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MATCH REPORT

Egypt beat Australia on penalties to reach last 16

ASHOUR SCORED IN THE 13TH MINUTE BEFORE TEAMMATE HANY'S OWN GOAL

AFP
Arlington, United States

Hossam Abdelmaguid scored the winning penalty as Egypt made history by beating a dogged Australia 4-2 on penalties to reach the World Cup last 16 yesterday.

A tense affair in which Egypt and their off-colour captain Mohamed Salah wasted the better chances had ended 1-1 after 120 minutes in Texas.

Lionel Messi's Argentina loom next for Egypt, as long as the reigning champions avoid a massive upset against tournament debutants Cape Verde in their last-32 encounter. The Pharaohs will celebrate anyway having reached this stage of a World Cup for the first time ever.

Australia coach Tony Popovic threw on experienced goalkeeper Mathew Ryan for the penalty shootout in a last-gasp gamble.

Shooting towards the Egypt fans and whistles raining down, defender Harry Souttar blazed the first penalty over to put the Socceroos on the immediate backfoot.

They next five players all scored, including Salah with the coolest of penalties, before 18-year-old Australian defender Lucas Herrington hit the bar.

Abdelmaguid kept his nerve to send Egypt through to leave Salah in tears of joy and break Australia hearts.

Emam Ashour had given seven-time African champions Egypt the lead from a header after



Egypt's Mohamed Salah and teammates celebrate after Hossam Abdelmaguid scores the penalty past Australia's Mathew Ryan to win the shootout at Dallas Stadium in Arlington, Texas, yesterday. (Reuters)

13 minutes at the air-conditioned home of the Dallas Cowboys.

The early goal put the onus on a shot-shy Australia who scored only twice in the group phase to attack in front of a crowd of 70,000.

With Salah mostly ineffective following injury in Egypt's last game, the Socceroos equalised 10 minutes after half-time when Mohamed Hany headed into his own net.

Both sides sensed history, nei-

ther having won a knockout game before at a men's World Cup, and they went to extra time after some late Egypt pressure.

With nothing to divide them they went to penalties.

Popovic's side had nearly taken the lead with less than five minutes gone as Cristian Volpato - who switched to Australia from Italy on the eve of the World Cup - rattled the top of the crossbar.

Egypt, who won a World Cup match for the first time in the

group phase when they beat New Zealand 3-1, looked nervy at the back.

Slightly against the run of play Hossam Hassan's men took the lead.

Australia forward Nestory Irankunda failed to pick up Ashour, who headed home at the back post from a cross by Karim Hafez for his second goal of the tournament.

The Socceroos had their first shot on target 10 minutes before

the break when full-back Aziz Behich fired tamely at goalkeeper Mostafa Shoubir. His father, Ahmed, played in goal for Egypt at the 1990 World Cup.

The 34-year-old talisman Salah, who came into the match after a hamstring strain, made little impact in an attritional first 45 minutes.

The half ended with Jordan Bos, one of the fastest players at the tournament, in a heap after a robust flying challenge from Rabia.

The wing-back had to be helped from the pitch and was replaced at half-time by Kai Trewin in a blow to Australian hopes.

Seconds after the restart it should have been 2-0 when Egypt's Manchester City attacker Omar Marmoush slid the ball off-target from close range.

Egypt's coach had said he was wary of Australia's physical approach, and so it proved as Hany headed under pressure into his own net from an in-swinging Socceros free-kick.

It was Hany's second own goal of the tournament.

Former Liverpool superstar Salah remained a peripheral figure but was involved in the build-up as Australian stopper Patrick Beach saved athletically deep in added time to keep out Ramy and force another 30 minutes.

Egypt finished normal time the stronger and Salah fired well over early in extra time on his weaker right foot, with penalties looking increasingly inevitable.

Salah though was to prove more reliable in the shootout as Egypt triumphed.

Canada hope healthy captain Davies can help shock Morocco

Canada coach Jesse Marsch knows his side will need every advantage it can get against Morocco in a round of 16 match in Houston today.

That includes figuring out how best to use captain Alphonso Davies coming off an injury. The Bayern Munich left-back played the final 15 minutes of Sunday's 1-0 win over South Africa in his first appearance since sustaining a hamstring injury in early May. He immediately set up Promise David for a shot just outside the left post and provided a boost to the Canadians.

"I thought he had a good impact on the game and, more than anything, what you saw is that South Africa really respected him when he came in," Marsch said. "So, we will be thinking about how to use Alphonso again in this game, whether from the start or off the bench."

Davies has 15 career goals for Canada and has reached a status that he is featured on a collection of McDonald's World Cup cups with the likes of David Beckham, Thierry Henry, Lamine Yamal and Christian Pulisic. Canada claimed their first knockout victory when Stephen Eustaquio scored in the second minute of second-half stoppage time against South Africa. But Marsch knows Morocco are on another level - and not just because Morocco rank sixth in the updated (but unofficial) FIFA world rankings compared to No. 54 South Africa. (Canada are 30th.)

"Preparing for Morocco is like a gory, horrible nightmare," Marsch said. "It's like, I don't want to watch them play. They're too good."

His sleeplessness likely relates to trying to stop attacking midfielder Ismael Saibari, who scored in all three group stage matches. On Wednesday, it was announced he will move to Bayern Munich, joining Davies, from PSV Eindhoven.

After Morocco beat the Netherlands 3-2 on penalties following a 1-1 tie in the round of 32, Morocco coach Mohamed Ouahbi said it's time the world take notice.

"Morocco has gained everybody's respect now," he said. "It's not because of what we've said. We've now shown it. (The players) know that behind them there are millions and millions of people. We played when it was 2 in the morning in Morocco and we're certain that most people stayed awake. That gives you the energy not to give up, to keep going and to believe in yourself."

