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MATCH REPORT

Kane double fires England to comeback win over Congo

Kane's second goal was his 13th at World Cups, one more than Pele, England to face Mexico in last 16 match

AFP
Atlanta

Harry Kane rescued England from a seismic World Cup shock with two late goals to beat the Democratic Republic of Congo 2-1 in Atlanta and secure a place in the last 16.

Aiming to end a 60-year wait to win a major tournament, Thomas Tuchel's men escaped humiliation and one of England's worst ever World Cup exits thanks to their talismanic captain after Brian Cipenga's early goal gave Congo an early lead.

But the Three Lions will need to improve for the daunting task of facing co-hosts Mexico at the Estadio Azteca in the last 16 on Sunday. Already England's all-time top goalscorer in the competition, Kane now has 13 World Cup goals and moves onto five for the tournament to remain in the star-studded battle for the Golden Boot.

"What a crazy game, obviously," said Kane. "I think you have to stay patient in these games."

"Their keeper definitely made some unbelievable saves in that first half. And it was just about pounding the rock, keep pounding the rock, and our moments will come."

Defeat ended Congo's fairytale run on their return to the World Cup for the first time in 52 years.

The Leopards had never even won a point or scored a goal at the World Cup until a few weeks ago, but had one of the tournament favourites teetering on the brink of elimination.

Tuchel made two changes from victory over Panama as Declan Rice return in midfield, while Djed Spence came in

at right-back with Reece James and Jarell Quansah both ruled out through injury.

The German coach's decision not to select more specialist right-back cover in a 26-man squad will face more scrutiny after Congo took the lead down that flank.

Spence was caught under Chancel Mbemba's cross as the ball fell for Cipeanga. The Almeria winger's shot was low and hard but Jordan Pickford should still have kept it out at his near post. The vast majority of the nearly 70,000 crowd decked out in England red and white were silenced, while Tuchel's players were visibly rattled.

Jude Bellingham was shown a yellow card for a lunge lunge and was then involved in a heated exchange with his coach during the mid-half hydration break.

The stoppage in play at least allowed Tuchel the chance to restore order.

Bellingham's powerful header from Declan Rice's cross finally forced DR Congo 'keeper Lionel Mpsi into action.

Moments later Marcus Rashford's powerful effort was blocked on the line by London-born Aaron Wan Bissaka after Noni Madueke's jinking run opened up the Congo defence.



Harry Kane of England heads to score the team's first goal during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Round Of 32 match against DR Congo at Atlanta Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, yesterday. (AFP)

Yet it could have been even worse for England at the break.

Yoane Wissa's three goals in the group stage fired his country to the knockout stages of the World Cup for the first time and the Newcastle striker had a golden chance to double the DR Congo lead but hit the outside of the post from

point-blank range.

At the other end, Kane was furious when he went down as he tried to round Mpsi but the referee refused to point to the spot.

Le Havre stopper Mpsi's in-

spired afternoon continued as he flew to his right to parry another bullet header from Bellingham and then denied Kane from a corner with the last action of the first half.

After a bright start to the second period, England were beginning to run out of ideas until Tuchel unloaded his offensive weapons off the bench.

Bukayo Saka, Anthony Gordon and Eberechi Eze were sent on by Tuchel in search of an equaliser.

And it was new Barcelona signing Gordon who provided the cross as Kane finally found a way past Mpsi with a downward header 15 minutes from time.

Gordon also got the assist for the 86th minute winner, but Kane did the hard

England forward Harry Kane celebrates scoring his team's second goal during the 2026 World Cup round of 32 match against the DR Congo at the Atlanta Stadium in Atlanta yesterday. (AFP)

ALL-TIME LEADING WORLD CUP SCORERS

- 19 - Lionel Messi (ARG)
- 18 - Kylian Mbappe (FRA)
- 16 - Miroslav Klose (GER)
- 15 - Ronaldo (BRA)
- 14 - Gerd Mueller (GER)
- 13 - Just Fontaine (FRA), Harry Kane (ENG)
- 12 - Pele (BRA)
- 11 - Jurgen Klinsmann (GER), Sandor Kocsis (HUN)
- 10 - Gabriel Batistuta (ARG), Helmut Rahn (GER), Gary Lineker (ENG), Teofilo Cubillas (PER), Thomas Mueller (GER), Grzegorz Lato (POL), Cristiano Ronaldo (POR).

work as he rifled a powerful drive into the roof of the net for his 84th international goal.

Tuchel says England never stopped believing

England coach Thomas Tuchel said his team had never stopped "believing" after making a terrible start in their come-from-behind Cup win yesterday.

"We kept believing. We had the worst start possible. First shot, first goal. Then, it became even more difficult," said Tuchel.

Kane was denied a first-half penalty after it appeared DR Congo goalkeeper Lionel Mpsi had tripped him.

After the first water break, we were on top of the game. I think we should have had a penalty," Tuchel added.

