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England thrash India by nine wickets for T20 series win



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MATCH REPORT

Mbappe leads France to easy win over Morocco

Mbappe strikes after missing penalty, Dembele also on target as Les Bleus enter semis



Kylian Mbappe of France scores his team's first goal during the World Cup quarter-final against Morocco at Boston Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts, yesterday. (AFP)



France's Ousmane Dembele (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring their second goal against Morocco yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Foxborough, United States

Kylian Mbappe recovered from having a first-half penalty saved to score a magnificent opener that set France on their way to a 2-0 win over Morocco in their World Cup quarter-final showdown yesterday.

Mbappe's weak spot-kick was easily saved by Moroccan goalkeeper Yassine Bounou, but he made up for that by producing a brilliant curling finish to make it 1-0 on the hour mark.

That was Mbappe's eighth goal at the tournament, moving him level again with Lionel Messi in the race for the Golden Boot, before he came off late on and watched the final minutes with an ice pack around his right ankle.

Before exiting, he set up Ousmane Dembele to run through and settle the contest watched by 63,811 at the Gillette Stadium, as France knocked Morocco out, just as they did in 2022.

Their 2-0 win four years ago in Qatar came in the semi-finals, and this time the

victory for Les Bleus takes them through to the last four.

They will face Spain or Belgium in Dallas next Tuesday.

France are looking to reach a third consecutive World Cup final in their last tournament before long-serving coach Didier Deschamps stands down.

Winners in 2018 and runners-up in 2022, it has felt like they have eased through to another semi-final and they were too strong for a Moroccan team lacking firepower in the absence of the injured Ismael Saibari.

Mbappe is one of the greatest goal-scorers of his generation, and the World Cup continues to bring the very best out of him.

After netting in the group-stage wins over Senegal and Iraq, as well as the last-32 defeat of Sweden, he got the only goal from the penalty spot against Paraguay in the last round.

He has now scored 20

goals in 20 World Cup appearances, with one goal of Messi's overall tournament record of 21.

More could have been expected from Morocco, who had more of the crowd behind them but lacked a cutting edge in attack as France kept a third clean sheet in as many knockout games.

Nevertheless, they have plenty of exciting young talents - including former France Under-21 captain Ayyoub Bouaddi in their midfield - and will surely be a force to be reckoned with again when they co-host the next World Cup in 2030 alongside Spain and Portugal.

On Thursday they were just the latest team to find containing Mbappe at a World Cup to be an impossible task.

The Real Madrid star provoked the penalty as he was scythed down in the area by Noussair Mazraoui after a quick breakaway in the 25th minute.

Argentinian referee Facundo Tello immediately

pointed to the spot, although a review was needed to rule out a foul on Moroccan captain Achraf Hakimi in the build-up.

Maybe the wait got to Mbappe, whose kick was uncharacteristically weak and easily stopped. It was a reminder that he remains human, just like Messi who has squandered two penalties at this World Cup.

The excellent Bounou frequently kept France at bay in the first half, notably tipping a Desire Doue shot around the post after Bouaddi was robbed of the ball.

Lucas Digne crashed a shot onto the top of the bar from distance as the opening half ended goalless, but France got the reward for their pressure 15 minutes after the restart.

Doue slipped the ball to Mbappe just outside the area, and he controlled before using Issa Diop as a screen to direct a superb strike into the net.

France's all-time leading marksman now has 64 international goals from 104 appearances.

His lay-off in the 66th minute allowed Dembele to advance on goal and curl a shot low into the same corner, a hand from Bounou proving unable to make it 2-0.

Dembele is the reigning Ballon d'Or and now has five goals at this World Cup, but Mbappe continues to hog the limelight.

Al-Buenain resigns as QFA president



Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain has announced his resignation yesterday as president of the Qatar Football Association (QFA) following the conclusion of Qatar's campaign in the ongoing 2026 FIFA World Cup. In a statement published on his official X account, al-Buenain said his decision comes after three years at the helm of the federation, a period he described as marked by significant challenges and continuous efforts to advance Qatari football. He said the federation worked tirelessly to transform its ambitions into tangible achievements, emphasising that commitment, dedication and teamwork were key to accomplishing the objectives set during his tenure. Al-Buenain also expressed his appreciation to everyone who supported the federation throughout his presidency, wishing continued success for Qatari football in the years ahead.

Al-Buenain said the achievements made during his tenure stand as a testament to the dedication and hard work of everyone involved. He thanked the federation's members and staff for their commitment, stressing that the successes achieved were the result of collective effort and prioritizing the interests of Qatari football. He said he leaves his position with pride in what was accomplished over the past three years, while expressing confidence that Qatari football will continue to progress.

Al-Buenain also wished the QFA and Al Annabi continued success in the years ahead. His resignation follows Al Annabi's exit from World Cup, co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico, after finishing bottom of Group B. Qatar made history by earning its first-ever World Cup point with a 1-1 draw against Switzerland, before suffering defeats to Canada 6-0 and Bosnia and Herzegovina 3-1, ending their campaign in the group stage.

