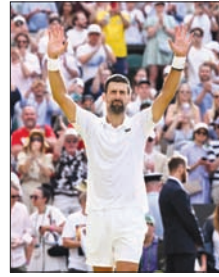


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MATCH REPORT

Norway knock Brazil out to enter quarter-finals

MANCHESTER CITY STRIKER HAALAND'S LATE DOUBLE STUNS FIVE-TIME CHAMPS

AFP
East Rutherford, United States

Erling Haaland scored two late goals yesterday to send Norway through to a first World Cup quarter-final with a stunning 2-1 win over Brazil that condemned the five-time champions to their earliest exit since 1990.

Norway goalkeeper Orlan Nyland produced a sensational display and saved a first-half penalty from Bruno Guimaraes before Haaland struck twice in the last 11 minutes to stun Brazil at MetLife Stadium.

Neymar pulled a goal back deep into stoppage time with Brazil's second spot-kick of the match. Haaland's brace took him level with Lionel Messi on seven goals for the tournament as Norway booked a showdown against either co-hosts Mexico or England in Miami on July 11. For Brazil, who hired Carlo Ancelotti in a bid to end a 24-year World Cup drought, it is the sixth straight tournament where they have been knocked out by European opposition. The last time Brazil failed to reach at least the quarter-finals came 36 years ago, when they lost 1-0 to arch-rivals Argentina in last 16.

Gabriel Martinelli was rewarded for scoring the stoppage-time winner against Japan in the previous round, as the Arsenal winger replaced the injured Lucas Paqueta in the lone change to Brazil's line-up.

Norway were boosted by the return of Julian Ryerson, the Borussia Dortmund defender fit again after missing the past two games with a thigh injury. Patrick Berg thought he had given Norway the lead inside three minutes, but his effort was ruled out for offside in the build-up. After a rocky start, Brazil won a penalty when Kristoffer Ajer clattered into Matheus Cunha in the box. The Brazilians were left furious as referee Ismail Elfath initially waved away their appeals, but VAR intervened and the decision was overturned. Guimaraes stepped up, but Nyland guessed correctly, diving low

to his left to push away the Newcastle midfielder's tame penalty. Nyland again came to Norway's rescue, getting a crucial touch to Martinelli's low drive as it flashed across goal, denying Guimaraes a simple tap-in. When Martin Odegaard lost possession on the edge of his own box, Nyland once more saved Norway as he stuck out a leg to thwart Vinicius Junior.

Haaland had struggled to make a significant impact, but his strength created a glorious opening for Norway before half-time.

The striker caused problems for Gabriel Magalhaes and Marquinhos in the Brazil defence before the ball broke kindly for Odegaard, whose effort was well saved by Alisson Becker. Norway coach Stale Solbakken brought on Oscar Bobb and Andreas Schjelderup at the break for Antonio Nusa and Alexander Sorloth, but it was the introduction of Endrick that almost changed the game immediately. Vinicius slipped Endrick through on goal with a delightful outside-of-the-foot pass, only for the teenager to dink wide as Nyland came out to close him down.

Nyland continued to frustrate Brazil, producing a good save to claw away Rayan's fierce strike before making another outstanding stop to deny Guimaraes, although the offside flag went up. The arrival of Neymar in the 67th minute drew huge roars from the largely pro-Brazil crowd. It was Norway who eventually broke the deadlock though, and it came through an inevitable source. Schjelderup whipped in a cross from the left and soared above Gabriel to power a header into the corner.

As Brazil desperately chased an equaliser, an incredible fingertip save from a backpedalling Nyland prevented Ajer from looping the ball into his own net. Haaland gave Norway breathing space as he hammered low into the corner from the edge of the box in the 90th minute. It proved vital when Neymar converted a penalty in the 10th minute of stoppage time, preceded by an unseemly spat with 'keeper Nyland, following an elbow on Casemiro.



Erling Haaland of Norway celebrates with teammate Andreas Schjelderup after scoring his team's second goal during the FIFA World Cup Round of 16 match against Brazil at New York New Jersey Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey, yesterday. (AFP)

Unprecedented U-turn by FIFA to clear Balogun for US v Belgium clash

United States striker **Folarin Balogun** will be available for their World Cup last-16 clash with Belgium after FIFA suspended his ban for a red card yesterday in an unprecedented move that was welcomed by US president Donald Trump. Balogun scored his third goal of the World Cup in the 2-0 win over Bosnia but was shown a red card in the second half for planting his boot into the ankle of Tarik Muharemovic, leaving the US to navigate the remainder of the game a man down.



The 25-year-old was sent off after a VAR review, with US coach Mauricio Pochettino saying it was never a sending-off but FIFA is allowing him to play - without rescinding the red card.

"In line with article 27 of the FIFA Disciplinary Code, the implementation of the match suspension is suspended for a probationary period of one year," FIFA said in a statement. "If Folarin Balogun commits another infringement of a similar nature and gravity during the probationary period, the suspension shall be revoked and the sanction enforced without prejudice to any additional sanction imposed for the new infringement."

The judicial body has the discretion to fully or partially suspend the implementation of a disciplinary sanction. "Thank you to FIFA for doing what was right, and reversing a great injustice," Trump wrote on Truth Social while the White House celebrated Balogun's reinstatement in the squad with a post on X saying: "USA-USA-USA." US Soccer accepted the decision. "(We) are pleased that Folarin Balogun is eligible to compete tomorrow," it said in a statement.

