspension, while Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman opted to start Donyell Malen in the ground where he plays club football for Borussia Dortmund.

The Westfalenstadion is a special place for the Dutch, as the scene of their 2-0 win over Brazil that took them through to the 1974 World Cup final.

They went ahead here after just seven minutes thanks to a stunning goal by Simons, who robbed Declan Rice 35 metres from goal and advanced before sending a

rasping drive beyond Jordan Pickford. The Dutch players ran off to celebrate with their fans behind that goal, as England found themselves behind for the third game running. Just like against the Swiss in the quarter-finals, however, they reacted swiftly.

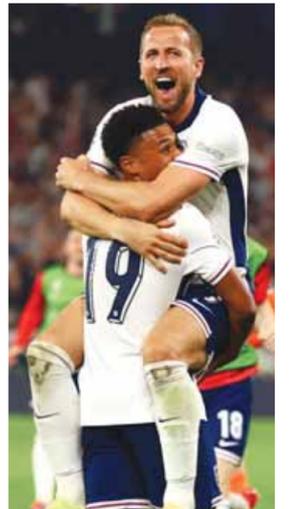
Kane forced a save from Bart Verbruggen and moments later sent a volley over the bar, and was caught by Denzel Dumfries on the follow-through.

It seemed totally innocuous but Zwayer was summoned across to review the images and gave a penalty. Kane, whose missed spot-

kick against France cost England dear in the 2022 World Cup, made no mistake, slotting low into the bottom-left corner.

It settled into an open and entertaining game, with Dumfries redeeming himself by clearing off the line from Phil Foden. Dumfries crashed a header off the bar from a Simons corner, but Foden responded by curling a superb shot from range off the top of the post.

England's midfielders were being given too much time on the ball, and Koeman used an injury to Memphis Depay to reinforce the centre, replacing the forward with



England's Harry Kane celebrates with Ollie Watkins after winning the match yesterday. (Reuters)

Joey Veerman. Another change followed at the interval, with Wout Weghorst - super-sub in previous rounds - replacing Malen.

Yet the game became more cagey as the minutes went on and the fear of making a mistake grew.

Pickford denied Virgil van Dijk on 65 minutes and the Netherlands began to take control as England's leading players started to tire. England did have the ball in the net on 79 minutes when Bukayo Saka turned in a Kyle Walker cutback, but the latter was just outside and the flag cut short the celebrations. Southgate then decided to remove Kane and Foden, with Watkins and Palmer entering the fray to devastating effect.

FOCUS

France plan for future with Deschamps after Euros exit

AFP

Düsseldorf, Germany

France boast an enviable record in major tournaments over the last decade under Didier Deschamps and have no plans to change coach despite a disappointing campaign at Euro 2024.

Tuesday's 2-1 defeat against Spain in Munich ended France's hopes of reaching a fourth final in the last five tournaments, European Championships and World Cups combined.

Reaching the semi-finals allowed Deschamps to meet the minimum target set for him in Germany, which is why French Football Federation president Philippe Diallo insisted the coach would see out his contract, which runs until 2026.

"I see no reason to call into question his contract," Diallo told sports daily L'Equipe yesterday.

"Past results speak for him and he has fulfilled his objectives. Didier will stay on."

The manner of France's Euros exit was deeply underwhelming, however. They simply never caught fire, with Randal Kolo Muani's early goal to give them the lead against Spain the only one scored in open play by any of their players in six matches in Germany.

"Despite reaching the last four, France go out of the Euros with a



France's head coach Didier Deschamps boards the bus to leave the stadium after the UEFA Euro 2024 semi-final against Spain at the Munich Football Arena in Munich. (AFP)

bitter taste," was how L'Equipe summed up their campaign.

Few teams boast a squad as strong as that of Deschamps, but while his side defended superbly for most of the Euros, their attackers failed to sparkle.

Kylian Mbappe, handicapped by fitness problems, was a shadow of his usual self, while Antoine Griezmann never came close to the form he showed at the 2022 World Cup and ended up being dropped.

"My ambition was to be champion of Europe and have a good Euros, and I have not done one

thing or the other," said Mbappe, whose only goal in Germany was a penalty against Poland.

France have got used to winning under Deschamps, but winning is all that has ever mattered to the coach, who is less fussed about playing with panache than about getting results.

"If you are bored you can watch something else. You are not obliged to watch us," Deschamps replied to one question by a Swedish journalist suggesting France were boring.

Those accusations have been levelled at Deschamps in the past,

but not always fairly until this year. His record does speak for itself, with Deschamps having taken over a team at a low ebb in 2012.

The captain of the France sides that won the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000, he led them to the 2014 World Cup, his first tournament in charge.