SPOTLIGHT

Spain keeping opposition far from goal, says 'keeper Garcia

AFP
Los Angeles

Spain's run to the World Cup quarter-finals has been built on a tournament record run without conceding a goal, a fact goalkeeper Joan Garcia has told AFP comes down to the whole team's willingness to defend.

Garcia has enjoyed a meteoric rise from playing in Spain's second division two years ago to being Barcelona's number one, but he has had to watch from the sidelines during the tournament as Luis de la Fuente has kept faith with Unai Simon.

The Athletic Bilbao stopper has not conceded in his last six games over the last two World Cups, smashing the record of Italy's Walter Zenga for the longest unbeaten run at the tournament. Yet, other than a few smart stops in the 1-0 last 16 win over Portugal, Simon has barely even been tested as Spain's dominance of possession and solid structure has kept the opposition at bay.

"Defensively, we are very well-structured; we all know what needs to be done and it shows in the fact that we concede few chances," Garcia said.

"I think the important thing for a goalkeeper is prevention rather than shot-stopping. Preventing the opposition from getting into position to shoot, whether through the intervention of a defender, a goalkeeper coming out for an aerial ball or intercepting a low cross.



Joan Garcia of Spain attends a training session ahead of the World Cup quarter-final at Carson Sports Park in Carson, California. (AFP)

"These are things that might not show up in the stats, but they are important for a goalkeeper and the team. It shows our game plan is working.

"Ultimately, in a World Cup - with the quality of the teams involved - the fact that opponents aren't even creating chances speaks volumes about the team."

De la Fuente said on the eve of the tournament whoever he put in goal would be the right decision based on the quality at his disposal.

David Raya was a major factor in Arsenal's Premier League title win and a run to the Champions League final. But in Spain it was Garcia who the media were championing to start ahead of Simon after an excellent first season at Barcelona, where he won La Liga.

Ultimately, both were overlooked as Simon remained in goal for a fourth consecutive major tournament. "I think you're more nervous on the bench than if you were out on the pitch playing," Garcia said. "We try to help Unai with things that are visible from the outside. Ultimately, I think he is very clear on what needs to be done. He needs little help, but if we notice something about a forward's positioning, for instance, we try to offer some input there."

A meeting with Belgium in the last eight on Friday means Spain have to find a way past one of the world's best goalkeepers in Thibaut Courtois. The giant Real Madrid 'keeper has spent most of his career in Spain, where he also previously played for Atletico Madrid.

"He has been one of the best in the world for so many years," said Garcia.

"Above all, his agility despite being so tall, that's something to admire, as well as the consistency he's shown over so many years as one of the world's best."

Doku offers Belgium X-factor they might need

Jeremy Doku has had the birth of his child to celebrate during the World Cup but little else to cheer having lost his spot in the Belgium side, but Friday's quarter-final against Spain in Los Angeles could be his chance to make up for lost time. The 24-year-old was expected to be a key contributor to his country's cause at the tournament, but has only started three of Belgium's five games and was on the bench last time out. His pace, dribbling skills and ability to get past defenders, however, make him an option for Belgium coach Rudi Garcia, who will be cooking up a tactical plan to upset the European champions.

Doku was not in his plans on Monday in Seattle when Belgium demolished the U.S. with a 4-1 win. Garcia picked Dodi Lukebakio and Leandro Trossard to play wide and they worked hard both in and out of possession. Doku has similar disruptive qualities that Garcia might turn to in order to break down a Spanish defence that has not conceded a goal at the tournament. The Belgium coach has a reputation for switching tactics around and got it spot on against the U.S., but against Spain he will need new plans. Doku began the tournament struggling with illness and dashed to London for his son's birth, missing the game against Iran. In the 5-1 group-stage win over New Zealand, he was taken off before the hour mark, struggling with fatigue and more was expected in the round of 32 but Doku was also taken off early in the second half before Belgium miraculously escaped defeat by Senegal. Doku has made no secret of his ambition to be the best winger in world football but admits he needs to score more goals. "If I have those goals then I believe that I can get there for sure," he said.

"I feel like assists, in that area, I'm fine but I have to be more in the areas where you can score easy goals, tap-ins and stuff like that." Doku did have a purple patch coming into the World Cup with five goals in the last two months of the season for Manchester City, but for Belgium he has not scored since November against Liechtenstein. "I think Doku will still explode at this tournament," predicted former international Marc Degryset.



CYCLING

Pogacar claims stage six to reclaim Tour lead

Reuters
Gavarnie-Gedre, France

Tadej Pogacar's attack during the punishing climb to Col du Tourmalet led him to a spectacular solo victory in yesterday's sixth stage of the Tour de France as the four-times champion reclaimed the overall lead from Thorstein Traeen.

Twice winner Jonas Vingegaard failed to keep up with Pogacar during the 17.1 km ascent to Tourmalet and finished a distant second, two minutes and 42 seconds behind. Pogacar's UAE Team Emirates-XRG teammate Isaac del Toro was third.