"The substitutes came on, and put the effort in, and we won it. Well deserved, but we had to work a lot. We have to have that mindset if it is getting hard, it is getting hard, but don't lose patience and don't lose belief."

Of Kane, Tuchel said admiringly: "He is getting better."

FOCUS

'Any team can beat you', warns Ruiz as Spain seek end to World Cup woe

AFP
Chattanooga, United States

Fabian Ruiz is confident Spain are gaining momentum as the European champions aim to end a 16-year hiatus to win a World Cup knockout game against Austria today.

One of the pre-tournament favourites, La Roja got off to a slow start with a 0-0 draw against Cape Verde, but bounced back to beat Saudi Arabia and Uruguay to top Group H.

"The first match didn't go the way we wanted. It was a game about finding our feet and Cape Verde made things difficult for us," Ruiz told AFP. "I believe the team has been gradually getting better over the last few matches."

"We know that the World Cup is very tough, but we have a lot of confidence in ourselves and in our work."

Since winning the World Cup for the first time in 2010 during a run of three consecutive major tournament wins for a golden generation, Spain have struggled on the global stage.

Eliminated at the group stage

as defending champions in 2014, they crashed out on penalties to Russia and Morocco in the last 16 at the past two World Cups.

"We've seen that nowadays, any team can beat you," added Ruiz, just a day after Paraguay eliminated Germany. "I think we're ready for it and looking forward to the match."

Despite winning a second consecutive Champions League with Paris Saint-Germain at club level, the 30-year-old has paid the price for Spain's slow start.

A star of La Roja's triumph at Euro 2024, the midfielder has been dropped to the bench by Luis de la Fuente for the past two games.

"What matters is winning; what matters is the team," he said. "Right now my role is to support and help them and to do my best so that I'm ready whenever the coach wants me to play."

Ruiz could be called upon for an unfamiliar role out wide with De la Fuente's options on the flanks decimated by injuries.

Nico Williams and Jeremy Pino will miss the Austria clash after being injured in a bruising encounter with Uruguay, who lost their discipline in the final stages

as a shock group stage elimination loomed.

New Liverpool signing Victor Munoz has also not featured at the World Cup due to a muscle problem and Barcelona superstar Lamine Yamal's minutes have been carefully managed on his return from a hamstring injury.

Lenient refereeing has been a common theme throughout the World Cup, but Spain were left furious at the challenge that caused Williams another injury setback after a disrupted season.

"The referees are letting the game flow. It's true that we like play to be interrupted as little as possible, but only up to a point," said Ruiz. "We suffered a bit more than usual in the last match. There was a bad tackle, but there's nothing we can do about that. It's up to the referees to intervene and set the limit. I'm sure they'll improve in the upcoming matches."

Spain's midfielder Fabian Ruiz and defender Marc Cucurella take part in a training session in Carson yesterday, on the eve of the World Cup round of 32 match against Austria. (AFP)





CYCLING

Pogacar eyes fifth Tour title as rivals plan upset results

DENMARK'S JONAS VINGEGAARD, FRANCE'S PAUL SEIXAS POISED TO PROVIDE STIFF COMPETITION

Reuters
Paris

Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar will chase a record-equalling fifth Tour de France title when the 2026 edition begins in Barcelona, Spain, on Saturday, with Denmark's Jonas Vingegaard and France's Paul Seixas poised to provide the stiffest competition.

Pogacar, who has won the last two editions, aims to join greats Jacques Anquetil, Bernard Hinault, Miguel Indurain and Eddy Merckx on five Tour victories.

The 27-year-old has never competed less than this season before entering the Tour, in which he will take part for the seventh time.

He has a total of 13 stage or general classification wins in 16 days of racing, including a maiden Milan-San Remo title, a third Tour of Flanders, a fourth Liege-Bastogne-Liege and Strade Bianche and, more recently, the Tour de Romandie and the Tour de Suisse.

"The Tour de France is always the biggest challenge of the season and also the race that motivates us the most," Pogacar said. "Every year, you arrive at the start knowing that anything can happen over three weeks, and that's what makes it so special."

"I feel good, I'm looking forward to racing, and I know I'll have a fantastic group of teammates and staff around me."

VINGEGAARD AIMS FOR GIRO-TOUR DOUBLE

The world champion, who admitted struggling with knee issues during last year's race and considered withdrawing, will be supported by a formidable team including Mexico's Isaac del Toro, winner of the recent Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes, and Britain's Adam Yates, a third-place finisher in 2023.

Pogacar's main rival will once again be Vingegaard.

The Dane seems close to the form that allowed him to win the world's most prestigious cycling race in 2022 and 2023.

The Visma-Lease a Bike rider has won all three of his 2026 outings: Paris-Nice, the Tour of Catalunya, and the Giro d'Italia, where he claimed five stage wins.

Vingegaard will try to imitate Pogacar, who in 2024 became the eighth and latest rider to achieve the Giro-Tour double.

