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CRICKET | Page 2

McCullum sacked as England Test coach but retains white-ball role



TENNIS | Page 3

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FOOTBALL

Scaloni says suffering is in Argentina's DNA after win over Swiss

ARGENTINA SINK 10-MAN SWISS TO SET UP BLOCKBUSTER ENGLAND SEMI-FINAL

Reuters
Kansas City, Missouri

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said their 3-1 extra-time victory over Switzerland in the World Cup quarter-finals on Saturday was further proof that his team have grown comfortable operating in challenging situations.

Forced to come from two goals down in their improbable 3-2 round-of-16 win over Egypt, and then pushed to the limit again by a relentless Swiss side, Scaloni's men found answers when the pressure was at its greatest, scoring twice deep in extra time to reach the last four.

For Scaloni, the ability to suffer without losing belief has become one of the defining characteristics of this Argentina squad. "We knew that we were going to suffer, and this is part of our blood, this is part of our DNA, and this brings peace of mind," the coach said.

Argentina's path through the tournament has been far from straightforward. They twice squandered leads to Cape Verde before grinding out a 3-2 victory in the round of 32, and then were 2-0 down to Egypt until the 79th minute before their comeback.

Scaloni believes the experience of Qatar 2022, where they captured the title with a penalty shootout victory over France, has helped his players navigate those difficult moments.

"In Qatar, we were not that experienced, I myself included, and those kind of situations were very difficult," he said.

"However, now we are more experienced because we know what it feels like to be dominated by the opponent, to concede an equaliser, so today we kept our composure. The team knew how to re-



Argentina's forward Julian Alvarez (centre) celebrates scoring his team's second goal with forward Jose Manuel Lopez (left) and defender Cristian Romero during the World Cup quarter-final against Switzerland at the Kansas City Stadium in Kansas City on Saturday. (AFP)

main calm and, of course, we will never give up."

Switzerland looked capable of derailing Argentina's campaign after they equalised in the 67th minute, but Julian Alvarez and Lautaro Martinez scored deep in extra time to secure the dramatic victory. "It was a tough opponent," Scaloni said. "It was very difficult for us to win the duels, to put more than five or six passes together.

"They were very strong, and they made that struggle in the one versus one in different areas of the

pitch. We suffered quite a lot."

Yet even on a day when Argentina were below their best, Scaloni felt his squad's depth and collective belief carried them through.

"We also have players on the bench who can turn the game on its head, and this is something very good," he said. "Ultimately, we always find the solutions."

The coach repeatedly returned to the theme of unity in his post-game press conference, crediting a group that has bought into his vision during six demanding weeks

together at the tournament. "This is thanks to the players because they had to trust in the process," he said. "We are a collective side. We are together. We are very much united. And this is proof that football is complicated."

Scaloni also highlighted Argentina's improvement on set pieces after midfielder Alexis Mac Allister headed home their opening goal from a Lionel Messi corner. "Alexis McAllister is one of the greatest. So all praise to him because he's been working very

hard," Scaloni said. The reward for Argentina is a sixth semi-final appearance in their last six major tournaments.

"I hadn't thought about it, but this is something to be very proud of," he said. If Argentina do lift the trophy again, this campaign may be remembered less for flowing football than for the stubborn resilience that has carried them through

"When you reach a semi-final, you need to suffer," Scaloni said. "You need to go through it."

As 2026 World Cup winds down, potential 2030 expansion to be discussed

FIFA officials will look at the possibility of expanding the World Cup by another 16 teams before the 2030 event, president Gianni Infantino said in an interview. Infantino told Bluewin, a Swiss media outlet, that growing from 48 to 64 teams could make sense. "That's definitely an issue that will be examined and discussed in the relevant committees after this World Cup," he told Bluewin. "When organizing a World Cup, it's important to organize it for the whole world - not just Europe and South America - but effectively the entire world. Every nation should be allowed to dream of participating in the World Cup. You can see that the quality of the teams is extremely high - and it's getting higher and higher, all over the world. If you don't give smaller countries a chance to participate in the World Cup, they'll lack the incentive to keep improving."

The World Cup field was 32 teams from 1998 through 2022. The current 2026 edition is the first with 48 teams. Four teams - Argentina, England, France and Spain - remain in the tournament. Two semifinal matches and the finals are all that remain from the initial 104-match schedule that saw action in Canada, Mexico and across the United States. Infantino said he considers the 48-team field to be a "huge success."

"Every team played at a high level. Teams from every continent scored goals and earned at least one point," he said. "Nine out of 10 African teams reached the knockout stage. At the last World Cup, there were only five teams from Africa. That just goes to show how important it is to include all teams - to give them this opportunity to participate."