The teams met in the final group stage match at the 2022 World Cup with Morocco prevailing 2-1. The Moroccans then downed Spain and Portugal to become the first African nation to reach the final four.

Ouahbi knows anything can happen in a knockout match. "Nobody can stop us if we play the football we know how to play," he said. "But nobody is unbeatable. If we get things wrong, we'll go home."

The winner will play France or Paraguay - who meet Saturday in Philadelphia - in the quarter-finals in Foxborough on July 9.



Alphonso Davies

FOCUS

Expanded World Cup brings more shocks, but titans still rule

Reuters
Boston

The expanded 48-team World Cup has made giant-killings significantly more likely, according to experts, but the longer and more demanding tournament still favours the traditional heavyweight sides best equipped to sustain their level through five knockout rounds.

FIFA expanded the tournament from 32 to 48 teams, adding more than 10 days to the schedule. A newly created round of 32 means teams must now survive an extra knockout match to lift the trophy, while eight third-placed finishers from the group stage advanced, creating more potential pathways for lower-ranked sides.

"We have an additional knockout match where the stronger teams will have a chance of one in three, one in four, one in five to proceed. This is the additional risk you get for the serious contenders to be kicked out," Achim Zeileis, Professor of Statistics at Universitaet Innsbruck, told Reuters.

"So it's reduced to 80% or 75% of the probability they had without this additional problem."

Zeileis, part of an international team of researchers using machine-learning models to simulate every possible World Cup match, said the revised group stage also introduces new uncertainty.

With eight of the 12 third-placed teams progressing, the

final round of group matches becomes more strategically complex, with teams able to react to earlier results while permutations over potential opponents multiply.

"So the eight out of 12 (groups) is the much more serious problem because it gives you this time dependency problem that later group matches can strategically react to the earlier group matches, and they also lead to these many permutations that some top-ranked teams play against third-ranked teams, but they don't know which one."

The format also left several teams waiting days after their final group match before discovering whether they had qualified among the best third-placed finishers. The tournament has produced several notable surprises. Four-time champions Germany were eliminated by Paraguay in the round of 32, and three-times finalists Netherlands lost at the same stage to Morocco.

The longer tournament is also changing how leading teams approach matches. With more games to survive and less recovery time between them, coaches are increasingly managing energy and risk rather than trying to dominate every opponent from the outset.

BIGGER CHANCES OF UPSET
"I think it (expanded format) probably it does (affect), because if you take an England ... at times England have appeared to be actually quite conservative in the



Morocco's defender Achraf Hakimi (left) takes part in a training session at the Houston Sports Park in Houston yesterday, on the eve of the 2026 World Cup round of 16 match against Canada. (AFP)

way they've approached games," Simon Chadwick, Professor of Afro-Eurasian Sport, told Reuters.

"In the (group) game against Ghana, against Panama and the (round of 32) against Democratic Republic of Congo, they were much more conservative and cautious, and I think the reason for that is that tournament management has actually become very, very important."

Although the expanded format creates more opportunities for surprise results, sustaining them over five knockout rounds remains a far greater challenge.

"The more teams you include, the bigger the chances of an up-

set," Stefan Szymanski, Emeritus Professor of Sport Management at the University of Michigan, told Reuters.

"But teams now have (in the knockout stage) five games to go to win the World Cup... so it's just not very likely."

Any suggestion that the expanded tournament marks a broader shift in football's balance of power away from Europe and South America is premature, according to Peter Alegi, Professor of History at Michigan State University and author of several books on African football.

MOROCCO THE EXCEPTIONS
Morocco are the notable excep-

tions. The North African side have benefited from sustained government investment in youth development, are the reigning Under-20 world champions and reached the semi-finals of the 2022 World Cup.

As a result, they are widely seen as the only team outside Europe and South America with a realistic chance of breaking the traditional grip on the last four. "I do hope there is a (African) team that makes it to the semi-finals, possibly Morocco," Alegi told Reuters, stressing that any of Morocco's success should not be seen as an accurate reflection on the health of the game across the continent.

"How can Nigeria, a country of 250mn, not make it to the World Cup is really an indictment of how football is organised and managed in that country," he said. "It is an exaggerated representation of the problems facing many African countries."

If the expanded format has made the road to the title less predictable, it has not fundamentally changed the identity of the favourites. Statistical modelling still points towards one of the tournament's traditional heavyweights lifting the trophy.

"We would have to say the top four teams are now Spain, England, France and Argentina," Zeileis said. "I would say these four teams, and it's a pretty open race at this stage. I would not trust my pre-tournament model results to do a good distinction between these four."



T20 WORLD CUP

Australia upbeat about Perry's fitness for final

AFP
London

Australia are increasingly optimistic that "ultimate professional" Elyse Perry will be fit for the Women's T20 World Cup final against arch-rivals England at Lord's tomorrow.

All-rounder Perry retired hurt with a quad problem during Tuesday's eight-wicket semi-final thrashing of the West Indies at the Oval.

But the 35-year-old was put through her paces during Friday's training session, getting through several sprinting drills and also having a lengthy bat in the nets.