SPOTLIGHT

Reflective Ronaldo takes on critics 'trying to kill me for 23 years'

AFP
Arlington, United States

Cristiano Ronaldo admitted at the World Cup yesterday he is not the player he once was but came out fighting against critics "trying to kill me for the past 23 years".

The 41-year-old Portugal superstar was in turns bullish, jovial and sentimental on the eve of the last-16 showdown with Spain at the home of the Dallas Cowboys in what will be his last World Cup.

One of the finest footballers in history, the former Manchester United, Juventus and Real Madrid superstar refused to say when he will end his international career.

But to numerous questions about what lies ahead and the flak that has come his way in recent years, Ronaldo conceded that "I am not the player I used to be".

But the attacker and Portugal skipper said, "I am not doing too bad", pointing out that he has scored three goals in North America - two against Uzbekistan in a 5-0 thrashing in the group phase and a penalty in the 2-1 win over Croatia in the last 32.

Relishing taking on journalists eager to ask about his future and the harsh spotlight on him, he told reporters: "It's been like this since I was 18, it is not going to change."

"I always put body and soul trying to get our goals - playing or not playing, I will always have an important role to play. As I said before, (I will stop) when I choose, not when you choose, you always ask the same question. I don't want to draw attention to this because it is less important."

Ronaldo said this was the World Cup he had enjoyed the most, citing the "emotions" of it on and off the pitch. Asked again about his international future, he shot back: "You have been trying to kill me for the past 23 years, but you must have seen that is not worth it, it's a waste of time, but you try and try and try and try."

"I am so used to this," said the veteran, who is the leading scorer in the history of international football. Ronaldo, who was clapped out of the press conference, added: "I am not going to be more Cristiano Ronaldo or less because I win the World Cup."

"Age gives you maturity and experience to see how relative



Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo answers to journalists during a press conference at the Dallas Stadium in Arlington, Texas, yesterday, on the eve of the World Cup round of 16 match against Spain. (AFP)

things can be," he said. "I even say thanks for the attacks I feel after I turned 40... the criticism is how you grow, so thank you for doing this."

Ronaldo even picked out one reporter because "I know he does not like me" and challenged him to ask a question.

"To speak to you, some of you, those who do not like us especially - I remember people's faces very well," he said grinning. "Listen, I am going to be honest: whatever happens tomorrow, Cristiano Ronaldo will leave with a clear conscience - not 100 percent but 1,000 percent because in life and football I gave everything."

On the encounter in Texas with Spain, a country he considers a second home after playing for Real Madrid, Ronaldo conceded Portugal were underdogs. "It's going to be a very hard battle," he said.

"We need a lot of faith, we need to run and we need to be brave."

Spain's Rodri warns Portugal best yet to come

Spain captain Rodri warned Portugal on the eve of today's World Cup last-16 clash that the European champions can still get a lot better. Spain, one of the favourites in North America, were held to a shock 0-0 draw with debutants Cape Verde to open their title charge. They then beat Saudi Arabia 4-0 and Uruguay 1-0 to top their group, before a statement 3-0 win over a dogged but limited Austria in the last 32.

That performance served notice to their rivals, and midfield general Rodri said that was just the start.

"Spain's evolution (at the tournament) has been gradual," the 30-year-old Manchester City ace told reporters on Sunday ahead of the meeting with Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal in Texas. "Obviously in a sense that is normal - in the first games you try to adapt to a different environment, different pitch, different type of teams you face, it is never easy."

"So I think in a gradual way, always growing and always knowing that the big things are coming now." Spain's goalless stalemate with Cape Verde came as a huge surprise, but Rodri said: "We didn't lose our heads, we stayed calm and I think right now we still have a big gap of improvement."

Rodri, who has been heavily linked with a

move back to Spain, with Real Madrid, said "details" will decide the winner at the home of the Dallas Cowboys.

"I think whoever is able to be more clinical, whoever is able to bring more intensity, more aggressiveness, play more in the opponent's half, I think will win," he added. Spain and Portugal both have squads packed with quality, especially in midfield.

But Luis de la Fuente's 2024 Euros winners go into a tantalising showdown as favourites. Rodri's fellow midfielder Mikel Merino, a Premier League winner with Arsenal, said the tournament had shown that nothing could be taken for granted.

"I see a real competition where every national team is ready to face the opposition, you see big names, big national teams are struggling or suffering against teams that are supposedly lower," he said ahead of a final training session.

"This shows us that the respect we have to have for every opponent is massive. Hopefully we can win tomorrow and keeping making history with our national team." Spain lifted the World Cup for the first time in 2010, but then shockingly went out in the group stage four years later. In 2018 and 2022 they exited prematurely, in the last 16.



Rodri of Spain looks on during a training session at Cotton Bowl in Dallas, Texas, yesterday. (AFP)



ANNOUNCEMENT

Babar to captain Pakistan on WI and England Test tours

AFP
Lahore

Pakistan on Sunday replaced struggling Test captain Shan Masood with Babar Azam, who will start a third stint as skipper on the tours of the West Indies and England starting later this month. Masood, 36, took over from Azam in December 2023 and led the side to 12 defeats in 16 Tests. Pakistan finished ninth and last in the last World Test Championship cycle.