"That gave me a tremendous amount of confidence heading into the Tour de France," Vingegaard said.

"It gave us a huge boost and reinforced the feeling that we can win the Tour."



UAE Team Emirates' Tadej Pogacar celebrates on the podium wearing the yellow jersey with a trophy after winning the Tour de France alongside second place Team Visma | Lease a Bike's Jonas Vingegaard and third place Soudal Quick-Step's Remco Evenepoel on July 21, 2024. (Reuters)

"A third Tour victory would be a dream come true. It has been three years since I last won the Tour, and ever since then it has remained one of my biggest goals."

The Visma-Lease a Bike squad, however, suffered a blow when

Belgium's Wout van Aert, winner of 10 Tour stages, was ruled out with an elbow injury.

FRANCE'S BIGGEST HOME HOPE IN A GENERATION

France's newest cycling hope, Paul

Seixas, could turn the race for the yellow jersey into a three-horse affair. The 19-year-old prodigy makes his Tour debut, giving France its biggest hope in a generation of a first home champion since Bernard Hinault in 1985.

Seixas made a dazzling start to 2026, winning the Tour of the Basque Country and the Fleche Wallonne in April before being beaten only by Pogacar in the Liege-Bastogne-Liege.

However, he had to quit the Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes in early June after crashing heavily.

He said he had been able to resume almost-normal training for the Tour de France, but added: "I'm not setting a more specific goal because I'm heading into the unknown - I've never competed in a race this long and demanding before."

"This is the race I've always dreamed of, and I realise how lucky I am to be able to compete in it so early in my career," he added in his remarks.

If he can last three weeks, the Decathlon-CMA CGM rider could challenge for a podium finish along with Red Bull-Bora-hansgrohe teammates Remco Evenepoel of Belgium and Florian Lipowitz of Germany, who respectively finished third in 2024 and 2025.

"The Tour is no longer won by an exceptional rider alone, but by an exceptional team," says Zak Dempster, chief of sports at Red Bull-Bora-hansgrohe.

The Tour's 3,320.7 km route features 53,950 metres of climbing across 21 stages.

CRICKET

England-India T20 match abandoned because of rain

Reuters
Chester-Le-Street, England

England and India were left frustrated as the opening game of their three-match T20 series was abandoned because of rain at the halfway stage.

India, who came into the match on the back of a surprise series defeat in Ireland, had posted a competitive target of 189-7 in their 20 overs after contrasting half-centuries from Abhishek Sharma and Shreyas Iyer.

England's chase, though, did not get underway with the drizzle that had fallen for the majority of India's innings intensifying and the game was called off at 2017 local time. India, who again chose to delay a debut for their 15-year-old batter Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, had fought back well from a terrible start.

They were 6-2 after two overs with opener Sanju Samson departing to a flying catch by Tom Banton at backward point off Saqib Mahmood and Ishan Kishan run out two balls later by Harry Brook after a mix-up with Abhishek Sharma.

Sharma, deposed by Kishan at the top of the ICC T20 batting rankings, shrugged off the incident to take the attack to England, despatching Mahmood for successive sixes.

It took the 25-year-old past



India's Abhishek Sharma plays a shot during the first Twenty20 match against England at the Riverside Ground in Chester-le-Street, north-east England yesterday. (AFP)

100 T20 international sixes. He is the quickest player to reach the milestone off 785 balls.

Three successive boundaries off Luke Wood maintained the momentum as India reached 61-2 at the end of the six-over power-play.

The onslaught gave Brook, who was captaining England's white-ball side two days after being part of the test team that lost the se-

ries to New Zealand, a lot to think about.

He turned to Sam Curran and it proved a smart call as the left-arm trapped Sharma lbw with his second ball for an exhilarating 59 off 24 balls.

India captain Iyer, who hit a beautiful six over extra cover off Wood, made a more workmanlike 68 off 47 balls before falling lbw to Mahmood who finished with

3-33. Shivam Dube finished on 42 not out from 21 balls.

India, who beat England in a high-scoring semi-final on their way to lifting the World Cup in March, would have been pleased with their total but England were still in the game.

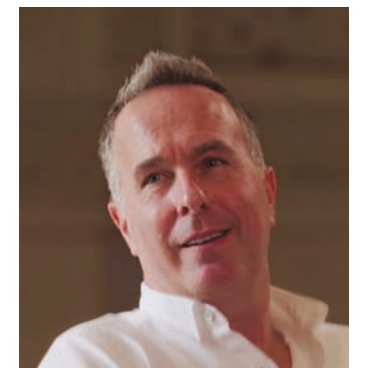
The teams move on to Old Trafford, Manchester for the second match of the T20 series on Saturday.

SPOTLIGHT

Vaughan for England coaching clear-out after Stokes exit



Rob Key (left) with Brendon McCullum



Former England Test and ODI captain Michael Vaughan

AFP
London

Former England captain Michael Vaughan has urged head coach Brendon McCullum and director Rob Key to resign following Ben Stokes's retirement from international cricket.