The 2030 tournament will be a multi-continent effort. The first three matches are scheduled to be played in Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay - one per country - with the remaining games staged in Morocco, Portugal and Spain.

Expansion to 64 teams could mean that the South American nations each could host one four-team group, rather than one match.

FOCUS

France do not fear Spain but respect their quality: Konate

Reuters
Waltham, Massachusetts

France are not afraid of Spain going into their World Cup semi-final on Tuesday, defender Ibrahim Konate said on Sunday, but they are conscious of their opponents' quality and their near-perfect backline.

Spain have conceded only one goal in the entire tournament to reach the last four in search of a second World Cup title.

France, winners in 2018 and finalists four years ago, know Spain very well, having lost to them in the Euro 2024 last four and also in last year's Nations League semi-finals. "You cannot fear anyone," France centre-back Konate told a press conference. "We will now prepare as best as possible and hope the result in the end will favour us."

"Spain are an exceptional team, with a lot of individual quality, so we won't be focusing on just one player even though Lamine (Yamal) is a great player," said Konate, who had a brief substitute appearance in the win over Norway in their final group match.

Dayot Upamecano and William Saliba have been France's starting centre-backs, as the tournament favourites eye their



France's midfielder Manu Kone (left), forward Michael Olise (centre) and forward Kylian Mbappe take part in a training session at Bentley University in Boston. (AFP)

fifth World Cup final. The French have reached four of the last seven World Cup finals. Should they take part in the July 19 showdown in New York, they will sustain the comparison with West Germany, arguably the ultimate tournament nation with four finals between 1974 and 1990.

But Konate said the French were not wasting any thoughts on what might be.

"We are staying humble, we won't fall into that trap," he said.

They will need to find a way to break down this World Cup's most effective backline, as well as contain as much as



Spain players during a training session at Cotton Bowl in Dallas, Texas, yesterday. (AFP)

possible Lamine's runs down the wings.

"I would not say 'fear' but we are conscious of their quality," said fellow France centre-back Maxence Lacroix. "They have won all their matches (except a 0-0 draw against Cape Verde in the group), so we respect them. They have high quality players but we want to win."

Top of the list is Spain winger Lamine, who has earned praise from his coach for keeping opponents' defenders busy as teammate use the spaces created.

"We will defend well, the best," Lacroix said. "Lamine is a very good player and he has shown he can hurt teams at this World Cup. We will do the work that is needed."

CRICKET

McCullum sacked as England Test coach after 4 years

England lost seven of their last 9 Tests under McCullum

AFP
London

Brendon McCullum has left his role as England's Test head coach but will remain in charge of the national white-ball set-up, the England and Wales Cricket Board announced yesterday.

England have lost seven of their last nine Tests under the former New Zealand captain.

This includes a woeful 4-1 Ashes defeat in Australia in 2025/26 and last month's 2-1 loss at home to New Zealand, with both series overshadowed by allegations of a team drinking culture.

"I've absolutely loved coaching the Test side and I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved together," said McCullum in an ECB statement, adding: "Of course I'm gutted not to be continuing, but I respect the decision."

Former England captain Ben Stokes announced his international retirement midway through what turned out to a crushing defeat in the third and final Test against New Zealand at Trent Bridge - the final match of McCullum's red-ball reign.

His time as Test boss started in remarkable fashion with especially aggressive batting in particular as Stokes led England to 3-0 series wins over New Zealand and in Pakistan, where 500 runs were scored in one day, before a thrilling 2-2 home Ashes in 2023.

But a crushing 4-1 loss in India two years ago exposed the limits of England's 'one size fits all approach' when they could not simply smash their way out of trouble.

And the writing was on the wall for McCullum when England lost the Ashes series in Australia in just 11 days' cricket.

After a winning start to the New Zealand series, fresh off-field problems saw Stokes and fast bowler Gus Atkinson omitted from the second Test after breaking a midnight team curfew in a London bar.

England are now looking for a new Test coach and captain ahead of next month's series at home to Pakistan.

"Brendon breathed new life into England men's Test team during an exciting period which saw some amazing victories and we're grateful for all he has given to the role," said ECB chief executive Richard Gould.

"We now believe that the time is right to make a change for the Test team as we target victory in the Ashes (in England) next



England head coach Brendon McCullum (left) and Ben Stokes during practice in the third and final Test against New Zealand at Trent Bridge Cricket Ground in Nottingham on June 23, 2026 (Reuters)

summer (2027). Only England managing director Rob Key, heavily criticised for England's lack of preparation ahead of the Ashes, now remains from a Test leadership trio that once included Stokes and McCullum.

But the ex-England batsman said McCullum, who won 25 of his 44 Tests in charge, had left the red-ball team "well-set and poised to achieve great things".