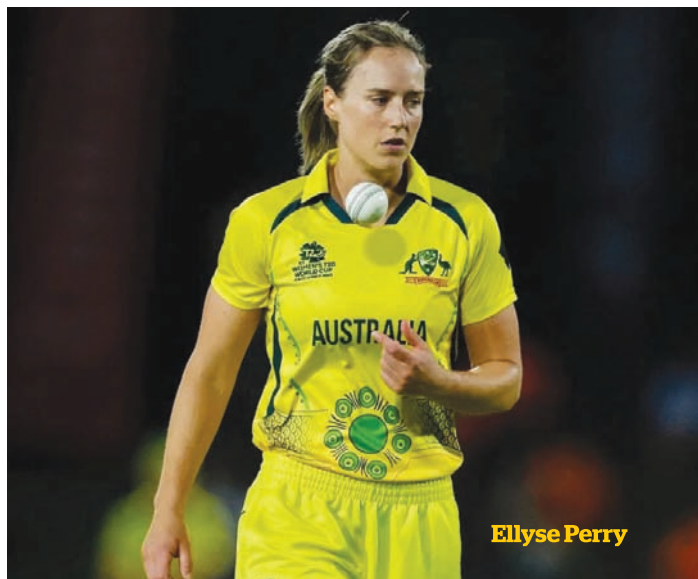
It is batting that has been the stronger suit of Perry, who burst onto the international scene as a teenage fast bowler, in recent years with her 56 at Lord's last week helping Australia achieve a T20 World Cup record chase of 171 that knocked India out of the tournament.

Australia coach Shelley Nitschke suggested Thursday that Perry, widely acknowledged as an all-time great of women's cricket, could play in the final even if less than 100 percent fit.

Perry's Australia team-mate Phoebe Litchfield, however, said Friday: "Pez is great. She's prepping really well and she's the ultimate professional."

"She had a total wellness day yesterday (Thursday), apparently, just getting everything right. The body's a temple for Pez, so it's nice to see her back around the group today and moving really well."

"As you can all imagine, she wants to be out there on Sunday and is doing everything in her ability to do that, which is the true



Elyse Perry

professional that she is."

Both Australia and England have won all six of their games leading into the final.

But Australia, bidding for a record-extending seventh T20 World Cup title, will be favourites to regain the crown they lost in the United Arab Emirates in 2024.

They have held the multi-format women's Ashes since 2015, humiliating England with a 16-0 whitewash series win in Australia 18 months ago.

While lifting trophies has been a common occurrence for Australia during the past decade, it is nine years since England last won a major international tournament, defeating India in a thrilling 50-over World Cup final in front of a capacity crowd at Lord's.

Heather Knight, England's captain in 2017, starred with the bat as England thrashed South Africa by 40 runs in an Oval semi-final on Thursday. Knight made 58 and

shared a decisive fourth-wicket partnership of 133 with current skipper and fellow 2017 World Cup-winner Nat Sciver-Brunt (75) after England had collapsed to 23-3.

Danni Wyatt-Hodge is the only other survivor from that memorable day still in the England side, with Knight saying: "I think we'll draw on (2017) a little bit."

"Playing in the home World Cup is quite unique and me, Nat and Danni are the only people that have done that."

"This is a very fresh-faced team. We play cricket in our own way."

"But I like playing in finals there. They're good fun. Playing at Lord's is always very special."

Knight, 35, added: "Hopefully we can deal with the big occasion and really just try and enjoy it. We'll just try and bring our best and hopefully bring that trophy home."

Dean says Australia final a 'fresh start' for England

England off-spinner **Charlie Dean** believes previous failures against Australia will count for little when they face their arch-rivals in the Women's T20 World Cup final at Lord's on Sunday.

Australia inflicted a humiliating 16-0 whitewash upon England in the multi-format Ashes when the teams last met 18 months ago. And they will be favourites to claim a record-extending seventh T20 crown this weekend, having been dethroned as champions by New Zealand two years ago. Australia have won all six of their games to reach Sunday's finale, including an eight-wicket semi-final thrashing of the West Indies. But England are unbeaten too, putting recent semi-final defeats by South Africa behind them with a 40-run rout of the Proteas at the Oval on Thursday, a match where captain Nat Sciver-Brunt marked her return from injury with a superb 75 after a top-order collapse.

England are now just one game away from winning their first major title since their 50-over World Cup triumph nine years ago. "We've not played them (Australia) in a year or so," said Dean, 25, who as vice-captain deputised as skipper when Sciver-Brunt was sidelined by a calf problem.

"It feels like a fresh start for us a little bit. But we know how brilliant they are as a side, they've dominated the games they've played in, too."

"They're a very skilful team and we know we need to produce our best cricket to beat them. In a final, it's whoever rocks up and plays the best cricket. It doesn't



England's Charlie Dean bowls during the ICC Women's Twenty20 World Cup semi-final against South Africa at The Oval in London on Thursday. (AFP)

matter what's happened before that."

Dean, who made her international debut in 2021, added: "I feel like it is the most confident I've personally been in an England shirt and I feel like that radiates from everyone else as well."

Two years ago, England dropped five catches against the West Indies as they crashed out in the group stages in Dubai and last year's Ashes reverse in Australia was littered with more fielding errors.

While England put down six chances in a group-stage win over the West Indies, there has been a significant improvement in their out-cricking at this tournament, with Sophie Ecclestone leading an impressive team effort against South Africa thanks to two fine

catches.

Dean paid tribute to the unusual methods of England fielding coach Nick Wilton, a former Sussex wicket-keeper, to prepare the team for playing under floodlights.

"He borrows his wife's glittery, sparkly jacket," Dean said. "We do pieces of fielding to each song that he has on and he pumps the music up to try to get us all really hyped up."

"I love the way he goes about getting us really passionate about fielding and doing different things so that it's fun every time."

She added: "We're getting into that space where we really want to show off with our fielding. There's that air of confidence about us now which has really grown over the last year."

PREVIEW

Pogacar undeniable favourite, says Tour de France director

The world's most popular cycling extravaganza begins in Barcelona today

Reuters
Barcelona

Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar is the "undeniable favourite" for this year's Tour de France, which begins in Barcelona today, according to Tour director Christian Prudhomme.