Traeen crashed during the descent from Tourmalet, ending his hopes of closing the gap on Pogacar who is bidding for his third straight Tour de France title.

"A really incredible victory, one of the sweetest for sure," said 27-year-old Pogacar, who is the first reigning world champion to conquer Tourmalet.

"I heard Thorstein Traeen crashed badly... I'd still prefer if he kept

the (yellow) jersey and I hope he's okay."

Pogacar's teammates paced themselves during the early climbs in the 186.2-km mountainous ride from Pau to Gavarnie-Gedre, preserving energy for the ascent to Tourmalet, one of the most difficult climbs in cycling.

By the time the peloton began its journey up to Tourmalet, the UAE Team Emirates-XRG riders were firmly established at the front of the bunch.

Several riders fell back during the climb, including Tom Pidcock and Paul Seixas' Decathlon teammates Aurelien Paret-Peintre and Matthew Riccitello.

POGACAR LAUNCHES TOURMALET ATTACK

Traeen also had to slow down, and Pogacar launched his attack with teammate Isaac del Toro soon after with Vingegaard in pursuit.

As Vingegaard grimaced and pushed himself to the limit, however, Pogacar pulled away on a solo run and reached the summit 30 seconds before the Dane.

Traeen, who had a lead of sev-

en minutes and 53 seconds over Pogacar coming into the stage, made the summit seven minutes and 40 seconds after the Slovenian.

The Norwegian's bid to reduce the gap during the descent did not work out as he crashed after touching wheels with Uno-X Mobility teammate Anders Johannesen. Traeen resumed the race a few minutes later after being attended by doctors.

Pogacar's lead over Visma-Lease a Bike rider Vingegaard had gone up to a minute and 15 seconds as he began the final ascent to Gavarnie-Gedre, and the gap only grew as the Slovenian pulled further ahead of the exhausted Dane.

"It was not my best day. Obviously I'm disappointed, I have to be, but it's life, I cannot change it," said Vingegaard, who is second in the overall rankings.

"I still believe in myself, I still believe my legs would get better throughout the race. The fight is not over."

The race continues with a 175.1-km flat ride from Hagetmau to Bordeaux today.



UAE Team Emirates - XRG's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar cycles in a lone breakaway in the final kilometers to win the 6th stage of the Tour de France race, 186 km between Pau and Gavarnie-Gedre in the French Pyrenees, yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

Bold batting from Brook, Salt guide England to win

THE HOSTS CRUSH INDIA TO TAKE UNBEATABLE 3-0 LEAD

AFP
Bristol, United Kingdom

England captain Harry Brook led the way as his side thrashed India by nine wickets at Bristol yesterday to secure a dominant series win over the T20 world champions.

Brook smashed an unbeaten 79 from 35 balls and Phil Salt finished on 59 not out as England overhauled India's modest 158-7 with more than six overs to spare.

Brook clubbed eight fours and four sixes while Salt added nine fours to a six in his innings.

Victory came just two days after England inflicted India's heaviest T20 defeat in terms of runs - a 125-run thrashing at Trent Bridge - and left them 3-0 up in the series with just tomorrow's finale at Southampton remaining.

England's fast bowlers starred again, Jofra Archer and Josh Tongue backing up impressive displays in Nottingham with two wickets each.

India captain Shreyas Iyer provided rare resistance with an unbeaten 80 from 49 balls.

But India still suffered a record fifth straight T20 defeat following their shock 2-0 series loss away to Ireland in Belfast as Brook and Salt, bowled from a free hit on four, ran riot at Gloucestershire's headquarters.

India, who won the toss, at least improved upon their woeful 76 all out in Nottingham.

Teenage opener Vaibhav Sooryavanshi struck Tongue to the cover boundary and hit an upper cut for six, but the 15-year-old rising star was again unable to better his age after scores of 13 and 14.

Sooryavanshi fell for 15 when he skied Archer to mid-on, fall-



England's Harry Brook and Phil Salt celebrate after reaching a 100-run partnership during the fourth T20 against India at Seat Unique Stadium in Bristol, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

ing to his Rajasthan Royals teammate just as he had done at Trent Bridge.

The pull shot also proved the undoing of Ishan Kishan, while leg-spinner Adil Rashid ran 20 yards to catch Abhishek Sharma off his own bowling and leave India 48-3.

Iyer and Shivam Dube repaired the innings, albeit in sedate fashion.

The fourth wicket partnership was worth 53 from 43 balls when Dube holed out in the deep to a slower ball from off-spinner Will Jacks.

Iyer reached his second fifty of the series with a six off Rashid.

But India were struggling and England's fine display in the field was exemplified by Sam Curran and Archer conceding only eight runs and no boundaries in the final two overs.

Arshdeep Singh made an early breakthrough for India when he had Jos Buttler caught behind for eight.

But it was one-way traffic from then on as Salt and Brook shared a stand of 146.