They again lie ninth in the current cycle after a 2-0 series defeat in Bangladesh in May.

"Azam will be our new Test captain as we feel that Masood could not lead as desired," said Pakistan selector Aaqib Javed at a news conference to announce the



Pakistan selection committee members Aaqib Javed (centre), Asad Shafiq (left) and Misbah-ul-Haq attend a press conference in Lahore yesterday. The committee has replaced struggling Test captain Shan Masood with Babar Azam. (AFP)

squad yesterday. "The selection committee discussed who could be the best player to lead Pakistan and Azam is the best option," said

Javed. This will be top-order batsman Azam's third spell in charge of the side, having stepped down in November 2023 and then again



Babar Azam back for third stint as Pakistan skipper.

in October 2024. Pakistan will play the first of two Tests against the West Indies in Tarouba, Trinidad, from July 25. The second begins in Port-of-Spain from August 2,

Pakistan will then travel to England for Tests at Headingley, beginning August 19, Lord's from August 27 and Edgbaston starting on September 9. Fast bowlers

Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasan Ali were omitted after being part of the squad that lost 2-0 in Bangladesh. Selectors awarded a place to 20-year-old uncapped fast bowler Ubaid Shah, the younger brother of Naseem, who was left out of the squad. Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Abbas and Mohammad Ali were the three other fast bowlers selected. Uncapped middle-order batsman Awaiz Zafar and left-arm spinner Ali Usman were included for the first time.

SQUAD: Babar Azam (captain), Aamer Jamal, Abdullah Fazal, Ali Usman, Azan Awaiz, Imam-ul-Haq, Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Rizwan, Awaiz Zafar, Ghazi Ghori, Sajid Khan, Salman Agha, Shan Masood, Ubaid Shah, Saud Shakeel (subject to fitness for England).

CRICKET

Australia crush England to win T20 World Cup

AUSTRALIA COMPLETE SEVEN-WICKET WIN AT LORD'S



Australia's Sophie Molineux holds the trophy as she celebrates with teammates after winning the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in the final against England at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters
London

Australia crushed England by seven wickets in a one-side final to land their seventh T20 women's World Cup at a sold-out Lord's yesterday.

A sparkling second-wicket partnership between Beth Mooney and Phoebe Litchfield helped Australia to chase down a victory target of 151 with 17 balls to spare.

Having beaten England 16-0 in the multi-format Ashes 18 months ago, Australia comprehensively outplayed their rivals again in regaining the trophy.

England's under-par total of 150-4 was built around an unbroken partnership of 80 between captain Nat Sciver-Brunt and Freya Kemp.

Sciver-Brunt made 58 from 53 balls, with Kemp striking 44 from 28 including a straight six off Sophie Molineux in the final over but

they were starting from too far back after a sluggish start.

Australia reduced England to 39-2 in the first six overs. Lucy Hamilton picked up her first wicket in the World Cup, slanting a delivery across Amy Jones to have England's opener caught low down by Georgia Voll at deep gully for six.

Wicketkeeper Mooney took a superb tumbling catch down the leg side off the glove to remove the tournament's leading run scorer Danni Wyatt-Hodge for eight to give Annabel Sutherland her 50th wicket in T20 internationals.

Alice Capsey hit Ash Gardner over deep mid-wicket for six as England tried to break the stranglehold but she was bowled by Molineux, reverse-sweeping, for 23 and, next over, Heather Knight was trapped lbw for two by the miserly Kim Garth who led the way for Australia with 1-20 from her four overs.

Sciver-Brunt and Kemp upped the ante but the modest target was insufficient to test

Australia. Voll signalled Australia's intent by hitting the first ball of the reply from Charlie Dean to the boundary and although the opener departed next over, dragging on Lauren Bell for nine, Mooney and Litchfield flayed the England attack.

They took out a huge chunk of the target in the first 10 overs, reaching 98-1, and kept their foot to the floor.

Litchfield, who hit two sixes, was eventually bowled by Dean for 48 off 35 balls, with Mooney following for 64 off 49, and Ellyse Perry saw Australia home at a canter after being given a life when a catch by Sophie Ecclestone was controversially ruled out by the TV umpire.

Victory was confirmed with four wides from a wayward delivery from Ecclestone - a neat summation of England's day.

BRIEF SCORES

Australia 153 for 3 (Mooney 64, Litchfield 48) beat England 150 for 4 (Sciver-Brunt 58*, Kemp 44*, Hamilton 1-19) by seven wickets

MOTORSPORT

Team Qatar by Iron Lynx secure LMGT3 podium at 4 Hours of Imola



Team Qatar by Iron Lynx celebrated another milestone in the 2026 European Le Mans Series after securing an impressive second-place finish in the LMGT3 category at the 4 Hours of Imola, the third round of the championship.

Representing Qatar on one of Europe's most demanding circuits, Abdulla al-Khelaifi joined teammates Julian Hanses and Maxime Martin to deliver a composed and competitive performance throughout the four-hour endurance race.

The trio combined consistency, speed and flawless teamwork to

claim a well-deserved podium finish aboard the No. 62 Mercedes-AMG LMGT3.