"He is the undeniable favourite, without a doubt," Prudhomme told reporters yesterday, a day before the first-stage team time trial.

The Slovenian, twice defending champion, is bidding for a record-equalling fifth Tour de France to join greats Jacques Anquetil, Bernard Hinault, Eddy Merckx and Miguel Indurain. Pogacar's main rival will once again be Denmark's Jonas Vingegaard.

"Jonas Vingegaard has regained all his abilities, he had certainly lost some after his horrific crash in the Tour of the Basque Country (in 2024)," Prudhomme said. "We've seen him win by a huge margin at Paris-Nice, in Catalonia and in Italy, but we've yet to see him go head-to-head with Pogacar."

The Tour de France director also hailed the precocity of Paul Seixas, the 19-year-old Frenchman who will become the youngest rider to start the Tour since 1937.

"Cycling has always been regarded as a sport in which athletes reach their peak later in life. This is no longer the case for him, but he is not the only one," Prudhomme said.

"I think he can really give us a lot of emotions. He will target the best possible position in the general classification, which leaves room for all sorts of hopes and boldness. "The Tour lover that will always be inside me obviously wants to see a French victory one day. The higher he is in the classification, the happier I'll be," he added. Prudhomme, who began his tenure in 2007 and is set to lead this year his 20th edition, dismissed any ideas that he would step down. "I don't feel completely exhausted yet. I'm not going to stop at the first bend," the Tour director said.

TOUR TO START WITH TEAM TIME-TRIAL 'BANG'

Former Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas said he wants his Netcompany



UAE Team Emirates XRG's Tadej Pogacar during practice ahead of stage 1 of the Tour de France which starts today in Barcelona. (Reuters)

Ineos team to "start with a bang" when the Grande Boucle launches this weekend in Barcelona with an intriguing team time-trial.

It will be the first team race against the clock in seven years and the first time the Tour has opened with one since 1971. But the innovative way riders are being timed has got many tongues wagging about the potential for fireworks, and others hankering after a more traditional approach.

"I love this version because it truly represents what cycling is: an individual sport raced in teams," Prudhomme said. "We would have never brought back the team time-trial if we didn't have this rule."

Traditionally, the team time-trial remains a group effort right to the finish line, with each rider given the same time as the fourth or fifth member of their team to cross the line.

It means that the eight-man group - or at least most of it - has to stay together all the way to the finish.

"You're only as fast as your weakest link," as the saying goes.

But the new rules mean that each rider is given his own time when he crosses the line. Today's largely flat 19.6km course around Barcelona's city centre ends with two short, sharp, climbs.

It means that each team's bigger, heavier time-trial specialists will have the job of shepherding their punchy climbers to the last part of the race before launching them up the Montjuic hill to the finish. It makes for a greater variety of race strategies, but also gives the overall contenders the chance to shine, and even snare a few extra seconds from each other.

'MULTISTAGE ROCKET DYNAMIC'

Ineos come into the stage as the favourites, boasting a team with two former individual time-trial world champions in Filippo Ganna and Tobias Foss, and the 2023 European champion Josh Tarrington.

"Obviously, starting with a TTT is a great opportunity for us," said Thomas, the team's sporting director, who took the coveted yellow jersey in 2017 after winning an opening individual time-

trial. "It's just an exciting goal. Let's get out there, start with a bang and give it the best we can."

Reigning Tour champion Pogacar's UAE team and two-time winner Jonas Vingegaard's Visma-Lease a Bike will also expect to set competitive times.

In Frenchman Kevin Vauquelin, Netcompany have a contender to claim the first yellow jersey of the 2026 Tour.

He was furious last month when he missed the chance to take the leader's jersey at the Tour Auvergne-Rhone-Alpes when the team slowed to wait for Oscar Onley after the Briton dropped his chain and had to fix it while cruising along at around 60kph. Even so, Vauquelin said then: "I like this multistage rocket dynamic" as it "shakes up the general classification more".

Fellow Frenchman Warren Barguil is more of a traditionalist.

"I'm old school. The team time-trial is a team discipline," he said. "In terms of attractiveness, watching on television, it's maybe more exciting to watch the new format because there are different strategies..."

CRICKET

Stokes bids farewell to fans after 'mad 15 years'

AFP
London

Ben Stokes posted one last farewell to international cricket yesterday, thanking fans and team-mates alike for a "mad 15 years".

The 35-year-old former England captain retired in extraordinary fashion during the third Test against New Zealand at Trent Bridge, making his exit public on the fourth afternoon and promptly taking a wicket next ball.

His last match as an England international capped a rollercoaster few weeks for the celebrated all-rounder that started with a morale-boosting win in the first Test at Lord's, only for Stokes to miss New Zealand's thumping win at the Oval for breaking a team midnight curfew at a London nightclub.

He returned for one last stand in Nottingham after receiving an official conduct warning, with his departure a chaotic affair that ended with Stokes being promoted to open the batting as England suffered a mammoth 160-run defeat that gave New Zealand a deserved 2-1 series-win.

His exit was a frantic affair, concluding with his promotion to open the batting in his final Test innings and a thumping 160-run defeat to New Zealand.

Stokes, posting on X after a couple of days away with his family, thanked colleagues and supporters for their backing.

"It's been a mad 15 years," he wrote. "It's had everything thrown in there, from the highest highs to the lowest lows (on and off the field)."

"My time was up, and no one was going to be able to make that decision other than me. But in the meantime, I just want to say I love every single England fan and every single cricket fan who's supported me over the years."

"I love every single person I've walked out onto the field with representing England."