They then reached the Euro 2016 final and won the 2018 World Cup before losing the 2022 World Cup final on penalties to Argentina. France also won the UEFA Nations League in 2021 and their only truly below-par showing at a recent major tournament came at the last Euros, when they lost on penalties to Switzerland in the last 16.

It was following the last World Cup that Deschamps signed a contract extension until 2026, and that year's World Cup is now France's next big objective.

But it remains to be seen whether Deschamps, 55, is still the man to lead them forward after six major tournaments in charge.

It is worth citing the example of Joachim Loew, who became Germany coach in 2006. In Loew's first five tournaments, Germany won the 2014 World Cup, got to the Euro 2008 final, and lost three semi-finals. After that, Germany went out of the 2018 World Cup in the group stage, and a last-16 exit at Euro 2020 - his seventh major tournament - signalled the

Real Madrid to formally present Mbappe next week

Kylian Mbappe will be officially presented as a Real Madrid player at the Santiago-Bernabeu stadium next Tuesday, the Spanish giants announced. The confirmation came less than 24 hours after the former Paris Saint-Germain star and the France team were knocked out of Euro 2024 by Spain in the semi-finals. Mbappe, who will wear the number 9 shirt, will be presented at the Bernabeu at midday (1000 GMT) on Tuesday and will be welcomed by Real president Florentino Perez for the signing of his five-year contract, the club announced yesterday. France's captain had a disappointing Euro 2024 and was ham-

pered by breaking his nose in his country's opening match against Austria and missed a late chance to equalise in the 2-1 defeat to Spain on Tuesday. Mbappe is due to have his first competitive game for the Spanish and European champions when they open their La Liga defence against Real Mallorca on the weekend of August 17/18, with his first taste of the Bernabeu coming a week later when Madrid host promoted Real Valladolid. Mbappe joins Real as a free agent on a reported annual salary of 15 million euros (\$16.2 million), with bonuses attached to his arrival in the Spanish capital of over 100mn euros.

end. Deschamps refused to answer a question about his future after the Spain defeat. If he does not stay, Zinedine Zidane - often cited in the past as a possible successor - will have to keep waiting for his chance.

Meanwhile Euro 2024 marks the end of the road for veteran striker Olivier Giroud, France's all-time top scorer, but there is no suggestion that Griezmann, aged 33, plans to retire.

"We will come back. We have talent but you need a lot more

than that," Griezmann said on Tuesday, acknowledging France had not performed well enough in Germany.

They always have new stars emerging, and Paris Saint-Germain winger Bradley Barcola, just 21, has been a revelation.

Most importantly, regardless of Deschamps' own situation, France will hope to get Mbappe back on form and fully fit for their next games, against Italy and Belgium in the Nations League in September.

CRICKET

Seven-star Atkinson is the hero as England dominate

The 26-year-old paceman upstages retiring James Anderson against the West Indies at Lord's

AFP
London

Gus Atkinson stole the spotlight from England great James Anderson's farewell by taking a sensational seven wickets on his Test debut as the West Indies collapsed to 121 all out on the opening day at Lord's.

England then consolidated their advantage to be 189-3 at stumps, a lead of 58 runs, with Zak Crawley (76) and Ollie Pope (57) both making fluent fifties.

The build-up to the first of this three-match series had centred on the retiring Anderson's last international appearance following a record-breaking Test career that has now yielded 701 wickets – the most by any fast bowler at this level.

But it was 26-year-old quick Atkinson who took centre stage instead with a remarkable haul of 7-45 in 12 overs – including a triple wicket-merit.

Atkinson's final figures, after he accounted for Alzarri Joseph and Shamar Joseph, were the second best by an England bowler on a Test debut behind Dominic Cork's 7-43 against the West Indies at Lord's in 1995.

Anderson, by contrast, did not add to his tally of Test wickets until he had last man Jayden Seales lbw to end the West Indies innings.

West Indies debutant Mikyle Louis, the first Test cricketer from St Kitts, top-scored with 27 in an innings where only three batsmen made it into the 20s.

Having played just one warm-up match and with inexperienced top-order batsmen Kirk McKenzie, Alick Athanaze and Kavem Hodge holding only nine caps between them before this Test, the West Indies unsurprisingly struggled after losing the toss in overcast conditions.

They were 88-3 when Atkinson, who had already taken two wickets before lunch, came on to bowl the 35th over.

With his second ball of the over he had Athanaze caught by Joe Root in the slips for 23. Atkinson, maintaining a challenging line and length, then produced a superb delivery next ball that Holder, back after nearly a year out of Test cricket, edged to Harry Brook in the cordon.

Joshua Da Silva survived the hat-trick but the following ball he too fell for a duck, an inside edge caught by opposing wicket-keeper Jamie Smith, who along with Surrey team-mate Atkinson was also making his Test debut.