BRIEF SCORES

England 159 for 1 (Brook 79*, Salt 59*) **beat India 158 for 7** (Iyer 80*, Archer 2-20, Tongue 2-36) **by nine wickets**



India's Shreyas Iyer watches the ball after playing a shot for six runs during the fourth Twenty20 yesterday.

SPOTLIGHT

Zimbabwe edge out Bangladesh again to secure ODI series win

Reuters
Harare

Zimbabwe beat Bangladesh by 13 runs in the second one-day international in Harare yesterday to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Zimbabwe, who won the first game by 25 runs, scored 247-6 before dismissing Bangladesh for 234.

Opener Ben Curran batted through the Zimbabwe innings for an unbeaten 111 after the hosts had been put into bat, closing the innings with a 99-run unbeaten partnership with Brad Evans (58).

Tawhid Hridoy top-scored for the tourists with 60, but they were dismissed with 11 balls remaining as Zimbabwe captain Richard Ngarava took 3-55.

The final ODI will be tomorrow, followed by three Twenty20 inter-



Ben Curran of Zimbabwe celebrates reaching his century against Bangladesh during the second ODI in Harare.

nationals in Bulawayo.

BRIEF SCORES

Zimbabwe 247 for 6 (Curran 111*, Evans 58*, Mehidy 2-32) **beat Bangladesh 234** (Hridoy 60, Tanzid 57, Ngarava 3-55) **by 13 runs**

OBITUARY

Thousands attend funeral for Afghan cricketer Shapoor

AFP
Kabul

Thousands of fans attended a Kabul funeral yesterday for Afghan fast bowler Shapoor Zadrán, who helped shape the country's early rise in international cricket.

Zadrán died Tuesday - a day before his 39th birthday - at a hospital in India, where he was being treated for a rare immune system disorder.

Some of Afghanistan's biggest cricket stars, including Mohammad Nabi and Fazal Haq Farooqi, attended the funeral at the Eid Gah mosque in central Kabul.

Several Taliban officials were also present.

"When I saw on social media that Shapoor isn't anymore among us, tears starting dropping from my eyes," said Wahidullah Wahdat, a 27-year-old businessman who attended.

Zadrán, a pin-up idol with

flowing long hair, was a "humble and loyal person", Wahdat added. Mohammad Usman Maftoon, 18, called Zadrán's death "a big loss for the nation".

Afghanistan's cricket board hailed Zadrán as a "foundation-laying figure" of the country's sport, whose dedication and commitment helped propel the national team to the international stage.

A strapping left-arm quick, Zadrán played 44 one-day internationals and 36 Twenty20 matches between 2009 and 2020, representing Afghanistan during a period of rapid growth for the sport in the country.

He featured in four T20 World Cups between 2010 and 2016, taking nine wickets in as many matches. "He was among the proud cricketers who stood at the heart of Afghanistan's early cricket journey and helped build the path that brought Afghan cricket to the international stage," the cricket board said.



Afghanistan cricketers and citizens are seen in Kabul yesterday during the funeral of fast bowler Shapoor Zadrán who died in New Delhi on Tuesday. A strapping left-arm quick, Zadrán played 44 one-day internationals and 36 Twenty20 matches between 2009 and 2020.

FOCUS

England, India set for first women's Test at Lord's

Reuters
London

Lord's, the Home of Cricket since 1814, will mark another milestone today when England and India step out for the first women's Test match at the sport's most famous venue.

The four-day test comes 50 years on from Rachael Heyhoe-Flint leading England out for the first women's match at Lord's.

"It's a huge honour and a privilege to be walking out there tomorrow," said England captain Nat Sciver-Brunt yesterday.

"I think we are pretty deserved of being here and we'll relish the opportunity.

"We are looking forward to such a special week here at Lord's, doing something that we dreamt of as kids growing up playing cricket," she said.

Women were not allowed to join the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) or enter the Lord's pavilion until 1999, when the club founded in 1787 announced its first 10 female honorary members.

Lord's has hosted 150 men's Tests to date, most recently against New Zealand last month.

The ground in north-west London will be the country's 20th venue since the 1930s to host an England women's Test.

More than 30,000 tickets have been sold for England's 103rd women's Test, with a special opening ceremony today featuring 50 Eng-

land players past and present including Enid Bakewell who featured in the 1976 international. Heyhoe-Flint, who died in 2017 and was in 2004 the first woman to join the MCC committee, has a gate named in her honour at the ground.

The Test will be the first against India on home soil since 2021 and also a farewell for England batter Tammy Beaumont, who missed out on the World Cup squad and announced on Wednesday her retirement from international cricket at the age of 35.

England and India have played 15 women's Tests previously, 11 ending in a draw and England winning only once. England lost to Australia by seven wickets at Lord's last Sunday in the women's Twenty20 World Cup final.