All-rounder Stokes, 35, announced the end of his reign as England captain and the finish of his celebrated international career on Sunday during a crushing 160-run defeat by New Zealand in the third Test at Trent Bridge, a loss that condemned his team to a 2-1 series loss. This latest reverse meant England have now won just two of their last 10 Test matches following defeats by Australia and New Zealand and a home draw with India.

Vaughan feels "enough is enough", with England's 2005 Ashes-winning skipper telling the *Stick to Cricket* podcast: "When I saw that on the fourth evening last week, I went 'nah, we can't accept that' as ex-players in the game."

"And it was that period that I watched and I went 'nah, enough is enough'. English cricket has got to be better than that."

Key and McCullum, a former New Zealand captain, were under pressure following England's woeful 4-1 Ashes series loss in Australia concluded in January, with Vaughan adding: "I think Baz McCullum is a great guy but he's not a great coach and for England - as ex-players and fans of English cricket -- we should be aiming to be the number-one team in the world and at the minute we are ranked seventh."

"We've won two games in 10 matches, and those two wins have come at Lord's on a cesspit and the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground) which was a two-dayer, so the only two games that we've won have been on farmers' fields (poor pitches). That can't be right. I want

change. I've seen enough. I care passionately about English cricket and I hate watching that and you can't tell me that the 20-odd thousand (fans) aren't thinking the same," insisted 51-year-old former Yorkshire batsman Vaughan.

"When you've got the opposition in your own back yard laughing at you, enough is enough. We need to move on."

'LAUGHABLE'

Key succeeded Ashley Giles as managing director of cricket in 2022 and oversees the coaching and selection set-up.

Key brought in McCullum as England's Test coach in May 2022 but the New Zealander was then appointed across all three formats in September 2024.

England's results in white-ball cricket have suffered too, with Vaughan suggesting former England batsman Key's position should also be in doubt.

"I'm so frustrated watching it, it's laughable," said Vaughan. You've got to say that Rob Key's job is on the line. It has to be on the line. It wouldn't surprise me if Rob Key goes. They're not being well coached. You are telling me if (former England coach) Andy Flower was in charge...this team would be getting the results they are getting? No chance."

England are waiting for their next Test which is not until August's series opener against Pakistan at Headingley.

England's last 10 results in Tests:
Lost vs New Zealand - Trent Bridge
Lost vs New Zealand - The Oval
Won vs New Zealand - Lord's
Lost vs Australia - SCG
Won vs Australia - MCG
Lost vs Australia - Adelaide Oval
Lost vs Australia - The Gabba, Brisbane
Lost vs Australia - Optus Stadium, Perth
Lost vs India - The Oval
Drawn vs India - Old Trafford

COMMENT

England Test captaincy would be a privilege: Brook

Reuters
London

Harry Brook said it would be an honour to captain England's Test team if asked and believes he can handle the demands of leading his country across all three formats. Brook, England's current white-ball skipper, served as vice-captain under Ben Stokes for the 2-1 Test series defeat by New Zealand on home soil.

Stokes, who has announced his retirement from international cricket, is among those to have tipped the 27-year-old to lead the Test side. "I don't think you can turn down being an England Test captain," Brook told reporters on Tuesday.

"It would be an honour and a privilege to be test captain - the pinnacle of our sport. It's not up to me to make that decision. It's up to people well above me. I'd be happy to do it if I did get asked."

"I'm not saying it would be easy, but I definitely do think it is possible (to be a three-format captain)," Brook said. "The fact I don't play franchise cricket means there are periods in my calendar when I wouldn't be playing cricket. I'd be focusing on my fitness and getting ready to play all three formats, which has been a dream of mine since I could speak or walk. If I am or I'm not captain for England in Test cricket, I'd be happy to just still be playing for England."



TENNIS

Gauff survives scare, Sinner and Sabalenka in easy wins

Daniil Medvedev enjoys a four-set win against Spain's Daniel Merida, Flavio Cobolli beat Mariano Navone

Reuters
London

Coco Gauff managed to shrug off her Wimbledon gremlins in the nick of time to avoid another early exit yesterday after men's defending champion Jannik Sinner and women's top seed Aryna Sabalenka eased into the third round.

The day after seven-time Wimbledon champion Serena Williams' comeback ended in defeat, the player who took the baton from the American great once again looked vulnerable on the grass but dug in to beat Solana Sierra 6-3 3-6 7-6(10-7). Gauff, the seventh seed, looked on the brink of a third first-round loss at Wimbledon in four years as Argentina's Sierra served for the match at 5-4 in the third set.

But Gauff channelled the warrior spirit of Williams to drag herself back and, after producing a moment of magic at 7-7 in the tiebreak, she sealed victory with an ace to set up a third-round clash with fellow American Claire Liu.