Atkinson had now taken three wickets for no runs in four balls, thereby securing his place on the Lord's honours board for a five-wicket haul in a Test.

Earlier, Anderson was thrust straight into the action when England captain Ben Stokes opted to field after winning the toss – a decision greeted by huge cheers from the crowd at the 'Home of Cricket'.

But despite a probing new-ball spell of five overs for 11 runs, the 41-year-old Anderson was unable to dislodge either West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite or fellow opener Louis.

West Indies were looking to Brathwaite, appearing in his 90th Test, to make a significant score.

But he was out for two, chopping onto his stumps, as Atkinson struck with only his second ball Wednesday.

Louis's promising 58-ball innings ended when the 23-year-old fell to a brilliant low catch by the diving Harry Brook at third slip off Stokes.

West Indies' plight was summed up when Hodge fell for 24 after a fierce square cut off Chris Woakes was well caught by Pope at point, the batsman sinking to his knees in disbelief. Crawley looked on



England's Gus Atkinson celebrates with James Anderson (left) and other teammates after taking the wicket of West Indies' Jason Holder on day one of the first Test at Lord's Cricket Ground, London, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

course for a hundred before Seales bowled him with a rapid leg-stump yorker as an 89-ball innings, including 14 fours, came to a spectacular end.

SCOREBOARD

West Indies 1st Innings

K. Brathwaite b Atkinson
M. Louis c Brook b Stokes
K. McKenzie c Crawley b Atkinson
A. Athanaze c Root b Atkinson
K. Hodge c Pope b Woakes
J. Holder c Brook b Atkinson
J. Da Silva c Smith b Atkinson

A. Joseph c Woakes b Atkinson 17
G. Motie not out 14
S. Joseph c Pope b Atkinson 0
J. Seales lbw b Anderson 2
Extras (lb7) 7
Total (all out, 41.4 overs, 193 mins) 121
Fall of wickets: 1-33 (Brathwaite), 2-36 (McKenzie), 3-44 (Louis), 4-88 (Athanaze), 5-88 (Holder), 6-88 (Da Silva), 7-88 (Hodge), 8-106 (A Joseph), 9-106 (S Joseph), 10-121 (Seales)
Bowling: Anderson 10.4-3-26-1; Woakes 11-2-29-1; Atkinson 12.5-45-7; Stokes 8-2-14-1;
England 1st Innings

Z. Crawley b Seales 76
B. Duckett c Da Silva b Seales 3
O. Pope lbw b Holder 57
J. Root not out 15
H. Brook not out 25
Extras (lb9, nb4) 13
Total (3 wkts, 40 overs, 190 mins) 189
To bat: B Stokes, J Smith, C Woakes, G Atkinson, S Bashir, J Anderson
Fall of wickets: 1-29 (Duckett), 2-123 (Pope), 3-153 (Crawley)
Bowling: A Joseph 10-1-66-0 (3nb); Seales 9-1-31-2; S Joseph 9-1-42-0; Holder 10-0-38-1 (1nb); Motie 2-0-3-0

SPOTLIGHT

India captain Gill hails 'crucial' T20 victory in Harare



India players celebrate a Zimbabwe wicket during the third T20I at Harare Sports Club yesterday. (@BCCI)

AFP
Harare

India captain Shubman Gill led his team to what he described as a "crucial" 23-run win in the third T20 international against Zimbabwe at the Harare Sports Club yesterday.

India took a 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

Gill hit 66 off 49 balls in an Indian total of 182 for four after he won the toss and decided to bat. Zimbabwe replied with 159 for six.

"It was a crucial win for us," Gill said at the post-match presentation. He added he was delighted with the way India started with both bat and ball.

The win continued an Indian comeback after they lost a low-scoring first match on Saturday. "Everyone is contributing and that is a good sign," said Gill.

India raced to 49 without loss in four overs at the start of a 67-run opening stand between Gill and Yashasvi Jaiswal, then reduced Zimbabwe to 39 for five in the first seven overs of the home team's innings.

Opening bowlers Khaleel Ahmed and Avesh Khan took three wickets in the power play before off-spin-



India's captain Shubman Gill bats against Zimbabwe at Harare Sports Club yesterday. (@BCCI)

ner Washington Sundar claimed two wickets in his first over. Sundar finished with three for 15 in four overs and was named man of the match.

India were bolstered by the inclusion of their three World Cup squad members, Jaiswal, Sanju Samson and Shivam Dube, who missed the first two matches because of India's World Cup victory celebrations in Mumbai.

Jaiswal made 36. Samson faced

only seven balls towards the end of the innings and made 12 not out. Dube did not bat but conceded 27 runs in two overs of medium-pace bowling.