The result marks Team Qatar by Iron Lynx's first podium of the 2026 ELMS season and reinforces the team's growing competitiveness in one of the world's most fiercely contested endurance racing championships.

The podium finish also strengthens Team Qatar by Iron Lynx's position in the LMGT3 championship standings as the team heads into the second half of the European Le Mans Series season with renewed confidence and momentum.

BASKETBALL

Qatar beat Saudi Arabia in FIBA WC 2027 Qualifiers



By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar men's national basketball team concluded its campaign in the third window of the Asian qualifiers for the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2027, hosted by Qatar, with a well-deserved victory over Saudi Arabia by a score of 76-73.

The clash, held yesterday in Jeddah, was part of Group D competition. The result confirmed Qatar's readiness for the second phase of the qualifiers, as the team displayed strength and competitive character, especially in the decisive moments of the game.

The encounter was marked by intensity and balance from start to finish, with both sides exchanging control before Qatar sealed the win in the fourth quarter with a spirited comeback.

Saudi Arabia started stronger, edging the first quarter 18-17, while the second quarter ended in a 15-15 tie, keeping the hosts ahead at halftime.

The Saudis extended their lead in the third quarter, finishing 21-15.

However, Qatar rose to the occasion in the final period, tightening its defense and unleashing an effective offensive surge to dominate

29-19, overturning the deficit and clinching the three-point victory.

Qatar's Alen Hadzibegovic stood out as the team's top scorer with 21 points, playing a pivotal role in securing the win. For Saudi Arabia, Mohammed Ali Abdulrahman led with 19 points.

In the other Group D fixture, Lebanon recorded a commanding 98-72 away victory over India, strengthening its lead with 11 points.

Qatar climbed to second place with 21 points, ahead of Saudi Arabia in third with 9 points, while India remained bottom with 6 points.

Lebanon, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia had already secured qualification to the second round before the final games, but Qatar's triumph over Saudi Arabia provided a significant morale boost, ending the first stage as group runners-up.

Qatar's journey through the qualifiers was notable: beginning with a narrow 74-75 loss to Lebanon in Doha, followed by a remarkable 86-83 away win against the same opponent.

The team then swept India 99-73 in the third round, before falling to Saudi Arabia 80-86 in Doha. Qatar regained momentum with a 65-56 win over India, and capped the stage with its crucial victory in Jeddah.

International Swimming League to pay overdue 2021 prize money

LONDON: The International Swimming League will pay about 300 athletes long-overdue prize money owed from its 2021 season, Commissioner Ben Allen told Reuters, as the professional swimming circuit seeks to rebuild trust and relaunch after years of inactivity.

Allen said the ISL would pay all the prize money owed, with just over \$7mn due to about 312 athletes who were being informed in a letter from the ISL being sent out yesterday.

Among the notable swimmers set to receive payments are multiple Olympic champions Ryan Murphy, Sarah Sjostrom and Summer McIntosh.

Payments will be made in four instalments of 25%, with the first scheduled by the end of this year and the rest expected annually, though the league would accelerate the process if possible. Some Russian athletes will have to wait longer to receive their funds due to technical issues regarding their bank accounts.

"We are paying our 2021 prize money," Allen



said in an interview where he broke news of the payments. "It's unfortunate that it's been a couple of years. We've been hit by a couple of different issues - the war in Europe, COVID. We had a lot of challenges but we're at the point where we can do it now. It's an obligation we've always said that we're going to fulfil."

'NOT TURNING OUR BACKS'

Launched in 2019, the ISL sought to professionalise elite swimming through a team-based competition model and attracted many of the sport's biggest names. It has

not held a season since 2021. Allen said total athlete compensation for the 2021 season was north of \$10mn, including roughly 25% in "solidarity payments" designed to support swimmers during the COVID-19 pandemic, when competition opportunities were limited. Those solidarity payments had been completed, he said, leaving the remaining 75% - just over \$7mn - in performance-based prize money. "We are not turning our backs on our athletes and we're going to fulfil our obligations."

Allen said the payments would be made with no reductions or conditions attached and would apply to active and retired athletes alike. Everyone will get 100%, he said. "They earned the money. They swam, they competed, they performed, they deserve it."

ISL COMEBACK

Allen said the league's original financiers remained supportive, including ISL founder Konstantin Grigorishin, who he said was still involved in the organisation and its planned relaunch.

MOTORSPORT

Leclerc delivers Ferrari's 250th victory at British GP

Race ended behind a safety car after series leader Antonelli was hit by mechanical problems

AFP
Silverstone, United Kingdom

Charles Leclerc claimed his first British Grand Prix victory yesterday with a consummate drive for Ferrari to win a dramatic and at times controversial race that ended behind a safety car after series leader Kimi Antonelli was hit by mechanical problems.

The 28-year-old Monegasque finished 0.427 seconds ahead of Mercedes' George Russell after he stayed with five laps remaining after four-time champion Max Verstappen crashed out.

The decision proved costly for seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in the other Ferrari who slipped from second to third during the pit-stops as the race stewards chose not to resume the race, as expected, in the final laps.

He had earlier been hit with a five-second penalty for a near-invisible false start.

"I just didn't have it today. I jumped the start and I got a five-second penalty... but Charles had the pace on," said a disappointed Hamilton.