GOLFERS IN THE ROYAL BOX

A clutch of European Ryder Cup winners watched from the Royal Box on Centre Court as top seed Sinner took on Portugal's Nuno Borges and after the hazards the Italian faced in his five-set win over Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic in his opener, the 24-year-old kept it straight down the middle to reach round three.

World number 48 Borges had a set point in the second set, but Sinner was relatively untroubled as he raised his game at the pivotal moments for a 7-6(4) 7-6(2) 6-4 victory. Sabalenka, bidding for her first Wimbledon title, was cruising against American McCartney Kessler but had to fight back from 5-2 down in the second set to win 6-1 7-6(9).

Kessler had two set points at 5-3 and another two in the tiebreak but four-time Grand Slam champion Sabalenka raised the intensity levels to set up a third-round fire-fight against big-hitting Latvian Jelena Ostapenko. Sabalenka gave herself eight out of 10 for her first-round win over Teodora Kostovic



Italy's Jannik Sinner takes his things to leave the court after winning against Portugal's Nuno Borges on the third day of the Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, southwest London, yesterday. (AFP)



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka celebrates after winning her second round match against McCartney Kessler of the US. (Reuters)

and passed another test yesterday. "She played incredible and played super aggressive and it was really tough to handle the second set and I am glad to have powered through," Sabalenka said.

SEEDS MAKE PROGRESS

Four-times Grand Slam champion

Naomi Osaka swapped her first round "Kill Bill" kimono for a more toned down outfit for her second round clash against Russian qualifier Anastasia Gasanova but dazzled with her tennis as she won 6-3 6-2.

Several other women's seeds progressed. Number 10 Karolina

Muchova of the Czech Republic beat China's Zhang Shuai to set up a third-round against Thai qualifier Mananchaya Sawangkaew who impressed in her win against American Alycia Parks.

American teenager Iva Jovic, seeded 16th, easily solved the puzzle that is 38-year-old Tatjana Maria, beating the wily German slice-merchant 6-1 6-2.

In the men's draw eighth seed Daniil Medvedev enjoyed a four-set win against Spain's Daniel Merida, French Open runner-up Flavio Cobolli, seeded nine, beat Mariano Navone and Brazil's Joao Fonseca blazed past Dutchman Jesper de Jong.

American qualifier Michael Zheng backed up his opening win against British number one Cameron Norrie with a straight sets win against Colombia's Nicolas Mejia.

He was joined in round three by fellow American Tommy Paul who claimed his second successive straight sets win, this time against Kwon Soon-woo.

FRENCH OPEN CHAMP ANDREEVA STUNNED BY KREJCIKOVA



Czech Republic's Barbora Krejckikova celebrates winning her second round match against Russia's Mirra Andreeva. (Reuters)

London: French Open champion Mirra Andreeva suffered a shock defeat against Barbora Krejckikova in the Wimbledon second round on Wednesday. Andreeva arrived at the All England Club hailed as one of the sport's rising stars after winning her maiden Grand Slam crown in Paris in June.

But the Russian teenager was unable to maintain the momentum from Roland Garros as Krejckikova recaptured the magic that inspired her unexpected Wimbledon title triumph two years ago.

The 30-year-old Czech, who also won the French Open in 2021, fought back for a dramatic 4-6, 7-5, 6-4 victory in two hours and 47 minutes on Centre Court. Krejckikova will play compatriot Nikola Pietrangeli in the third round.

"What a match! It's always been a huge fight against Mirra. She is such a young and unique player. I'm extremely proud I managed to win on this beautiful Centre Court, the best court in the world," Krejckikova said. "I've been through a lot with the

injuries but also in my personal life. It was really hard to get through with all the emotions with everything that happened. I tried to go day by day. Thanks to my team and my family."

Andreeva advanced from her previous Wimbledon showdown with Krejckikova in 2023 when the injured Czech withdrew after falling a set behind.

That was Andreeva's Wimbledon debut campaign as an unknown 16-year-old, while Krejckikova was just 12 months away from winning the All England Club crown with a surprise run that culminated in final victory over Jasmine Paolini.

Andreeva, 19, is now tennis royalty after fulfilling her potential at the French Open.

In contrast to the fifth seed's ascent, Krejckikova has plummeted to 38th in the rankings after an injury-plagued period including first-round losses at the Australian and French Opens this year. But Krejckikova flipped the script in impressive style, holding her nerve after wasting six match points in the deciding set to finally seal a memorable victory.

FORMULA 1

British hopes on a high for Silverstone weekend

Reuters
Silverstone

George Russell heads to Silverstone on a high and hoping to give British Formula One fans a home winner at Silverstone for the third year in a row after Lewis Hamilton in 2024 and Lando Norris last July.

The chance of all three standing on the podium - a Mercedes, Ferrari, McLaren combination in whatever order - is real after the trio provided the first British one-two-three since 1968 in Barcelona last month.

"I'm sure it's going to be great," said Russell of the return to Silverstone after winning in the heat of Austria last weekend and trimming Mercedes teammate Kimi Antonelli's championship lead to 40 points.