Abhishek Sharma, who hit a century as an opening batsman in India's 100-run win in the second match on Sunday, batted at number three and was out for 10. Zimbabwe captain Sikander Raza bemoaned a poor fielding performance.

"We are proud of our fielding but the wheels came off today. We gave away 20 extra runs," he said.

Dion Myers made a spirited 65 not out off 49 balls as he and Clive Madonde (37) added 77 for the sixth wicket to lift the Zimbabwe innings after their poor start.

BRIEF SCORES

India 182-4 in 20 overs (Y. Jaiswal 36, S. Gill 66, T. Gaikwad 49; B. Muzarabani 2-25, S. Raza 2-25).
Zimbabwe 159-6 in 20 overs (D. Myers 65 not out, C. Madonde 37; A. Khan 2-39, W. Sundar 3-15).
Result: India won by 23 runs.
Series: India lead the five-match series 2-1.
Toss: India.
Remaining matches: July 13, Harare; July 14, Harare

Vingegaard wins Tour de France stage 11, Pogacar extends his overall lead

Le Lioran, France: Jonas Vingegaard edged overall leader Tadej Pogacar as a battle between the four Tour de France favourites played out over a series of hills in the central Cantal region yesterday. Defending champion Vingegaard reeled in Slovenian Pogacar's ferocious attacks before a razor's edge final dash to the line. Belgian Remco Evenepoel finished third at 25sec while Pogacar's compatriot Primoz Roglic was fourth at 55sec despite a late accident. Race officials later accorded Roglic the same time as Evenepoel.

In the overall yellow jersey standings, Pogacar leads Evenepoel by 1min 06sec. Vingegaard is in third place at 1min 14sec, and Roglic is fourth at 2min 15sec.

Pogacar, 25, would normally be a faster sprinter than Vingegaard, but sportingly reached out a hand to his rival at the end of their struggle after a 211km ride. Vingegaard, 27, cried after coming off from his bike, as the spindly-framed rider proved he had overcome life-threatening injuries in March at the Tour of the Basque Country. "I called my wife, she's been a big part of me coming back. I'm deeply moved by this win," Vingegaard said. "It's only a few months ago my

loved ones feared I was going to die. I never thought I'd be back at this level. I had many doubts about myself," he added. While the stage win went to Vingegaard, his tactics also may have won him a moral victory in the struggle between the pair of two-time Tour winners.

Pyrenees promise

Pogacar refused to accept that however with two mountainous stages on the agenda for this weekend in southern France. "OK he won the sprint, I won the first climb and he caught me on the second. I have a lead in the rankings so no," he said. "Let's see what happens on the bigger climbs in the Pyrenees. I'm really confident," he added. The gathering war of attrition between Visma-Lease a Bike's Vingegaard and his challengers reached a crescendo as it climbed to the remote ski station of Le Lioran, located at an altitude of 1,242m. Surprisingly it left the top four positions unchanged however. "We can now confirm that Jonas is on good form. He beat me," Pogacar said. "And I was feeling good," he added. This was Vingegaard's first stage win on this year's Tour and above all proof he has overcome his injuries from earlier in the year. For Pogacar it is back to the drawing board after his bold, but foiled attempts to distance

his rivals on a handful of testing climbs to the west of the city of Clermont. The 2020 and 2021 champion Pogacar had opened up a 30sec lead over Vingegaard on the penultimate climb and dropped Evenepoel altogether before he also rallied. Pogacar was unable to maintain his infernal pace as he looked over his shoulder in horror as Vingegaard once more appeared on his back wheel. Vingegaard spent most of the 2023 Tour sitting just behind Pogacar during the race, before pulverising him on stage 16 and 17 in the Alps to win by 7min 29sec.

Pogacar did however take the king of the mountains climbers' points jersey. Frenchman Romain Bardet, who grew up in the region, was greeted by a throng of ardent supporters on what was billed as 'Virage Bardet' (Bardet corner) where thousands of locals and backers bid him farewell on his final Tour de France. He came second on the 2016 Tour de France and finished in the same position at the world championships two years later. "It was a magnificent day, I didn't think it would be so intense," Bardet told *France Televisions*. "The atmosphere was amazing, I did everything to be in front, but it didn't work out," the 33-year-old added.



Team Visma - Lease a Bike team's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard cycles to the finish line to win ahead of UAE Team Emirates team's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey during the 11th stage of the Tour de France cycling race after covering a distance of 211kms between vaux-les-Bains and Le Lioran yesterday. (AFP)

TENNIS

Musetti sets up Wimbledon semi-final with Djokovic

'DJOKOVIC KNOWS THE STADIUMS HERE BETTER THAN ME. HE'S A LEGEND EVERYWHERE'



Italy's Lorenzo Musetti celebrates winning against US player Taylor Fritz during their singles quarter-finals on the 10th day of the 2024 Wimbledon Championships in southwest London yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
London

Lorenzo Musetti reached his first Grand Slam semi-final at Wimbledon yesterday with a five-set victory over Taylor Fritz, setting up a clash with seven-time champion Novak Djokovic.