Stokes, who intends to continue his career with county side Durham, added: "I could go on and on, but I hope you get the gist of how much I loved doing what I did for 15 years. I'm looking forward to being a fan and supporting the team, and the odd day in hospitality won't go amiss."

"Family, friends, teammates, fans...I love you (sic) all."



TENNIS

Djokovic ties Federer with 105th win at Wimbledon

The Serbian reaches Wimbledon fourth round for the 18th time

Reuters
London

Novak Djokovic has spent the latter half of his glittering career equalling records set by former rival Roger Federer and the Serb was at it again as he notched up win number 105 at Wimbledon to reach the fourth round yesterday.

The 39-year-old, eyeing Federer's men's record eight Wimbledon singles crowns, suffered a third-set wobble against dangerous Frenchman Arthur Rinderknech and was pushed hard before closing out a 7-5 6-4 1-6 7-6(4) Centre Court victory.

Another one against Russian qualifier Roman Safiullin will take him to second alone on the all-time Wimbledon match win list behind only Martina Navratilova's 120.

"I propose a match-up between me and Roger for 106," seven-time Wimbledon champion Djokovic joked in his on-court interview after celebrating the win with some "dad dancing" for his laughing daughter Tara.

"Let's just stop it here and call Roger to come."

DIVING LIKE A GOALKEEPER

The way Djokovic dispatched Greece's twice former Grand Slam runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas in a round-two masterclass showed again that despite the passing years, there are few players who can touch him on grass.

It was a similar story against 30-year-old Rinderknech for the opening two sets on a sun-bathed arena as his precision shot-making and trademark elasticity had the crowd roaring their approval and Djokovic lapping it up.

At one point, after diving like a goalkeeper to make a volley as he served for the opening set, Djokovic, who again walked on wearing his Federer-esque blazer, made a bow.

Rinderknech was great value though, playing his full part in an absorbing duel littered with drop shots, lobs, crafty angles and some



Serbia's Novak Djokovic in action during his third-round match against France's Arthur Rinderknech at Wimbledon yesterday. (AFP)



Italy's Jannik Sinner reacts during his third-round match against Jenson Brooksby of the US yesterday. (Reuters)

thunderous power from the tall Frenchman. Even when the 25th seeded Rinderknech romped away with the third set, coming close to serving Djokovic his first 6-0 bagel at Wimbledon, it seemed like only a temporary diversion away from a record-extending 407th Grand Slam win.

"I'm not really thinking about how many more I can get, I'm just really trying to win the match on a given day," Djokovic said.

Djokovic is now four wins away from a record 25th Grand Slam title and becoming the oldest player in the professional era to win a singles Grand Slam title.

Sinner beats the heat and breezes past Brooksby

Jannik Sinner's Wimbledon title defence gathered pace yesterday as the world number one swept aside American Jenson Brooksby 6-4 6-3 6-4 to enter the fourth round.

Having been dragged into a five-set battle in his opener and forced to negotiate two tough tiebreaks in the next, the Italian looked increasingly at home on the grass of Court One and gave Brooksby very few opportunities to disrupt his rhythm.

"I'm very happy about the win, I'm trying to improve every day," said Sinner, who arrived at the All England Club without a competitive match on grass courts after his shock French Open defeat in the second round. "A small step forwards today, trying to get better. If I want to go far in this tournament, there are a couple of things that we need to work on. I've never played him (before). Whoever is in the fourth round of a Grand Slam deserves to be there. So it's going to be a tough match," Sinner said.

WORLD NUMBER 1 SABALENKA CRUSHES OSTAPENKO

LONDON: No. 1 seed Aryna Sabalenka yesterday navigated a tricky third round in style to reach the second week of Wimbledon for the fourth time, defeating Jelena Ostapenko 6-4, 6-4 in 1 hour and 32 minutes, holding off a late charge by the former Roland Garros champion from 4-1 down in the second set. Sabalenka has now reached the second week of the last 15 Grand Slams that she has contested dating back to Wimbledon 2021, and 20 times in total.

She'll face fellow four-time major champion and No. 14 seed Naomi Osaka tomorrow for the fifth time, fourth time this year, and first time on grass - and, oddly, for the fifth time in the fourth round of a tournament.

Though Osaka won their first encounter at the 2018 US Open 6-3, 2-6, 6-4, eight years on Sabalenka has gained the upper hand. The World No. 1 has conceded just one set in three meetings in Indian Wells, Madrid and Roland Garros.

Elsewhere in yesterday's third-

round action, Osaka ended her long wait to reach the Wimbledon fourth round for the first time with a 6-1, 6-3 win against Australian Daria Kasatkina. Osaka has caused a stir at Wimbledon with her eye-catching outfits, but the 28-year-old is finally stealing the spotlight with her performances as well. She needed just 65 minutes to dispatch Kasatkina, setting up a fourth-round clash against Sabalenka.

'I'M REALLY HAPPY'

"I'm really happy. In my career I'd never won on this court. I'm just glad to have made a really good memory here," Osaka said yesterday.

American fourth seed Jessica Pegula thrashed Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-1, 6-3.

Swiss 11th seed Belinda Bencic, who reached the Wimbledon semi-finals last year, beat Russian Anna Kalinskaya in three sets. Daniil Medvedev, seeded 8, was shocked by world no. 74 Jan-Lennard Struff in straight sets.



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka in action during her third-round match against Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko. (Reuters)

MOTORSPORT

Hamilton puts Ferrari on pole for Silverstone sprint

Reuters
Silverstone

Lewis Hamilton continued a decades-long love affair with Silverstone by seizing pole position for today's British Grand Prix sprint race as his home crowd hailed their Ferrari hero's achievement.