As a result, many spectators were left frustrated and puzzled as the race ended in a procession.

Antonelli, who won the sprint on Saturday, still leads the title

race with 179 points, 25 ahead of Russell with Hamilton a further seven points back in third.

It was Leclerc's ninth Grand Prix victory and first since he won the United States GP in Austin in October 2024, and puts him fourth in the championship with 108 points.

It also confirmed Ferrari's emergence as a force in the title battle after Mercedes had won the opening six races of the season.

"Tough times never last," said a delighted Leclerc on team radio after his first win since the United States GP in 2024. "Only tough people last."

It was Ferrari's 250th win and their first at Silverstone since 2022.

Antonelli, who had made a bad start from pole, climbed to second place and looked poised to fight for a win until he made two late pit-stops for car repairs. He battled on but finished 16th.

Russell, who recovered from a puncture during the race, claimed his first home event podium finish ahead of Hamilton, who scored a record-extending 16th podium success at his favourite track, where he has won a record ninth time.

"My first podium here - I am so really pleased to be here," said the Briton.

"I was unlucky with my puncture, but then very lucky with the Safety Car at the end. It's a shame for the fans to miss the finish."



Ferrari's Charles Leclerc celebrates with his trophy on the podium after winning the British Grand Prix along with third-placed Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton at the Silverstone Circuit in Britain yesterday. (Reuters)

World champion Lando Norris finished fourth in his McLaren with Isack Hadjar in the other Red Bull in fifth.

The Racings Bulls took the next two slots with Liam Lawson sixth and British rookie Arvid Lindblad, 18, coming in seventh on his British Grand Prix debut.

Audi's Gabriel Bortoleto and the Alpine duo of Franco Colapinto and Pierre Gasly rounded out the top 10.

ANTI-CLIMAX FINISH
The race began in near-perfect conditions in front of 175,000 fans, part of a record four-day crowd of

564,000, but ended in puzzlement and disappointment as fans grumbled at the way in which a thrilling spectacle was reduced to a procession finish.

Antonelli made a poor start from his fifth pole position and dropped to third behind both Ferraris on the opening lap while Piastri fell to

14th and Verstappen passed Norris for sixth before taking fifth from team-mate Hadjar on lap four.

By lap six, Leclerc was leading Hamilton by 2.3 seconds with Antonelli just one-third adrift in third and Russell fourth.

He pitted from the lead on lap 26 to hand the lead to Antonelli who came in on lap 35 as Hamilton launched a series of attacks on Verstappen.

The pair duelled hard before Hamilton passed him into Luffield on lap 38, seconds before a Virtual Safety Car (VSC) was deployed, after Nico Hulkenberg abandoned his Audi at Copse.

Antonelli was the next to run into technical trouble on lap 42 of 52.

"Something is broken," he radioed. "The car isn't turning."

It was a damaged wheel shield that required two pit-stops before his vain fight for a point.

All this left Leclerc heading home 20 seconds clear of team-mate Hamilton before Verstappen's late drama, on lap 47, when he flew off into the gravel at Stowe, triggered a late full safety car intervention.

Ferraris pitted both cars for softs, but Russell stayed out and moved up to second, ahead of the luckless Hamilton as the outcome was decided by a decision taken in the control tower and not with a showdown final racing lap.

WIMBLEDON

Djokovic makes history, Osaka beats Sabalenka

AFP
London

Novak Djokovic enjoyed another slice of Wimbledon history as the Serbian star broke Roger Federer's singles match-win record yesterday, while Japan's Naomi Osaka stunned world number one Aryna Sabalenka to reach the quarter-finals for the first time.

Djokovic's 7-6 (8/6), 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 victory over Russian qualifier Roman Safiullin in the fourth round took the seven-time Wimbledon champion past Federer to 106 men's match-wins at the grass-court Grand Slam.

Only Martina Navratilova (120) has won more singles matches at the All England Club across the men's and women's events.

The 39-year-old is through to his 17th Wimbledon quarter-final and his ninth in a row.

In his record-extending 66th Grand Slam quarter-final, Djokovic will play Canadian third seed Felix Auger-Aliassime or Spanish 22nd seed Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

"Survive to thrive, that's how I feel. So hopefully the thriving part is coming," Djokovic said.

"Our mind wanders all the time, it's very hard to keep it in the present moment, whoever does that is a winner."

Djokovic has a 100 percent record in 20 Wimbledon matches against players outside the top 100, winning all 34 matches he has played against qualifiers at the Grand Slams.

After dropping a set in two of his first three matches at the All England Club this week, Djokovic again looked out of sorts at times but did enough to keep his bid for tennis immortality on track.

The Serb is aiming to win a record 25th Grand Slam singles crown, which would break a tie with Margaret Court and take him level with Federer on eight Wimbledon titles.

OSAKA AVENGES DEFEAT AGAINST SABALENKA

Osaka avenged a straight-sets defeat against Sabalenka in the French Open last 16 in June by eliminating her fellow four-time Grand Slam champion with a superb 6-2, 7-6 (7/2) victory on Centre Court.

It is five years since Osaka lifted her most recent Grand Slam trophy at the Australian Open.

Osaka is yet to drop a set across her opening four matches at Wimbledon.

Seeded 14th, she is finally finding her groove on grass, helped by the eye-catching outfits she arrives on court wearing.