Italian 25th seed Musetti triumphed 3-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2, 3-6, 6-1 against the 13th-seeded American.

Djokovic was earlier handed a free pass into a 13th Wimbledon semi-final when Alex de Minaur withdrew from their scheduled last-eight tie with a hip injury.

"I probably played my best tennis at the end today," said Musetti.

Djokovic has a 5-1 winning record over 22-year-old Musetti, including a come-from-behind five-set victory at the French Open last month.

Musetti also took Djokovic the distance in their first meeting at

Roland Garros in 2021, when the Italian won the opening two sets of their last-16 tie before injury scuppered his hopes in the decider.

"Djokovic knows the stadiums here better than me," said Musetti.

"He's a legend everywhere and has done unthinkable things. We've played lots of times and I expect a huge fight. It's the toughest challenge in tennis but I am an ambitious guy and I like to be challenged. I will give 100 percent."

Yesterday, Musetti came back from dropping the first set for the third time at Wimbledon this year after Fritz broke in the fourth game.

The Italian, who plays with a one-handed backhand, levelled on a fourth set point in the second set tie-break and was dominant in the third, breaking the American in the first and fifth games.

Fritz had come back from two sets down to knock out Alexander Zverev in the last 16 but showed no sign of immediately wilting, leveling the contest in the fourth set.

However, Musetti was undaunted, sweeping into a 5-0 lead in the decider on his way to victory.

Djokovic progressed to a record-equalling 13th Wimbledon semi-final without hitting a ball yesterday after De Minaur pulled out injured as former champion Elena Rybakina eased through.

Australian ninth seed De Minaur, 25, announced shortly after midday at the All England Club that he was "devastated to pull out due to a hip injury".

It means Djokovic has now equalled Roger Federer's men's record of 13 semi-final appearances at Wimbledon as he closes on the Swiss great's mark of eight singles titles.

The 37-year-old Serbian is also through to a record-extending 49th men's Grand Slam semi-final.

De Minaur, who beat Djokovic at the United Cup in January, said: "It's no secret that this would have been the biggest match of my career but it's a unique injury."

"I woke up this morning want-



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina celebrates winning against Ukraine's Elina Svitolina during their singles quarter-finals on the 10th day of the 2024 Wimbledon Championships in London, yesterday. (AFP)

ing to feel some sort of miracle, but there was a high risk of making the injury worse if I stepped on court."

"One stretch, one slide could take this from a three to six weeks' injury to four months out."

The world number two - who had knee surgery last month - does not have a title to his name this year and is still seeking a first victory against a fellow top-10 player.

But a historic 25th Grand Slam triumph is coming into sharp focus for Djokovic, who demolished Holger Rune in straight sets in the fourth round.

Ruthless Rybakina

In early action yesterday, 2022 champion Rybakina barely broke sweat in swatting aside last year's semi-finalist Elina Svitolina 6-3, 6-2 in 61 minutes.

She will face Barbora Krejčíková for a place in Saturday's final after the Czech 31st seed came out on top against Jelena Ostapenko in a battle of former French Open champions.

Rybakina is now 19-2 in main-draw matches at Wimbledon - only retired champions Ann Jones and Steffi Graf have better winning percentages at the tournament.

Russian-born Rybakina broke the Ukrainian 21st seed four times in the match on Centre Court.

The fourth seed was broken in the first game in front of the watching Queen Camilla but hit back straight away and barely put a foot wrong after that. The 25-year-old, who crunched 28 winners to Svitolina's eight, said she had "amazing memories" from 2022 but does not like the favourite tag.

"I have an aggressive style of game, I have a huge serve so it's a big advantage," she said.

Krejčíková took the first set against the Latvian 13th seed with a single break.

Ostapenko, the 2018 Wimbledon semi-finalist, finally broke through in the fourth game of the second set for a 3-1 lead and backed it up with a hold.

But she went dramatically off

the boil as Krejčíková reeled off the next four games for a 5-4 lead.

Ostapenko clung on to break the Czech in the 10th game but 2021 French Open champion Krejčíková played the more composed tie-break to seal the victory.

"I told myself that I'm going to leave here everything I have and I'm really happy that I did and it's a great moment for me," said Krejčíková.

"It's an unbelievable moment that I'm experiencing right now in my tennis career."

Victory for the 28-year-old Krejčíková comes after a miserable run in 2024, with her season marred by injury and illness.