The seven-times world champion was fastest in sole practice and all three phases of yesterday's qualifying session, finishing the day with a best lap of one minute 28.376 seconds on a sunny afternoon at Silverstone.

Mercedes's Formula One leader Kimi Antonelli was 0.011 slower than Hamilton, who has won a record nine British Grands Prix wins since his 2007 debut with McLaren.

"I love this place and I love this crowd. I can't express to you how big a dream it is," said Hamilton after stepping out of his car and saluting the adoring crowd.

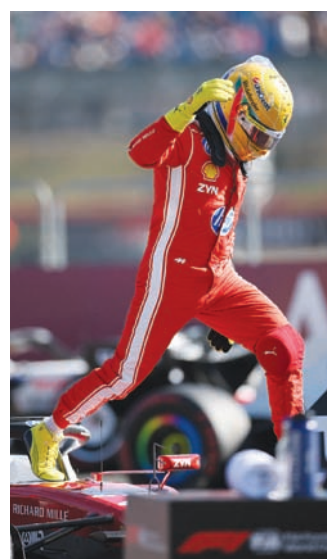
"The car has felt great today... I'm really grateful to get that pole. I was quick through all the sessions but still, it was only 11 milliseconds, so it was very close to these guys."

Red Bull's Max Verstappen qualified third with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc fourth and George Russell, Antonelli's teammate and closest rival, fifth. McLaren's world champion Lando Norris, last year's winner, starts sixth.

Antonelli is 40 points clear of Russell after eight rounds and can extend that today, with eight points going to the winner of the 100-km race. The pole was Hamilton's first of any sort this season and first also since a sprint qualifying in China last year. The



Ferrari's British driver Lewis Hamilton (also right) drives during the sprint qualifying session ahead of the British Grand Prix at the Silverstone motor racing circuit, central England, yesterday. (AFP)



41-year-old great, who took his first Grand Prix win for Ferrari in Spain last month, has yet to take a regular pole since July 2023 when he was at Mercedes.

Throughout the session Hamilton made the difference, the Briton pushing himself to another level as has been the case so often in the past at a circuit where he has lived some of the great afternoons of his career.

"We are ahead of Mercedes and Red Bull and these guys have so much power," he said. "They have been doing amazing all year but my team just won't let up and they keep pushing and that is what I am so proud of."

"We didn't expect we would be coming to Silverstone and competing for the front row. We really, really didn't. But this is an amazing surprise and I am ecstatic."

FERRARI CONFIRM HAMILTON STAYING NEXT YEAR

Ferrari team boss Fred Vasseur yesterday quelled speculation when he confirmed that seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton would stay with the Italian team next year.

"Last year, I underestimated the scale of the transition from Mercedes to Ferrari," Vasseur told the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*. "Everything was new to him and Lewis isn't one of those drivers who moves team every two three years."

Asked if he could confirm Hamilton for Ferrari in 2027, Vasseur said: "Yes."

"He knows the tools, the people and our approach now," said Vasseur. "And with these good results, he's entered a virtuous circle."

Vasseur said also that this year's Ferrari was not designed around Hamilton's requirements or style.

"Not at all, we don't tailor our F1 cars to one driver or another," he said.

Ferrari also announced yesterday that, despite reservations, it was intended that Hamilton would join Charles Leclerc in tomorrow's pre-race parade lap of mini-cars made of Lego.

The event has drawn a mixed reception among drivers, disenchanted by the amount of unpaid marketing work they are required to do for Formula One.

Four-time champion Max Verstappen had joined Hamilton and others in criticising the stunt yesterday, saying he did not like to see the drivers made to look like "kids and clowns".

GOLF

Glover, Zac share lead at John Deere Classic

Reuters
Silvis, Illinois

Lucas Glover and Zac Blair share the first-round lead at the John Deere Classic after posting bogey-free, 8-under 63s on Thursday in Silvis, Ill.

Zach Johnson, Lee Hodges and German Stephan Jaeger are one stroke behind the co-leaders after one trip around TPC Deere Run. Davis Riley used a hole-in-one and an eagle on consecutive holes to shoot a 6-under 65, where he's tied with Ben Kohles and Patrick Fishburn.

Glover, 46, birdied seven of his first 11 holes before cooling down the rest of the way.

The 2009 US Open champion won the John Deere in 2021 and has collected three of his six PGA Tour titles in this decade. He said the 63 - his lowest round of the year by four shots - showed him his game is "still there."

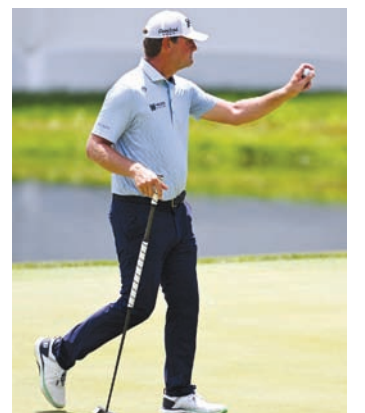
"It's easy to lose belief in that when you've been struggling," Glover said.

"Like I said, I saw some good things Sunday (at the Travelers Championship), even though I finished wherever I finished, way down there. Saw some good stuff. Been having just a lot of those days where my ball seemed to just roll away from the hole. Today it kind of rolled towards it, so maybe it's turning."

Blair, meanwhile, is searching for his first PGA Tour victory. The 35-year-old started his day on the back nine, then went birdie-eagle at Nos. 1-2 for a boost. He led the field in strokes gained on approach.

"Just trying not to chase every flag, maybe, and do dumb things and just get a lot of looks," Blair said.

"Felt like I did a pretty good job with that."