Her walk-on costumes have included a kimono, a bomber jacket with a long train and a cloak that looks like an open kimono.

Once again the 28-year-old treated fans to a memorable outfit before delivering a tailor-made performance that left Sabalenka's Wimbledon challenge in tatters in the last 16.

Osaka faces Czech 10th seed Karolina Muchova, who eliminated former Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejickova in the fourth round, for a place in the semi-finals.

"For me this court is so special. This is the



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates beating Russia's Roman Safiullin during their singles match on the seventh day of the 2026 Wimbledon Championships yesterday. (AFP)



Japan's Naomi Osaka celebrates after winning her fourth round match against Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka yesterday. (Reuters)

first match I've won on this court. It means a lot," Osaka said. "It's been a long time since I've had so much fun on the court and to do it here, really means a lot."

Sabalenka's bid for a 15th consecutive Grand Slam quarter-final came to an abrupt halt.

She bows out of a major tournament before the quarter-finals for the first time since the French Open in 2022.

She had lost in the semi-finals on each of her past three visits to Wimbledon and has never made the final.

The Belarusian suffered a surprise loss to Diana Shnaider in the French Open quarter-finals and this was another painful result for a player with a history of unexpected meltdowns.

Elsewhere yesterday, American fourth seed Jessica Pegula, who has never won a Grand Slam, beat compatriot Iva Jovic in three sets.

The 32-year-old Pegula said beforehand she had expected the 18-year-old Jovic to come at her hard and so it proved, but after a scrappy first set, she won 4-6 6-3 6-1 to reach the quarter-final and equal her best Wimbledon run. The opener featured seven service breaks, with Pegula describing the action like a 'ping pong match'. But once she settled, she stamped her authority on the match.

"I'm happy with the way I was able to kind of readjust and not kind of panic too much and just reset," Pegula said. "I wasn't serving well, so I ended up losing the set and that's not how I was going to win the match."

CYCLING

Del Toro wins stage two as Pogacar closes in on Vingegaard

Reuters
Barcelona

Isaac del Toro overcame a mechanical issue and a long wait to change his bike before launching a late attack to win the second stage of the Tour de France yesterday, becoming only the second Mexican to claim a stage at the race after Raul Alcala more than three decades ago.

Del Toro's teammate and defending champion Tadej Pogacar finished second, cutting Jonas Vingegaard's overall lead to six seconds.

"It means really everything," said Del Toro after his second Grand Tour stage win. "As I said before, I'm very privileged. Plenty of confidence by the whole team. I cannot believe I just did it. It's just insane. You cannot believe how it feels now for me, especially for the country."

"We made a plan for Tadej, I did it but then the gap was bigger and I just went with the flow to the finish line."

Slovenian Pogacar crossed the finish line with Del Toro in the air as the UAE Team Emirates-XRG colleagues celebrated the victory.

With about 60km left on the hilly ride from Tarragona to Barcelona, Del Toro suffered a mechanical problem. A miscommunication with his team on the radio left him sitting by the road, waiting for a replacement bike.

But Del Toro needed little more than 10km to make up for lost time when he got going again and played a central role in his team's strategy during the three laps up Cote de Chateau de Montjuic at the end of the stage.

POGACAR AND TEAMMATES DOMINATE THE FINISH

Brandon McNulty set the pace for Pogacar during the first climb as two-time winner Vingegaard remained behind his Visma-Lease a Bike teammate Victor Campenaerts.

Pogacar and three teammates led the way during the second lap of the hill, but Vingegaard's team-mate Matteo Jorgenson made a late push to become the second rider to the top behind McNulty.

As the race entered the final 10km, Vingegaard positioned himself behind Jorgenson, with four-time champion Pogacar following the Dane closely, along with others.

JORGENSEN FELL BACK

When Jorgenson fell back during the final climb, Adam Yates led out Pogacar for the final attack, before Del Toro surprised his rivals with his launch for the finish line.

"It was not an easy day, I think this circuit is not my favourite terrain so I think I can be pretty happy with keeping the yellow jersey. They did a super job so they really deserved the victory today," Vingegaard said.

Del Toro said he was pleased to get the win for Mexico on the same day that the country's soccer team play in the World Cup round of 16.

"We have these 11 guys ripping it in the football, they're doing amazing and to be at the same level here in France at the hardest race is like a dream," he added.

The French portion of today's stage three, a ride from Spain's Granollers to Les Angles in France, will be closed to fans due to risks posed by a forest fire raging in the region, officials said yesterday.



UAE Team Emirates XRG's Isaac Del Toro celebrates on the podium wearing the green jersey after stage 2 at the Tour de France from Barcelona to Tarragona yesterday. (Reuters)



PREVIEW

US feel confident against Belgium, says Pulisic

Reuters
Seattle

The United States are confident enough to play their own game against Belgium, talisman Christian Pulisic said ahead of a World Cup match which will provide the sternest test yet of the co-hosts' major tournament credentials.

The sides meet today for a place in the quarter-finals in a repeat of their clash in 2014, when Belgium knocked out the US in extra time despite the heroics of goalkeeper Tim Howard.

The difference in quality between the sides, though, is smaller this time and Pulisic said the US have growing confidence, despite a 5-2 defeat in a friendly in March.