Her run to the Birmingham quarter-final last month allowed her to celebrate match wins for the first time since Abu Dhabi in February.

"It was a very, very difficult period. It was actually super difficult even before this tournament. I really want to thank my team that is there today," she Krejčíková.

FOCUS

'WADA did not mishandle Chinese doping case'

Reuters
Montreal

The World Anti-Doping Agency did not mishandle or show favoritism in the case of 23 Chinese swimmers who tested positive for banned substances and were cleared to compete in the Tokyo Olympics, an independent investigation said on Tuesday.

A report by Swiss prosecutor and lead investigator Eric Cottier found there was nothing in the file to suggest WADA in any way favoured the 23 swimmers who tested positive for trimetazidine (TMZ), a medication that increases blood flow to the heart.

The swimmers were cleared by a Chinese investigation which said they were inadvertently exposed to the drug through contamination. The report determined the swimmers were staying at a hotel where traces of TMZ were discovered in the kitchen.

WADA said it had no evidence to challenge China's findings and that external counsel had advised against appealing them.

Cottier's investigation reached a similar

conclusion, finding no irregularities on the part of WADA's review of the China Anti-Doping Agency (CHINADA) decision and that it had covered all relevant issues in determining whether or not to appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

"All the elements taken into consideration by WADA, whether they come from the file produced by CHINADA with its decision or from the investigation procedures that it carried out, show the decision not to appeal to be reasonable, both from the point of view of the facts and the applicable rules," wrote Cottier in his report.

WADA has vigorously defended its handling of the Chinese case and welcomed the report which vindicates its process.

A more complete report is expected in the coming weeks and could include recommendations but WADA president Witold Banka emphasised it will not change any of the findings in the initial summary.

"... the independent prosecutor has concluded WADA showed no bias towards China and the decision not to appeal the Chinese swimming cases was undisputedly reasonable based on the evidence," Banka told Reuters.

"His conclusion is very crystal clear. 'We were disgustingly accused of wrongdoing by a few individuals that there was a cover-up and that is why we found it very important to engage the independent prosecutor.'"

The report, however, drew a stinging rebuke from anti-doping groups FairSport and Global Athlete, which called the process "inherently flawed from the outset due to its limited scope and independence."

"The report, as expected, does not provide sufficient evidence to support Cottier's findings and conclusions - it also does not explain why 23 Chinese athletes were not provisionally suspended with mandatory public disclosure," the groups said in a joint statement.

"Until all related documents are made public, trust in the system will not be regained and WADA's position as the global regulator will continue to be challenged," they said.

Cottier's findings also did not impress WADA's fiercest critic, United States Anti-Doping Agency chief Travis Tygart, who stepped up his attack, questioning whether the global agency was able to "sanitize" the report prior to its release. The USADA statement asked how the TMZ entered the kitchen.

BOTTOMLINE

Russia's athlete list for Paris Olympics shrinks

Reuters
Moscow

The list of Russian athletes who will head to the Paris Olympics later this month has thinned to just over a dozen, as several sports federation heads have said their squads will not take part under what they see as humiliating restrictions.

Athletes from Russia and Belarus, Moscow's closest ally in the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, are barred from the Paris Games unless they compete as neutrals without their flags, anthems and emblems.

As of July 10, the Olympics website shows that only 16 Russian athletes are scheduled to appear in the Paris Games, which run from July 26-Aug 11.



Russia takes pride in its record as a major sporting power at the Olympics. At the last summer Games in Tokyo in 2021, 335 Russian athletes competed, coming away with 71 medals including 20 golds.

Russians and Belarusian athletes have been forced to undergo an additional vetting process to

ensure they do not support Russia's war and have no connection to its military.

While 36 Russians received the green light, 20 of them subsequently declined to compete, according to the IOC.

The Olympics kick off as tensions between Russia and the West are at their most acute in decades.

Moscow has denounced the vetting process and other restrictions as discriminatory, accusing the IOC of engaging in a "conspiracy" to exclude its athletes.

USA confirms 592-member Olympic team

The United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC) yesterday formally named a star-studded 592-member team for this month's Olympic Games in Paris.

The US squad, which is comprised of 314 female athletes and 278 male athletes, will be aiming to top the Olympic medal table for a fourth straight games.

The team includes Olympic stars such as gymnast Simone Biles, swimmer Katie Ledecky and NBA icon LeBron James.

"It is with immense pride and excitement that we announce the 2024 US Olympic Team and the exceptional athletes that embody the spirit of dedication, resilience, and excellence, continuing the proud history of Team USA at the Olympic Games," USOPC chief executive Sarah Hirshland said in a statement.