Compatriot Jenson Button, the 2009 world champion, said Russell was in a good place.

"There's nothing in the back of his mind thinking 'Oh, Kimi's quicker than me,'" he told reporters. "All the pieces of the puzzle are together and he's ready to rock."

FIRST HOME RACE AS CHAMPION FOR NORRIS

Norris will be racing at home for the first time as world champion, chasing a first win of the season more in hope than expectation after two podiums so far in 2026. "We go to Silverstone as champions... and we go realistically, in condition to hopefully fight for podiums," said McLaren team boss Andrea Stella. "But the victory will be difficult."

Button reckoned Russell and seven-times world champion Hamilton both had a good chance, with the Ferrari driver boasting an exceptional history at Silverstone as a record nine-times winner there. "I don't think Mercedes can have it all their own way, you know, the Ferrari is very good in high-speed corners, change of direction," added the Briton on a call for ticket resale company Viagogo.

"It is going to be hot, which is their only downfall... I expect we're going to have a cou-



Lewis Hamilton with his Ferrari backroom staff.

ple of Brits fighting there at the front with Kimi."

Red Bull's four-times world champion Max Verstappen holds the Silverstone lap record and won there in 2023. He was Russell's closest rival in Austria, with Antonelli third, but the Dutch driver has hardly been playing up his chances in the new engine era.

"I love the track but I did a few laps on the simulator and I just started laughing," he said of Silverstone. "It felt like a different track, to be honest. You barely have battery around the lap. It's just constantly flat."

"So yes, it's going to feel very different compared to what we are used to around Silverstone, because of the layout of the track... it's going to be a tough one."

The weekend follows the sprint format, for the fourth time this season, offering more points and a chance for Russell to make bigger inroads into the 19-year-old Antonelli's lead.

The Italian qualified 10th last year and retired, after a collision with French driver Isack Hadjar, but has shown this season that past performance is no guide to current form.

"He's always there, he's always competitive, and it's very different to the Kimi we saw last year, especially in the European part of the season, that really struggled," said Button.

The race will also be a Formula One first for Racing Bulls' British rookie Arvid Lindblad, who could well end up in the points.

"It's going to be a special moment for me, my first home race," said Lindblad.

"It was the first F1 race I went to so to be going there 13 years later as a Formula One driver will be very special. To be going there with a car that is competitive, fighting for something, is very cool."

The forecast for the weekend is warm with little chance of rain, although the weather at Silverstone can be notoriously fickle.

BASKETBALL WORLD CUP

Qatar face India in first game of third window of Asian qualifiers today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar men's national basketball team will play a crucial match against India at 3:30pm at Veer Savarkar Hall in Ahmedabad, India, marking the start of the third window of the Asian qualifiers for the FIBA Basketball World Cup - Qatar 2027. The team enters the contest with the ambition of returning to winning ways and strengthening its position in Group D, which also includes Lebanon and India.

This fixture carries particular importance given the close competition among the group's teams and the intense battle for qualification to the second round. Qatar aims to bounce back after its narrow 86-80 defeat to Saudi Arabia in the rescheduled game of the second window.

In the same group, Lebanon defeated India 99-56, moving to the top of the standings with 7 points, level with Saudi Arabia. Qatar follows in third place with 6

points, while India sits fourth with 4 points. At the conclusion of the second window, Qatar, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia secured qualification to the next stage of the Asian qualifiers.

Head coach Hakan Demir of Turkey is focusing on addressing tactical details from the previous match, particularly defensive transitions and fast breaks, while improving finishing efficiency in the paint to ensure greater consistency throughout the game.

The Qatari delegation is led by Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari, Secretary General of the Qatar Basketball Federation and Director of National Teams, assisted by Jassim Ibrahim Ashkanani (Team Manager) and Nabil Jumaa (Assistant Team Manager).

QATAR'S 12-PLAYER ROSTER CONSISTS OF:

Abdulrahman Saad, Mostafa Fouda, Omar Saad, Zeineddine Badr, Mohamed Hashem, Mostafa Nado, Babacar Dieng, Ousmane Dieng, Aladji Bobo Magassa, Alen Hadzibegovi, Donte Grantham, and Mahmoud Darwish.





FOCUS

Ronaldo and Modric struggle to defy Father Time at World Cup

AFP
Atlanta

Cristiano Ronaldo and Luka Modric will make history when two outfield players aged over 40 face off for the first time in a World Cup as Portugal take on Croatia in Friday's last-32 clash.

But both men are facing questions over whether their status as national heroes is now more of a burden than a boost to their countries' hopes of progressing far in the competition.

Prior to this tournament, only Cameroon's Roger Milla had played in a World Cup as an outfield player after turning 40.

Ronaldo and Modric, who won four Champions Leagues in six seasons together at Real Madrid, have long defied Father Time but have shown their age in what will almost certainly be their final flourish on the global stage.