TENNIS

Muchova and Noskova in all-Czech Wimbledon final

IT WILL BE THIRD TIME IN 4 YEARS THAT A CZECH WILL HOLD ALOFT THE VENUS ROSEWATER DISH

Reuters
London

Even as Karolina Muchova's surgically patched-up body went hurtling towards the turf after she conjured up a showstopping dive volley to catch Coco Gauff off guard in their Wimbledon semi-final, she never lost sight of the ball.

So what if the shot had taken the racket out of her hands or that the fall could once again damage a body that had already been put through the wringer with an assortment of ankle, abdominal and wrist injuries.

For a place in the Wimbledon final, Muchova was ready to put her body on the line, bruises and all.

That single-minded focus allowed Muchova to end Gauff's incredible run of living dangerously at this year's Wimbledon as she saved a match point in the third set tiebreak to topple the American in a nerve-shredding 6-2-1-6-7-6 (12-10) thriller.

ALL-CZECH FINAL

With compatriot Linda Noskova beating Marta Kostyuk in yesterday's second semi, the duo set up an all-Czech women's final at a Grand Slam for the first time.

It also meant that for the third time in four years a Czech will hold aloft the Venus Rosewater Dish - after the triumphs of Marketa Vondrousova in 2023 and Barbora Krejčíková in 2024.

All those dreams were on the verge of vanishing within a blink of an eye for Muchova when Gauff stood at match point at 9-8 in the tiebreak, but the American left the



Czech Republic's Karolina Muchova in action during her semi-final against Coco Gauff of the US at Wimbledon yesterday. **Right:** Czech Republic's Linda Noskova celebrates winning against Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk. (Reuters)



spellbound crowd gasping as she produced a howler. Hesitating for a fraction of a second, her attempt at a dropshot ended with the ball being dumped into the net.

ROLLERCOASTER TIEBREAK TO DECIDE MATCH

Muchova was among those who could scarcely believe the drama that was unfolding during an electrifying tiebreak where she had surged to a 4-1 lead, extended that to 6-3, before Gauff defied logic to reach match point first.

But as Gauff discovered, the gulf between reaching match point and converting match point is as wide as the Atlantic Ocean.

"It sounds really nice to be in the final. It was such a big fight. It was a rollercoaster, you're up and

down," a beaming Muchova, still trying to catch her breath, told the crowd. "In 10 seconds you have a match point, then you're match point down. There's no time to think, but very nerve-racking. I don't even know what I'm saying. 'I'm really shaking and trying to let it sink in, but the atmosphere here, indescribable.'"

When the duo last met in the semi-final of a major at the 2023 US Open, climate protesters, including one who glued their feet to the cement floor of the stands, disrupted play for almost 50 minutes.

At least this time it was the players who were creating all the excitement.

FURNACE ON CENTRE COURT

No one would have guessed that

Muchova is allergic to grass, and requires "a lot of pills, sprays, eye-drops" just to step onto the most famous patch of turf in tennis.

While spectators struggled to stay cool in the furnace-like atmosphere on Centre Court, Muchova's pick-and-mix variety of grasscourt craft shone brightly as she broke Gauff in the third and fifth games, with the American surrendering her serve for the second time by wildly misfiring a forehand into the backboardings.

A 111-mph ace sealed the set for Muchova and put her within touching distance of a first Wimbledon final.

However, no one can accuse Gauff of holding up the white flag when the going gets tough or even taking the easy route as she sur-

vived four successive three setters to reach the semis - and once again she was ready to go the distance.

GAUFF KNOWS SHE GOT CLOSE

After failing to convert any of her first eight break point opportunities, the American seventh seed finally got the breakthrough on her ninth to take a 3-1 lead.

Another break for 5-1 sent her mother into raptures in the player's box and one game later it was all level.

After two one-sided sets, both protagonists displayed their incredible ball-striking ability, producing ferocious forehands and breathtaking backhands, as they went toe-to-toe in a captivating decider.

Gauff had two chances to break

for a 5-4 lead but once 10th seed Muchova used her get-out-of-jail-free card to wriggle out of that spot of bother, there was no stopping her.

She produced all the goods in the match tiebreak, including the outrageous diving volley winner and also lobbed Gauff to earn her first match point.

While that one went begging, she made no mistake on the second and held her arms aloft in victory after watching the American dump a forehand into the net to end the 2 hour 35 minute spectacle.

"Obviously got super close. Definitely going to think about the second, third, last point, whatever. A match for sure to remember. It's tough to digest. I left it all out there," summed up Gauff.

SPOTLIGHT

High jump legend Barshim set for competition at Monaco DL meet

QNA
Monaco

The Diamond League Council announced high jump legend **Mutaz Barshim** of Qatar will compete in the Monaco Diamond League meeting today.

In a statement published on its official website, the council said Barshim will headline the men's high jump competition alongside a number of prominent athletes in the event this season.

It noted that Barshim's return to Monaco this season carries significant importance for the meeting, given the Qatari Olympic champion's exceptional abilities, which are expected to draw the attention of athletics and high jump fans.

The council added that an athlete of Barshim's caliber would raise the level of competition at the meeting and enhance its prospects for success.