Lucas Glover waves to the spectators after making his putt on the 18th hole during the first round of the John Deere Classic golf tournament. (Reuters)

LIV GOLFER ACKNOWLEDGES LEAGUE'S FUTURE 'NOT LOOKING GREAT'

Carlos Ortiz admitted yesterday that the future of LIV Golf looks bleak, now that the Saudi group that bankrolled it said it will stop paying the bills.

"It's looking a little bit tough, hopefully there's a way forward," Ortiz said following his second round at the BMW International Open in Germany, a stop on the DP World Tour. "I mean, I honestly don't know all the situation, but it's not looking great, obviously, as we all know."

"That's a shame. I've really enjoyed my time playing all around the world and it's been awesome playing with my team." Ortiz, a 35-year-old from Mexico, has one LIV Golf win (LIV Golf Houston, 2024) and one PGA Tour victory (Houston Open, 2020). He joined LIV in 2022. He said yesterday that should LIV cease operations after the 2026 season, he knows he will come through just fine.

"We'll see what happens, you know, but whatever happens, I'm sure I'll find a place to play."



FOCUS

Portugal advance thanks to last-gasp Ramos winner

Ronaldo becomes the oldest player to score in a World Cup knockout match, Portugal will face Spain on Monday

AFP
Los Angeles, United States

Substitute Goncalo Ramos' headed goal edged Portugal into the last 16 of the World Cup on Thursday after Croatia were dramatically denied an equalizer by VAR.

Ramos settled a classic World Cup game when he connected with a superb pass from Rafael Leao in the fourth minute of stoppage time to snuff out a Croatia team which had created the lion's share of the chances in sapping heat in Toronto.

Croatia thought they had snatched a goal in the dying seconds of extra time, but Josko Gvardiol's goal was chalked off for offside.

The Croatians were left stunned by the decision, and their fans began hurling rubbish on the pitch.

In the seconds before Gvardiol's disallowed goal, the Portuguese bench and coach Roberto Martinez were growing increasingly livid, begging match officials for the final whistle.

Cristiano Ronaldo played his role in the victory, stroking home a penalty that cancelled out Ivan Perisic's opener.



Portugal's forward Goncalo Ramos (also inset) heads the ball to score his team's second goal during the 2026 World Cup round of 32 match against Croatia at the Toronto Stadium in Toronto. (AFP)

It was Ronaldo's first ever goal in the knockout phase of the World Cup, and it made him the oldest scorer in that phase in the tour-

nament's history. His remarkable international career will now have another chapter when Portugal face Spain in Dallas on Monday.

After the match, Ronaldo shared a long exchange with Croatian legend Luka Modric, one of football's all-time greats, whose World Cup

career has almost certainly ended with Thursday's defeat. The match marked the first time that two outfield players aged over 40 took to the same pitch in a World Cup.

At the end, the Portugal players also paid tribute to late teammate Diogo Jota, who was killed in a car crash a year ago, by holding up his number 21 shirt.

After a lacklustre first half, Croatian veteran Perisic stunned the Portuguese by slotting the ball under the advancing Portugal goalkeeper Diogo Costa in the 53rd minute.

Within minutes, Ronaldo had the ball in the net after controlling a long pass, but his effort was disallowed for offside.

But Portugal got level when Renato Veiga was grabbed by Croatia's Nikola Vlastic in the penalty area and after a VAR check, the referee pointed to the spot.

Ronaldo stepped up to convert the penalty with ease, hitting the ball straight down the middle of the goal and pumping his fists with joy afterwards, triggering deafening cheers in the Toronto stadium.

In a pulsating game, Manchester City forward Mateo Kovacic's low shot was pushed onto a post by 'keeper Costa's fingertips.

Still Croatia pushed and Peta Sucic had the ball in the net but the assistant referee's flag was up for a clear offside. Ronaldo was withdrawn in the 81st minute to allow Ruben Neves to come on.

The sellout crowd of 43,000 erupted with appreciation as Ronaldo went off - unsure in the moment if he would appear again at in World Cup.

Croatia continued to create more chances than their opponents and Mario Pasalic came so close to winning the game with a header at the far post, but it bounced just wide. But when Ramos connected, the net bulged and Portugal were through.

While the crowd tilted towards Portugal, the sizeable and vocal Croatia contingent smothered the stadium with boos every time Ronaldo touched the ball.

Tens of thousands of people with Portuguese lineage live in and around Toronto and Ronaldo's presence in the city also sparked waves of enthusiasm - and chaos on a major highway a day before the match.

A multi-lane expressway was forced to close Wednesday when hundreds of fans lined the shoulder hoping to get a glimpse of the passing Portuguese team.

'COINCIDENCE OF LIFE' SAYS RONALDO AFTER JOTA TRIBUTE A YEAR FROM DEATH

Cristiano Ronaldo said it was a "coincidence of life" that Portugal's World Cup last-16 win against Croatia on Thursday came almost a year since the death of his late teammate Diogo Jota.

Ronaldo and his teammates posed with Jota's number 21 jersey after their gripping 2-1 win against Croatia sent Portugal into the last 16.

"The coincidence of life, it's unbelievable," Ronaldo said. "We knew it before the game. It was a so special moment. We speak today, our group, about that, the coincidence of life. It's unbelievable."

Ronaldo also pulled on a number 21 jersey at the end of the game to conduct interviews. Portugal coach Roberto Martinez said the victory had special meaning. "For Portuguese fans this is a very happy day and also because of the meaning of the game, we've moved to the next phase, to the

round of 16. In a year where we honored Diogo Jota." Jota and his brother Andre Silva were killed when their car crashed as the Liverpool player drove through Spain on July 3 last year on his way back to report for pre-season training in England. Jota's close friend Ruben Neves, the Portugal midfielder, now wears the number 21 for the national team. He kissed a wristband bearing the Liverpool forward's name as he stood for the anthem at the end of which Jota's image was cast on the big screen, drawing cheers from every corner of the stadium.