At 41, Ronaldo defiantly



Cristiano Ronaldo

screamed "I'm back" after netting twice against Uzbekistan as he became the first player to ever score at six World Cups.

Yet either side of a 5-0 romp over a team ranked 60th in the world, Portugal failed to beat the Democratic Republic of Congo and Colombia and fell into a tougher section of the draw as a result.

"It's already 23 years I've been a professional and whenever things don't go well it's 'Cristiano, he's finished, he's old,'" Ronaldo said

earlier in the tournament.

The forward played every minute of the group stages and outgoing Portugal boss Roberto Martinez shows no sign of taking the bold call to sit the five-time Ballon d'Or winner on the bench.

"There is not an issue physically or mentally for Cristiano in today's game to play the 90 minutes," Martinez said after Ronaldo managed just two touches in the Colombia box.

After a slow start to the World



Luka Modric

Cup four years ago, Ronaldo was eventually dropped by Fernando Santos in favour of Goncalo Ramos.

The AC Milan striker immediately scored a hat-trick in a 6-1 demolition of Switzerland, but a 1-0 defeat to Morocco in the quarter-finals meant Ronaldo's time out of the side was short-lived and Santos was removed as coach.

The impression that Martinez is wasting a richly talented generation just to protect Ronaldo's

ego grows with every pedestrian performance. Portugal's depth of midfield talent meant Paris Saint-Germain's Joao Neves and Bernardo Silva, now of Real Madrid, started on the bench against Colombia.

Yet even with one of the World Cup's strongest midfields behind him, Ronaldo's strikes against Uzbekistan are his only non-penalty goals in his past 14 games at major tournaments.

Modric, 40, similarly showed

his age in Croatia's tournament opener, which ended in a 4-2 defeat to England in Dallas.

Caught on his heels, Modric conceded a penalty when chopping down Noni Madueke for England's opening goal and was sacrificed by Zlatko Dalic before the hour mark. Croatia bounced back to celebrate Modric's 200th cap, edging past Panama 1-0.

In doing so, Modric became the fourth man to reach a double century of international appearances, joining Ronaldo.

The AC Milan midfielder then provided the assist for Nikola Vlasic's winner as Croatia beat Ghana 2-1. Finalists in 2018, Croatia also reached the semi-finals four years ago. Modric was the driving force behind those incredible runs for a country of less than four million people. A likely last-16 meeting with Spain and one final shot at glory awaits the winners in Toronto. But for one of football's all-time greats, the World Cup curtain will come down in Canada.

COMMENT

Messi will score more but I want trophy: Mbappe

Mbappe's 18 career World Cup goals have come in 18 matches



France's forward Kylian Mbappe scores his team's third goal during the 2026 World Cup round of 32 match against Sweden at the New York/New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford on Tuesday. (AFP)

Agencies
East Rutherford

Kylian Mbappe has been on Lionel Messi's heels as both players break new ground in World Cup scoring, but the Frenchman is more obsessed by lifting the trophy in New York on July 19 than becoming marksman supreme.

The 27-year-old netted a double as Les Bleus crushed Sweden 3-0 in the round of 32 on Tuesday to move one shy of Messi's record 19 goals at World Cups and join him on top of the scoring charts in this edition with six.

"I think the goal, as I said, is to go as far as possible - to make it to (the final on) July 19th and come

back here," Mbappe, who scored his 18 goals in 18 games, told reporters.

"We're trying to win; we're taking it one step at a time. Of course, the more goals you score, the higher you climb in the rankings - I'm not telling anyone anything new here.

"But I'm also convinced that Leo is going to score more goals, so I don't focus too much on that. I'm more focused on the opponents we might face and how close we're getting to our goal: the final."

France's captain has arrived at this World Cup on a mission. He has scored six goals and set up two more, but his influence stretches far beyond the scoresheet.

He has publicly defended teammate Ousmane Dembele through

difficult moments and repeatedly insisted that nothing matters more than lifting the trophy again.

The scars of Lusail still burn deep. Mbappe's extraordinary hat-trick in the 2022 final against Argentina was not enough to prevent France surrendering their crown, a painful lesson that even one of the game's greatest talents cannot conquer a World Cup alone. Four years on, he is chasing the title not simply as France's marksman supreme, but as the leader of a team he is determined to carry with him.

Messi's Argentina face minnows Cape Verde in the last 32 tomorrow. France next take on Paraguay for a place in the quarter-finals, where they would face either co-hosts Canada or Morocco.

Paraguay took an ultra defensive approach against Germany to knock the four-times world champions out on penalties in the last 32 on Monday and there is little chance that they will go out swashbuckling against France in Philadelphia on Saturday.

Les Bleus will not take anything for granted and will do their homework, Mbappe warned.

"I think we'll keep working between now and the Paraguay match to see what we can improve, because there are still some sequences that aren't quite clear enough, there's room for improvement," he said.

"Still, I think it's positive overall, and our ability to score goals means we always have the chance to take the lead in matches."