The US Paris team includes more than 250 returning Olympians, including three five-time Olympians, four four-time Olympians and 16 three-time Olympians.

QOC holds Fencing Festival for community categories



Doha: The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) in co-operation with the Ministry of Social Development and Family and Qatar Fencing Federation (QFF) held a community event, Fencing Festival for community categories and guests of Qatar from Palestine at the QFF training hall at Maamoura area yesterday. The one-day festival brought together a number of amateurs, game lovers, Qatar community members, alongside 20 participants from Qatar's guests from state of Palestine. They all enjoyed the festival in atmosphere full of sportsmanship and social connection.

Under the supervision of well-trained coaches, the participants from different age groups exhibited promising skills in fencing weapons, Epee, Foil and Sabre. They knew about rules of the game, technical skills, and were looking forward to get more

experience in this sport.

The QOC aims through organizing this event to promote "sport for all" concept, to increase communication between Qatari community categories and residents, as embodiment of its vision: "To Become a Leading Nation in Bringing The World Together Through Sustainable Sport Development".

In a post-event statement, the Event Director, Abdulla Eisa al-Harami said sports has become an effective tool in achieving sustainable development, promoting peace, inscribing the spirit of tolerance, ensuring mutual respect for all.

"Doha has proven to be the capital of global sport, and it will keep performing its centre stage role to bring nations together through sport, as well as to encourage community categories to develop their sport skills" added al-Harami.



SPOTLIGHT

France's top scorer Giroud bows out anonymously

Reuters
Munich

The international career of France's top scorer **Olivier Giroud** ended quietly on Tuesday, after a late cameo appearance in their 2-1 semi-final loss to Spain at the European Championship.

Giroud played 137 times for Les Bleus and scored 57 goals, more than any other player for France.

Hopes of a final swansong in Germany, however, were dampened by being relegated to the bench, with 56 minutes of game time in four substitute appearances and two attempts on goal.

Giroud, 37, announced his retirement from international football before the tournament, as he secured a move to Los Angeles FC after finishing at AC Milan last season.

"He had a lot of good moments, but also some more difficult ones," coach Didier Deschamps.

"He is an example of longevity, seriousness and professionalism. Even though he had less playing time at this Euro, he was fully with the squad. He is one of the leaders. I want to say well done and thank you."

Giroud won his first cap in 2011 against the United States, when Laurent Blanc was coach, and was



a member of France's World Cup-winning team in 2018. He also played in the final in Qatar in 2022 and was also on the losing side in the Euro 2016 final.

Ironically, World Cup success in 2018 came as Giroud led France's

attack but failed to score at the tournament in Russia. In Qatar four years later, he netted four as the French reached the final and lost it to Argentina on penalties.

When he announced his international retirement, Giroud said

he still had two good years in his legs, but that he was starting to feel his age.

"I thought about it carefully. Playing every three days is more and more difficult, especially at this level."

FOCUS

Argentina see off Canada to reach Copa America final

'I'm living it like I lived it in the last Copa America, in the last World Cup.. These are the last battles and I'm enjoying them to the maximum'

AFP
East Rutherford, United States

Lionel Messi was on target as world champions Argentina turned on the style to beat Canada 2-0 on Tuesday and reach the Copa America final where they will look for a third straight major title.

The defending Copa champions will face the winners of Wednesday's semi-final between Uruguay and Colombia in what will be a highly anticipated final in Miami on Sunday.

The 15-times Copa champions produced their best display of the tournament in front of a capacity crowd at the 82,500 MetLife Stadium and as in their 2022 World Cup triumph they look to be peaking at the perfect moment.

"The truth is that it's crazy what this group has done, what the Argentina national team has been doing," Messi told TyC Sports after his first goal of the tournament.

"It's not easy for us to be in a final again, for us to compete again to be champions. I'm living it like I lived it in the last Copa America, in the last World Cup...These are the last battles and I'm enjoying them to the maximum," said the 37-year-old.

Canada, who surprised many by reaching the last four in their first Copa America appearance, can take great credit for their run in the tournament but Messi and company were simply a step too far.

"I think the tournament caught up with us a little bit," said Canada's American coach Marsch, who said he noticed that his players looked tired midway through the first half.

"Eventually the physicality and fatigue can catch up with you and that was a big part of what happened with us tonight," he added.

Marsch's side had progressed by hitting teams with high-energy football straight out of the gate but after an early opening for left-winger Jacob Shaffelburg, who fired wide after cutting in from the flank, the South Americans took control and never gave it up.



Argentina's Lionel Messi vying for the ball with Canada's Derek Cornelius during their Copa America 2024 semi-final at MetLife Stadium, East Rutherford in New Jersey yesterday. (Reuters)

Angel Di Maria, the veteran wide-man playing in his final tournament for his country, was seeing plenty of the ball down the right and he offered an early warning of his threat when he picked out Messi with a ball inside which the forward flashed just wide of the post.