"We know what they (Belgium) have to offer," he told reporters yesterday.

"They have really talented players that can make a difference really quick. But we're not going to completely reinvent our style either. Of course, we want to be aggressive and try to hurt them, as we have to other teams this tournament," Pulisic added.

"We have confidence regardless of the game in March. We know what we can do. We think we can hang - not just hang, but dominate spells of the game against some of the best teams ... I think we have the right to feel confident."

"As a team we want to leave our mark on the game and a legacy behind," US midfielder Tyler Adams said. "We know that the further we go, the more the game is going to grow."

US BELIEVE THEY CAN WIN
Pulisic called on fans to continue to get on the US bandwagon.

"Because we're Americans, that's what we do. We believe any-

thing is possible," he said. "We're a team that's going to fight and we're going to give it everything we got and we believe that we can win this thing."

"So I'd say that's a good reason to believe."

Shortly before yesterday's training session, news broke that US forward Folarin Balogun would be available to play against Belgium after FIFA suspended his one-match ban for a red card against Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Pulisic described the red card as "super harsh" and welcomed FIFA's decision.

"He's obviously super happy, man ... you want to be able to play in games like this," Pulisic said of Balogun's reaction.

For Belgium, the tournament may represent the final World Cup act for the country's so-called "Golden Generation," led by Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku and Thibaut Courtois.



Brenden Aaronson of the United States catches a baseball as Tyler Adams, Auston Trusty and Joe Scally look on during a training session at Husky Soccer Stadium in Seattle. (AFP)

FOCUS

Mbappe says France happy 'to get hands dirty' after victory

Deschamps hails France for staying cool in 1-0 win over Paraguay

AFP
Philadelphia

France captain Kylian Mbappe said his side were happy to do whatever it takes to advance in the World Cup after they battled through a bad-tempered last-16 tie with Paraguay to win 1-0 on Saturday.

Mbappe scored the winner from the spot in the 70th minute to bring his tally for the tournament to seven and his overall tally in the World Cup to 19 goals, but he was continually goaded by the Paraguayan defenders towards the end of the game in sweltering Philadelphia.

"We knew what sort of match we were in for, but I think today went really well," Mbappe said.

"They thought we'd turn up in tuxedos, that we'd just come to pull off some spectacular moves," Mbappe added.

"But we know how to play the dirty game too. And we did that today; we won, and even in that respect we were better than them."

The Real Madrid forward added: "The way we played today showed that we're not just a team that knows how to play attacking football."

"If we have to get our hands dirty, we'll get our hands dirty. Sorry for the expression, but we've no problem with that."

The meeting with Paraguay was a scrappy affair that somehow only produced three yellow cards from Uzbek referee Ilgiz Tantahev - all for France. As Mbappe prepared to take his penalty, both sets of players squared off, with Paraguay also attempting to dig up the spot ahead of the kick.

"That's their football, that's their way of playing," the 27-year-old said.

"Everyone plays to their strengths; there's no right or wrong way to play football. There's only one way, and that's to win."

"They tried to get the better of us that way, but we got the better of them in that too. Now we're moving on to the next stage."

France will meet Morocco in the quarter-finals next Thursday in Boston.

"We know they're a very good team. And we're really looking forward to playing against them," Mbappe said of the last-eight clash, which will be a repeat of the 2022 semi-final won 2-0 by France.

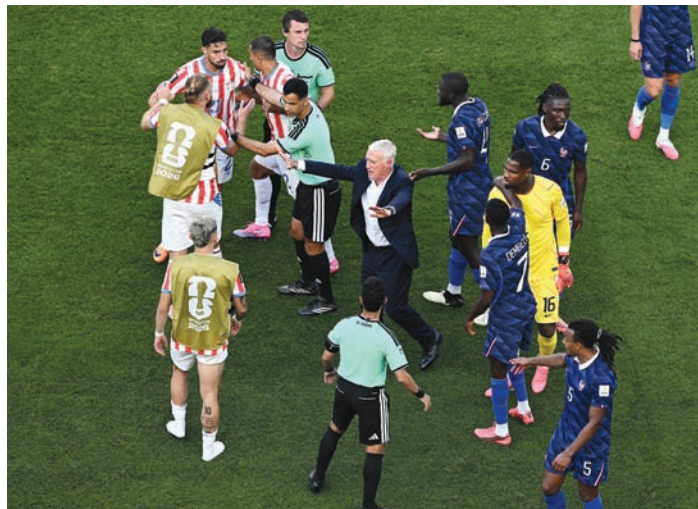
"We'll give it our all to keep moving forward."

France coach Didier Deschamps also hailed his side for keeping their cool against an aggressive Paraguayan team in heatwave conditions as the favourites reached the quarter-finals of the World Cup.

"It wasn't easy. They used every resource possible. It is maybe not the kind of football that brings



France's forward Kylian Mbappe celebrates scoring his team's first goal during the World Cup round of 16 match against Paraguay at the Philadelphia Stadium in Philadelphia. (AFP)



France's head coach Didier Deschamps separates Paraguay and France players during the World Cup round of 16 match at the Philadelphia Stadium in Philadelphia. (AFP)

people to the stadium, playing with that aggression, exaggerating everything," Deschamps told French broadcaster M6.