The statement reviewed Barshim's main challengers based on this season's recorded performances, including Ukraine's Oleh



Doroshchuk, the top-ranked high jumper this season with a mark of 2.33 meters, Britain's Kimani Jack with 2.31 meters, and Jamaica's Romaine Beckford, who cleared 2.30 meters. Barshim began the current season by winning the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships high jump title in China in May, clearing 2.24 meters, before improving his mark to 2.27 meters at the Doha Diamond League meeting. Barshim, who is Tokyo Ol-

ympic gold medallist, is aiming to improve his Diamond League performance before taking part in the remaining meetings as he competes for the high jump Diamond Trophy in the 2026 season.

The Monaco meeting is the 10th event on this year's Diamond League calendar, which features 15 meetings and will conclude in the Belgian capital, Brussels, with a two-day competition on September 4-5.

ATHLETICS

I want to be as good as I can for as long as I can, says Duplantis

AFP
Monaco

Serial world record setter **Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis** has spent countless hours battling away questions about how he stays motivated in the men's pole vault.

The US-born Swede set his 15th pole vault world record in March, clearing 6.31m in Sweden, and is one of the star attractions in whatever meeting he appears.

The two-time Olympic champion and triple world gold medallist will compete in Monaco's Diamond League today on the back of victory with 6.13m in Paris and a rare defeat on home cinder in Stockholm.

Since first breaking the world record in Torun six years ago, Duplantis has single-handedly raised the bar, a demonstration of a stunning consistency that has seen him clear the 6.00m barrier for nine straight seasons.

"Time has already gone really, really quickly," Duplantis, who made his Diamond League de-



but in 2017, said yesterday. "I've actually been jumping for a long time especially at this level. It's pretty hard to comprehend."

While courtesy and politeness are often rolled by the 26-year-old out in answer to questions about whether he still had the desire to compete in one of the most technically demanding events of track and field, Duplantis did not mince his words in Monaco.

"I want to be as good as I can for as long as I can. I think it's fun to compete at this level," he said. "As long as I like it and as long

as I like the grind of everything, then I imagine that I'll continue to compete to jump. "As far as right now I feel like there's a lot of hunger and motivation still in the tank, so I think I'm going to be going for a while. This first nine years went scarily fast, like too fast. I'm trying to soak it all up and enjoy it because it's really insane how fast everything goes."

The men's pole vault was not initially on the programme in Monaco, the 10th of the 15-leg Diamond League circuit.

But Duplantis, as a new resident of the Principality, got down on bended knee with the organisers to include his event.

"It's going to be my first time jumping here as a resident, so home turf," he said. "I really had to push hard, to fight hard for us to be added as an extra event. I'm just really happy about it. I didn't want to miss out on all the fun."

"I'm really happy to be part of the action. Hopefully I have some good stuff to give - I really want to jump hard, especially as I pushed hard to be able to get this to even happen!"

GOUT OUT OF UNDER-20 WORLDS WITH HAMSTRING TEAR

BRISBANE: Australian sprint sensation **Gout Gout** will miss next month's World Under-20 Championships after suffering a left hamstring tear in training in Brisbane, the 18-year-old said yesterday. The sprinter had been selected for Australia's 200 metres and 4x400m relay teams for the championships in Eugene, Oregon.

Gout had opted to skip this month's Commonwealth Games in Glasgow to focus on the World Under-20 Championships, but the injury has cut short his season.

"I'm very disappointed but I have no other possibility but to accept the situation," he posted on Instagram.

"I understand that this is part of athletics. My focus now will be on my rehab in the coming weeks and months and ensuring I come back in 2027 better and stronger and faster." He stamped his authority after he clocked a world under-20



record of 19.67 seconds in the 200m at the Australian Championships in Sydney in April, breaking his own national record. He was unable to replicate that performance at last month's Diamond League meeting, where he finished sixth in 20.60 seconds. The teenager also finished third in the rarely contested 150m at the Ostrava Golden Spike meeting in the Czech Republic last month, clocking 14.96 seconds.

BOTTOMLINE

Russia to take on World Athletics at CAS over ban

AFP
Lausanne

The Russian athletics federation announced yesterday they will appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) challenging World Athletics extending the blanket ban on their track and field athletes.

"Russian Athletics notes that World Athletics' decision affects the fundamental interests of athletics in Russia and restricts Russian athletes' right to compete, on grounds that Russian Athletics considers discriminatory," read the federation's statement.

World Athletics announced last Friday that the ban on Russian and Belarusian athletes - imposed in March 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine - would remain in place.

WA president Sebastian Coe said the body's Council Meeting

had "been consequential and methodical in reviewing the sanctions imposed on Russia and Belarus and in identifying a conditional pathway back into international competition".

"We presented options for the Council to consider on this matter, however, the original decision remains on the sanctions that protect the integrity and fairness of our competitions, with no tangible movement towards peace negotiations having materialised."

WA's stand has been in contrast with other federations - World Gymnastics and the International Skating Union the latest to ease restrictions.