But it was Rodrigo De Paul who was to create the breakthrough in the 22nd minute, picking the ball up on the half-way line, taking a quick glance up and then lofting the ball over the top to Julian Alvarez.

The Manchester City forward, recalled to the starting line-up ahead of Lautaro Martinez, delivered a deft first touch that took him away from Moises Bombito and gave him just enough room to drive the ball home.

The classy triangle of Di Maria, Messi and De Paul, was a constant source of danger for Canada's back

line and the former threatened a second with a chip from the right which floated over the bar.

The assuredness of Argentina's build-up play reflects the confidence of coach Lionel Scaloni's team, a well-drilled unit but one that never allows their organisational solidity dominate over their creativity.

Two minutes before the break, former Real Madrid winger Di Maria provided a slide-rule pass to Messi, who worked himself space for a shot on his right-foot, but he was narrowly wide of Max Crepeau's right-hand post.

Canada's American coach Marsch had plenty of work to do at the interval if he was to find a way of getting his team back on level terms and any strategy went out of the window when the world champions doubled their lead, just six minutes after the restart.

The excellent De Paul pulled the ball back from the byline to Enzo Fernandez and his side-foot shot was directed home by Messi in front of goal.

For a moment Canada had hope that Messi may have been offside but the VAR review showed that defender Derek Cornelius had played him inside.

The two-goal cushion established, Argentina were content to sit back and preserve their energy and invite the Canadians to take them on.

It was not until the final minutes though that Canada were able to trouble Emiliano Martinez with substitute Tani Oluwaseyi forcing the keeper into action after some sloppy defending.

But it was a comfortable victory for Scaloni's men and one which leaves them one win away from a record 16th Copa America triumph.

HORSE RACING

Mukatel Al Shahania claims Prix Tijani



The His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani-owned Mukatel Al Shahania (Gazwan) produced a nice performance to win the Sheikh Mansoor Festival - Prix Tijani (PA) at the La Teste de Buch in France. Trained by Francois Rohaut, the Purebred Arabian was having his second start after a promising debut at Toulouse last month. With Ioritz Mendizabal in the saddle, Mukatel Al Shahania was prominent through the early stages of the contest. Still travelling extremely well on the turn for home, Mukatel Al Shahania showed a good turn of foot to quickly get rid of the opposition to win by three lengths. Mouzaffar De Monlau (Assy) was second while Jallaab Du Soleil took third (Munjiz). Bred by Al Shahania Stud, he is out of a Gr 2 (PA) winner Djelana (Al Sakbe) and a half-brother to Gr 1 (PA) winner Khataab (Amer)

Winning debut for Intisar De Monlau in Prix Razzia III

The unraced Intisar De Monlau (Al Mamun Monlau) made a bright start as she won the Gr 3 (PA) Sheikh Mansoor Festival - Prix Razzia III which took place at La Teste yesterday.

Owned by Mubarak Ali al-Nuaimi, the Purebred Arabian is trained by Mme Jean-François Bernard and is now a Gr 3 (PA) winner. Ridden by Maxime Guyon, the three-year-old made the most setting a slow pace. Headed by the free-going Lambada Du Croate (Af Alhar) before the final bend, Intisar De Monlau proved much the best despite showing greenness, to win by one length with pricked ears. Lady De Faust (Af Al Buraq) finished well to grab second while Wala'a (Gazwan) took third spot. Bred by R. Bourdette & Suc. Ma. Bourdette, she is out of Leila De Monlau (Nizam), who is a half-sister to Gr 2 (PA) winner Africa De Monlau (Af Al Buraq) and a half-sister to Gr 1 (PA) winner Jugurtha De Monlau (Al Mamun Monlau).



Nour Al Maury takes Criterium des Pouliches

The Gr 1 (PA) Sheikh Mansoor Festival - Criterium des Pouliches went the way of the title holder Nour Al Maury (Azadi) who won this race last year. Carrying the colours of Al Shaqab Racing and trained by Thomas Fourcy, the five-year-old won the fifth Gr 1 (PA) of her life career. Under a fine ride by Mickael Barzalona, Nour Al Maury was happy to chase the leaders over the 1,900m contest. With Al Wakrah (Tm Fred Texas) leading the race with a healthy advantage entering the home-straight, the fantastic mare played her card late to beat Al Wakrah. Norma Al Maury (Azadi) was third. Bred by Mlle Renee-Laure Koch, Nour Al Maury is out of Nectarina Al Maury (Jalnar Al Khalidiah) and a full sister to Gr 2 (PA) winner No Reply Al Maury (Azadi).