Mbappe's goal was his seventh so far at the tournament, pulling him level again with Lionel Messi as the joint-leading scorer. Before that, it had been a frustrating afternoon for Les Bleus, and a sharp contrast to their previous free-scoring matches at the tournament. France had scored 13 goals in their four World Cup outings prior to this game, but on Saturday they struggled to make clear chances despite totally dominating possession.

Their most creative players - Michael Olise, Ousmane Dembele and Bradley Barcola - all found the going tough against a niggly Para-

guayan team looking to cause another upset after ousting Germany in the last 32. "We stayed focused on our game. It was difficult, they had lots of men behind the ball and they defend well," added Deschamps. "Obviously the temperatures made it hard to play with intensity and without that they defended well."

The match was played in the late afternoon heat, with temperatures hitting 38 degrees Celsius (100 Fahrenheit) in Philadelphia as the city marked the July 4 weekend and the 250th anniversary of American independence.

Deschamps was also left perplexed that his team collected three yellow cards, while not a single Paraguayan player was booked.

"I am not going to criticise the

referee but we finished the game with three bookings and yet there were a lot of things going on," Deschamps said in his post-match press conference, as he suggested he and his team were subjected to verbal aggression too.

"I won't criticise Paraguay. Every team can play however they want, but I could do without the insults. The most important thing is that there were no incidents at the end. But all that matters is that we have qualified."

Deschamps said he had to resort to using two of his strongest players to protect captain Mbappe against Paraguayan aggression towards the end of the match.

"We kept our nerve and that is an essential thing. It doesn't win you the game but it is important," he added. "This experience will help us. After all, we have a lot of players who are playing at their first World Cup," he added.

"I wouldn't say it had been easy for us up to now but now we have had a different type of game."

That game will be a repeat of the 2022 semi-final which France won 2-0, before they went on to lose the final on penalties to Argentina. "Morocco are one of the best teams. We played them four years ago in Doha and they also got to the Africa Cup of Nations final," Deschamps said.

He will hope his squad recover quickly from the Paraguay clash, and that key midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni comes back after missing Saturday's game with a thigh injury. "We have a few days now to recuperate. We have some tired players and a few little knocks too."

SPOTLIGHT

Al Sadd appoints Lucescu as head coach for two years



Romanian Razvan Lucescu poses with Al Sadd CEO Sheikh Khalifa bin Khalid al-Thani yesterday, after signing a two-year contract as the club's coach.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar Stars League (QSL) champions Al Sadd have appointed Romanian coach Razvan Lucescu as their new head coach on a two-year contract that will keep him at the club until 2028, the club announced yesterday.

The 57-year-old succeeds Roberto Mancini, who departed after a single season in charge and is widely expected to return as head coach of the Italy national team.

Lucescu joins Al Sadd following his latest stint with Greek Super League side PAOK. A former goalkeeper, he began his coaching career with FC Brasov before guiding Rapid Bucuresti to two consecutive Romanian Cup triumphs.

During his managerial career, Lucescu has also coached the Romania national team and enjoyed successful spells with El Jaish, PAOK and Al Hilal, win-

ning six major domestic trophies. His biggest achievement came in 2019 when he led Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal to the AFC Champions League title. Lucescu will be supported by a backroom staff comprising three assistant coaches, two fitness coaches, a goalkeeping coach and a performance analyst.

"The signing of coach Razvan Lucescu comes as part of Al Sadd Club's strategy to continue achieving successes and strengthen the team's position at the local and continental levels, in line with the ambitions of the club and its fans," Al Sadd said in a statement.

Lucescu will be tasked with helping Al Sadd build on their QSL triumph and challenge for more silverware after the Wolves fell short in the Amir Cup final against Al Gharafa and exited the AFC Champions League Elite at the quarter-final stage last season.

Al Sadd are holding a pre-season training camp in Austria ahead of the new QSL season, which begins on August 20.

Coach says Morocco 'no longer a surprise' after reaching last 8

Morocco coach Mohamed Ouahbi said "we're no longer a surprise" after reaching the World Cup quarter-finals on Saturday and hit back at "bold" claims by Canada's Jesse Marsch. The north African side were not at their best but were clinical in defeating Marsch's co-hosts 3-0 in Houston and will face France or Paraguay next. Morocco made the semi-finals at the 2022 World Cup and won the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, and Ouahbi said: "We're no longer a surprise today and that's a great source of pride. I think this is only the beginning and I hope we'll keep producing this kind of run for many years."

Morocco lost to France in the last four at Qatar 2022, but the coach said revenge was not their motivation if they clash next in North America. "We want to go as far as possible and make our people proud," he said. After Canada were the better team in the first half, Azzedine Ounahi scored twice for Morocco on 50 and 82 minutes to kill off the tie. "What we're trying to get across to our players is that we're playing in a World Cup, which means you go through difficult moments," said the coach.

"What we needed to do was hold on and show resilience when things aren't going so well." His opposite number Marsch said he felt his side had been the better team, to which Ouahbi replied: "In terms of intensity they were good, that has to be said. 'Were they better? Hard to say that when you lose 3-0, it's a bold claim,' he remarked. "They were well organised, but I think in the second half there was no contest. "In any case," he added, "I'm not sure many teams are going to win by that scoreline in the round of 16."