Those came before this week's announcement by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that under strict conditions Russian athletes would be allowed to compete in team events and qualifying competitions for the 2028 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

"We made it clear that we want-

ed to ensure all athletes have the possibility to compete at the Olympic Games and not be held responsible for their government's actions," IOC president Kirsty Coventry said after an Executive Board meeting in Lausanne.

'AMBULANCES AND HEARSE'

However, the IOC kept in place the ban on the Russian national anthem being played and the flag being displayed, for the time being, and stipulated returning Russian athletes would have to pass "multiple" doping tests before being allowed to participate.

The IOC said individual sports could decide whether to allow the flag and anthem at their own events or stage competitions in Russia.

Ukraine slammed the IOC decision as "premature" and "unfounded" while Moscow's invasion drags on through its fifth year.

Athletics global governing body examined the impact of the con-

flict on athletics in Ukraine. "The dedicated fund that World Athletics established in 2022 to support Ukraine is helping ameliorate some of that impact, but there is no doubt the ability of Ukraine and its athletes to train and compete remains severely compromised," WA said.

Coe has said if a peace agreement is reached then it is not for sport to stand in the way of the Russians' return.

The conflict, though, has left its mark on Coe after a visit he paid to Ukraine.

"When you get to Kyiv (train station), there's probably 50 or 60 ambulances and hearses waiting on the platform," he told AFP in an interview last year. "Families waiting for the news. They have two carriages, mobile operating theatres and intensive care units, where amputations are taking place as the train's coming back."

"So, sorry, it's not something I could ever really be neutral about."



COMMENT

Rogers backs Kane to outshine Haaland in Miami

AFP
Kansas City

England's Morgan Rogers backed Harry Kane to come out on top when he faces Norway's Erling Haaland in an enticing battle between the World Cup sharpshooters on Saturday.

The forwards, who will meet in the quarter-finals in Miami, are among the frontrunners in a thrilling race for the tournament's Golden Boot award, along with Lionel Messi and France's Kylian Mbappe. Aston Villa forward Rogers admitted Manchester City's Haaland, who has scored seven goals so far, was almost impossible to stop.

"Has anyone ever stopped Erling Haaland? I'm not sure they have, but we're going to try," the 23-year-old said at England's Kansas City base camp on Wednesday.

"He's such an unbelievable player. The things he does, the numbers he puts up, you're just in awe of how good he is, and the level he's at."

Haaland has netted in each of his past 14 competitive outings for Norway - 27 goals in total - and is bound to prove a handful for England's shaky defence.

But Rogers is confident England captain Kane, one goal behind Haaland in the race to be the World Cup's top scorer, would come out on top.

"They're the two, for me, that are at the top of their game in this tournament, and have been two of the best players," he said.

"It's a spectacle, I suppose, for the fans and it's going to be a good one to see who comes out on top."

"I hope it's Harry, and I'm sure it will be. I think we've got that confidence in him. He's playing at probably the highest level that he's ever played at, which is madness to say, because of what he's been doing for so many years."

No limit for Bellingham

Real Madrid midfielder Jude Bellingham, 23, has been England's other outstanding player at the 2026 World Cup in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Rogers said there was no limit to the heights Bellingham could

reach. "You forget how young he is, that's how good he's been but I still think there's a long way to go and he'll probably say the same as well - the drive and the hunger he's got in the game for what he wants to achieve," he said.

"He knows that he's got things to work on, things to improve on like we all do and I think that's what's so exciting about being an England fan, an England player, being his friend."

"I think it's just how far he can go. No one really knows and kind of having no cap on what he can achieve really."

Rogers, who came on as a late substitute in England's thrilling last-16 win against Mexico, admitted it was impossible not to think ahead to the final as the tournament reached its closing stages. "We're all aligned, we're all on the same page of attacking each game in the best way possible really," he said.

"So I think it's difficult because we're all human and we're all excited as we should be but at the same time we know we've got a job to do and it's still a long way away from that yet."



Morgan Rogers of England collects his darts from the board while playing darts against Peter Crouch in Kansas City, Missouri. (AFP)

FOCUS

Haaland relishing 'special' showdown with England



Erling Haaland of Norway during a training session on the eve of the World Cup quarter-finals against England at Inter Miami CF Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. (AFP)

"I didn't expect it, to be honest, to be in the quarter-finals with Norway in the World Cup"

AFP
Miami

Erling Haaland said facing England, the land of his birth, in the World Cup quarter-finals is extra special as he aims to extend Norway's historic run into the last four.

In his first major international tournament the Manchester City striker has propelled his country to the last eight by scoring seven times in four appearances, including a memorable double to beat Brazil in the last 16.

Haaland was born in England as his dad Alfe Inge Haaland was playing for Leeds at the time and has spent the last four seasons at City where he has become the poster boy of the Premier League.

"It's a special game, yeah, definitely. I think for me it's super special, because I play in England and I was born in England, and you also play against teammates and everything," Haaland told reporters in Miami. "It's a funny game and it's gonna be nice."