Cristiano Ronaldo and his Portugal teammates celebrate with a shirt in commemoration of late teammate Diogo Jota after the 2-1 win over Croatia at Toronto Stadium in Toronto. (AFP)



MATCH REPORT

Switzerland sweep past Algeria into last 16

Reuters
Vancouver

Switzerland's Brel Embolo struck early and Dan Ndoye added a second after the break as they cruised to a 2-0 win over Algeria on Thursday and into the last 16 at the World Cup, where they will meet Colombia or Ghana back in Vancouver next week.

The victory was Switzerland's first in the knockout stage since 1938, and they will fancy their chances in the next round after a tactical masterclass orchestrated by coach Murat Yakin.

They shifted formations and laid traps for Algeria before hitting them with two sucker-punch goals that decided a contest short on excitement, but full of intrigue and nuance.

Pitted against a familiar foe in Algeria coach Vladimir Petkovic, who had seven years at the helm of Switzerland between 2014 and 2021, Yakin set his team up to absorb early pressure and strike on the break, and that is exactly what they did.

"We couldn't underestimate Algeria and we had to be clinical, that clinical finishing made the difference today," striker Embolo said.

"It gave us the energy we needed in the first half. We could have been even more ruthless in the second half. We played with great maturity. We have to stay humble and keep working."

SWISS GRAB EARLY LEAD THROUGH EMBOLO

Switzerland's opener was as simple as it was effective.



Dan Ndoye of Switzerland celebrates scoring his team's second goal during the FIFA World Cup 2026 Round of 32 match against Algeria at BC Place Vancouver in Vancouver, British Columbia. (AFP)

They won the ball in their own half and sent 20-year-old Johan Manzambi off down the left on the counter, and he squared for Embolo to steer the ball into the net from close range in the 10th minute.

The lead secured, Switzerland shifted to a five-man midfield out of possession, snuffing out the space and challenging the Algerians to play through them, but Petkovic's charges struggled to break their opponents down.

Algeria's best chance came in first-half stoppage time when Ibrahim Maza dragged a snap shot wide of the near post, one of few efforts on goal they managed in the game.

The Swiss struck again almost immediately after the break, attacking down the right before a half-hearted clearance from Rafik Belghali ended up at the feet of Ndoye and the winger placed his shot beyond the dive of goalkeeper Luca Zidane.

Algeria captain Riyad Mahrez could have pulled a goal back moments later but he fired straight at a defender from a central position, summing up a frustrating evening for the Algerians.

With Granit Khaka steering Switzerland's defensive shape, they went back to their original game-plan of ceding possession and launching lightning-fast counter-attacks, but the Alge-

rians were wary of committing players forward lest they concede again.

Despite the sell-out crowd at BC Place, the last 15 minutes were played in virtual silence, only broken by cheers and then groans as Swiss substitute Fabian Rieder somehow contrived to miss with the goal at his mercy, scuffing his shot back across goal where a grateful Zidane was able to avert the danger.

Fortunately for Switzerland it had no bearing on the outcome as they celebrated moving into a last-16 clash on Tuesday.

Ndoye capped a superb performance with his well-taken goal, revealing he had waited a long time for it.

"Before the World Cup, I hadn't played for a long time, so I had to get back into the swing of things. I was really looking for that goal, and sometimes when you look for it too much, it doesn't come," the Nottingham Forest said.

"Today, I started playing by telling myself, 'Just play the way you know how, don't overthink it,' and it came naturally. Our strength is knowing how to play as a team."

Algeria captain Riyad Mahrez announced that the game was his last for the national team.

"The goal was to progress, and I think it was a game that was within our reach. We conceded two goals on mistakes, and at this level, we pay dearly for that," he said.

Asked if Thursday's defeat would be his last match at the World Cup, the 35-year-old went one step further.

"It's my last appearance even with the national team. It was my last game," he said.

SPOTLIGHT

Modric praised as career appears at end

AFP
Toronto

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic and Portugal's Roberto Martinez paid tribute on Thursday to Luka Modric, who almost certainly played his last World Cup match.

After a gut-wrenching 2-1 loss to Portugal in Toronto, Croatia midfielder Modric, 40, shared a long exchange with 41-year-old Cristiano Ronaldo - two football greats nearing the end of their international playing careers.

"This was probably his last World Cup, and I'm sorry that it ended this way," said an emotional Dalic.

"He has shown his quality and his character and of course he was leading Croatia until the very end."

Martinez lauded the Croatian great for having "inspired millions of kids."

"His example is going to stay in the folklore of football forever," Portugal's coach told reporters, highlighting Modric's in-match thinking.

It's not often that "we talk about that player that can put his foot on the ball and make a decision. I think Modric is the beautiful example of that."

"Depending on how the game goes, he finds the space, he makes the right call. It's incredible to see him play," Martinez said, praising Modric for playing "the game like a young man."



Croatia's Luka Modric acknowledges fans after the match against Portugal in Toronto. (Reuters)

Modric was the driving force behind Croatia's runner-up finish at the 2018 World Cup and their third-place finish in Qatar four years ago.

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 the 2026 tournament.

Ronaldo, who group stage performance was criticized, played his role in Thursday's victory, stroking home an equalizing second-half penalty.

Dalic said Modric was one of Croatia's "key players" on Thursday.

The AC Milan midfielder marked his 200th international appearance in a group-stage match last month, and was hoisted in the air by his teammates following that June 23 victory over Panama.