SPOTLIGHT

Mexico beat Ecuador to break 40-year World Cup curse

AFP
Mexico City

Mexico turned on the style at their iconic Azteca Stadium on Tuesday, brushing Ecuador aside 2-0 to break a 40-year World Cup knockout curse.

The round-of-32 match was delayed for an hour due to stormy weather and when it started the co-hosts flew out of the blocks, mounting wave after wave of attacks.

In a supercharged atmosphere, Julian Quinones gave Mexico a deserved lead midway through the first half with a thunderous strike and then turned provider for Raul Jimenez.

Ecuador desperately needed to wrest back the momentum after the break but struggled to shift through the gears, with the home side remaining largely in control.

Mexico had not won a World Cup knockout game since 1986, when they last hosted the tournament.

Head coach Javier Aguirre, taking charge of the team at a World Cup for the third time over three spells, said he needed a Scotch to celebrate ending decades of heartache.

"I am one of those that I was never able to play the fifth match," he said. "It happened to me in South Korea and it happened to me in South Africa (when he was previously in charge)."

"So you have a good group stage and then you get stuck and you cannot move forward... but today there was a huge communion with the people."

As celebrations erupted across the country the 67-year-old said the Mexican team was a "true family".

"I can tell you that this team deserves what is happening," he said. "This big connection with the fans and playing the World Cup."

"Today we stand within the top-16 rank and we have been together for a long time and we still like each other. We are very happy. We are highly focused

and we are a true family."

Tuesday's win means Mexico are now unbeaten in 10 World Cup games at the Azteca and will fancy their chances against England or the Democratic Republic of Congo in the round of 16.

Mexico were one of only three teams in the group phase to win all three of their matches, alongside France and Argentina, and did not concede a single goal.

Gilberto Mora, 17, was named in the starting line-up for Mexico, becoming the second-youngest player to start a knockout match at the World Cup finals behind Pele in 1958.

The home team started on the front foot, with Jimenez wasting a glorious headed chance in the seventh minute and Mora flashing just wide.

At the other end, John Yeboah muscled his way into the penalty area in a rare foray forward for Ecuador, clipping the outside of a post.

Mexico took the lead in the 22nd minute when Saudi-based Quinones received the ball from Roberto Alvarado and tore down the left before driving into the box and unleashing an unstoppable shot past goalkeeper Hernan Galindez, raising the roof.

The first hydration break failed to change the script and Mexico doubled their lead after half an hour when Quinones fed Fulham striker Jimenez, who fired into the top corner.

Ecuador coach Sebastian Beccacece made a number of changes after the break in an effort to find a way back into the match.

But Mexico remained the more threatening team, with Cesar Montes twice going close.

Piero Hincapie was sent off in stoppage time after covering his mouth during a confrontation with an opposition player to cap a miserable night for Ecuador.

Mexico will hope the Azteca, which hosted the World Cup final in 1970 and 1986, works its magic again in the last 16 on Sunday.

From the quarter-finals onwards, all the matches at the World Cup will be taking place in the United States.



Mexico's forward Raul Jimenez celebrates next to teammate Julian Quinones after scoring his team's second goal during the 2026 World Cup round of 32 match against Ecuador at the Mexico City Stadium in Mexico City. (AFP)

BAYERN SIGN MOROCCO MIDFIELDER SAIBARI ON 5-YEAR DEAL

Bayern Munich yesterday announced the signing of Morocco midfielder Ismael Saibari from Dutch side PSV Eindhoven until 2031.

The midfielder joins the German champions for a reported fee of 50mn (\$57mn).

An attacking midfielder with a goal threat, the 25-year-old will further strengthen a ruthless Bayern forward line which already includes Harry Kane, Michael Olise, Luis Diaz, Jamal Musiala, Lennart Karl and Serge Gnabry.

"As a child, you dream of signing a contract with a club like Bayern - everybody knows it's one of the world's biggest clubs," Saibari said in a statement.

"Bayern compete for the biggest titles like the Champions League every year, and I want to win as many trophies as possible here." The midfielder has been among the best players at the World Cup as Morocco made it through to the last 16.

He scored goals in each of Morocco's three group matches before converting the final penalty

in their last 32 victory over the Netherlands on Monday.

Bayern sporting director Max Eberl said the club were "delighted to have secured the services of Ismael Saibari, one of the most exciting players at the World Cup." Saibari's transfer has been rumoured for weeks, with the midfielder reportedly missing a training session in New Jersey earlier in the tournament to undergo a medical ahead of a move to the Bavarian giants.

Born in Spain, Saibari moved to Belgium at a young age but elected to represent Morocco, making his debut in 2023.

Bayern are looking to get even better after a stellar season in 2025-26. The Bavarian giants won a league and cup double while setting a record for goals scored in a Bundesliga campaign, but fell agonisingly short in the Champions League. Bayern were eliminated in the semi-finals by eventual champions Paris Saint-Germain 6-5 on aggregate.