In their first World Cup for 28 years, Norway have surpassed all expectations thanks to Haaland's killer instinct in front of goal.

"I didn't expect it, to be honest, to be in the quarter-finals with Norway in the World Cup is quite surprising even for me," he added.

"Playing against Brazil was kind of crazy for us Norwegians and to win against Brazil and then go and play England in the quarter-finals in the World Cup in the USA is quite special."

"I think if you watch the scenes back in

Norway, this is not normal for Norway to be, so it's super special."

England, by contrast, are in the quarter-finals for a third consecutive World Cup, but have not won a major tournament for 60 years.

Haaland was keen to put the pressure on the Three Lions, who were considered among the pre-tournament favourites.

All of the top four seeds are still on course to reach the last four as England could face defending champions Argentina, while France and Spain could face off in the other semi-final.

"I think there's some clear favourites out there, England's one of them," said Haaland. "I think all of you should put every single pressure on the English lads."

Haaland's exploits have also made him a star Stateside over the past few weeks.

On top of his goalscoring prowess, the 25-year-old's jovial personality has gained fans.

Just hours after scoring the winner in the last 32 against Ivory Coast, Haaland went to be kitted out like a cowboy in Dallas posting a video in a cowboy hat and boots that went viral.

"It's a good thing because I like the Americans, I think they are kind of hilarious as well. They are funny, so I like the way they are," he said on his newfound fame in the USA.

"I think it's just good. Honestly on every single thing with the World Cup so far here it has been amazing: from the games to the stadiums, everything has been amazing."

"The training ground where we train has been amazing, so I'm super happy and it's been impressive."

England's Quansah gets two-game World Cup ban

England defender Jarell Quansah will miss tomorrow's World Cup quarter-final against Norway, and the last four should the Three Lions progress, after being handed a two-game ban by FIFA.

Quansah was shown a straight red card against Mexico in the last 16, but only after a VAR review. The absence of the Bayer Leverkusen man adds an extra headache to Thomas Tuchel's selection at right-back.

Chelsea captain Reece James has missed the last three games after picking up a hamstring injury and is the only natural right-back in Tuchel's squad. Djed Spence and Quansah have deputised at right-back, but both have struggled.

James remains a doubt for the last eight after missing training on Wednesday. Ezri Konsa was forced to move to right-back for the final half hour of England's dogged display to win in Mexico and could start there with John Stones coming into central defence.

The English Football Association (FA) has reportedly been exploring options to appeal Quansah's suspension

after USA striker Folarin Balogun's ban was controversially suspended by FIFA. Balogun was cleared to play in the States' 4-1 defeat to Belgium following a call by US President Donald Trump to football's global governing body.

"Where does this start and where does this end now? Can we overturn it or not overturn it? What's going on?" Tuchel said after victory in Mexico City. "Where to draw the line is the question that I ask?"

(AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Courtois sees Belgium getting better, believes they can beat Spain

Reuters
Los Angeles

Belgium goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois believes his country can create a surprise at the World Cup and upset Spain in today's quarter-final after finally beginning to show some form.

"Everyone on our team realises it's possible. I think we have a strong squad with qualities that Spain will have to take into account," he told reporters ahead of training on Wednesday. "There are surprises in every tournament ... the Champions League, the Europa League, the World Cup."

"There are always surprises, and I think we can be one of them. Eliminating the European champions would obviously be a huge upset. The confidence is there," he said after a 4-1 victory over co-hosts the United States in Seattle on Monday.

Belgium bumbled through the group

phase, eventually topping the standings after beating New Zealand 5-1 in their last fixture after being held by Egypt and Iran. They then scraped by Senegal, coming back from two goals down with five minutes left to take the game to extra time and then win 3-2 with a last-gasp penalty.

Courtois, rated among the best keepers in world football, knows all about the Spanish threat having played at Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid.

"People were a bit disappointed in us, but we've set that right. We're getting better and better," Courtois insisted.

Spain is the favourite, of course. They are excellent in possession, and when they lose the ball, they press quickly. That's where the key lies: knowing how to quickly exploit the space behind their defence."

Spain substitute Mikel Merino earned them a 1-0 last-16 win when he scored against Portugal in the 91st minute on

Monday. "I think the goal against Portugal highlights their strengths," added Courtois. "We know Lamine Yamal is incredibly talented in one-on-one situations; he's fast, agile, and can beat two players if necessary."

Courtois, rated among the best keepers in world football, knows all about the Spanish threat having played at Atletico Madrid and Real Madrid.

"I've lived in Spain for 11 years, that's a long time, of course. Life runs on a slightly later schedule there, and the weather is better. But ultimately, I remain Belgian."

"Spain is my second home, though, and I'll probably keep living there after my career ends. I also have two children who are naturally more Spanish than Belgian, but at the end of the day, tomorrow's match is all about Belgium," he added.

Thibaut Courtois of Belgium reacts during the World Cup round of 16 match against USA in Seattle. (AFP)