Former England captain Nasser Hussain praised McCullum's initial impact upon the Test side, but said now was the right time for him to leave the red-ball role.

"In recent times, with the Ashes and losing seven of their last nine Test matches, and the manner of those defeats, I think it is about the right time," Hussain told Sky Sports.

Yesterday's announcement came the day after England's white-ball side thrashed India by 56 runs in Southampton to complete a 4-0 series sweep of the T20 world champions under McCullum. "My focus now is on giving everything I've got to the white-ball teams and helping England keep moving forward," said McCullum, 44, who took on the role of England limited-overs coach in 2024.

There have long been calls for Andy Flower to have a second stint as England coach.

The Zimbabwe cricket great was in charge from 2009-2014 and oversaw three successful Ashes campaigns, including their last away success in 2010/11.

"Flower took England to number one in the world, pushed

his team hard, some say at times too hard, but I loved Flower's coaching ability," Hussain said.

"Everything (was) meticulous...and that is what has been lacking in this England Test match side - the meticulous nature of what is needed behind the scenes."

Michael Vaughan, England's 2005 Ashes-winning skipper, said wholesale change was required in the Test set-up.

"Enough is enough," he told the *Stick to Cricket* podcast.

"There is no way in a million years that this management group is maximising... and I hate using the word talent now because talent only takes you so far, and we keep saying there are a talented group of players - well, they keep losing."

SPOTLIGHT

Bhatia first to score Test hundred at Lord's as India eye big win

AFP
London

Yastika Bhatia rode her luck but also batted superbly to become the first woman to score a Test century at Lord's as India closed in on a crushing victory over England yesterday.

Her hundred was the centrepiece of India's second innings 341-7 declared in the inaugural women's Test at 'the Home of Cricket'.

That left the host needing a mammoth 457 to win - the highest successful fourth-innings chase in any women's Test is Australia's 198 against England in Sydney in 2011.

England, however, collapsed to 34-4 before Amy Jones's unbeaten fifty helped the recovering to 130-6 at stumps - still 327 runs shy of their imposing target. But the showpiece match - taking place 142 years and 150 matches on from the first men's Test at Lord's - will at least now go into today's fourth and final day.

There were no fairytale farewells, however, for England veterans Tammy Beaumont and Heather Knight.

Opening bat Beaumont was bowled for a golden duck by the in-form Kranti Gaud in her final international appearance, with the India team forming a guard of honour as she left the field.

Former captain Knight, who after Saturday's close announced she too would be joining Beaumont in calling time on her England career after this match, fell for 13 after she was caught at short leg off the in-form Gaud.

Knight too received a guard of honour, but might well have traded it for a few more runs.

Earlier, Bhatia was almost dismissed for her overnight 39 off yesterday's very first ball.

The left-hander was beaten on the inside edge by a Lauren Bell delivery that clipped off stump without dislodging the bails.

But she made the most of her good fortune with several sparkling shots and there were no 'nervous 90s' for the 25-year-old, who completed her maiden inter-

national century in any format in the first over after lunch.

She hit Issy Wong for two fours off consecutive balls - a square drive followed by a carve to point - to go to 99 - before a quick single off the fast bowler saw Bhatia to a 145-ball hundred including 12 boundaries.

Bhatia punched the air in delight as her team-mates gathered on the India dressing room balcony in the pavilion to applaud her achievement.

Bhatia joined the likes of India men's greats Vinoo Mankad, Dilip Vengsarkar, Mohammad Azhar-rudin, Sourav Ganguly and Rahul Dravid in scoring a Test century at the London ground.

She was eventually out for 113 when caught at extra-cover trying to loft left-arm spinner Sophie Ecclestone over the top.

Bhatia was congratulated by several England fielders as she walked off while receiving a standing ovation from spectators in the stands.

Ecclestone, who in the course of this match has become England's leading wicket-taker across all international formats, later bowled Sneh Rana to complete a five-wicket haul as she finished with 5-118 in 33.3 overs.

That made her the second woman to achieve the feat in a Lord's Test following Gaud's miserly 5-37 in 17 overs during England's first-innings 170.

Richa Ghosh, with a rapid unbeaten 50, added to the woes of an increasingly ragged England, who started this match just a few days after their T20 World Cup final defeat by Australia at Lord's last Sunday.

Smriti Mandhana had been in superb touch Saturday as she backed up her first-innings 83 with an unbeaten 69.

But Mandhana added just one run to her overnight score before she was caught low down the legside by diving wicket-keeper Jones.

BRIEF SCORES

England 170 and 130 for 6 (Jones 52*, Satghare 2-19) **need 327 runs to beat India 285 and 341 for 7 dec.** (Bhatia 113, Mandhana 70, Richa 50*, Ecclestone 5-118)



England players congratulate India's Yastika Bhatia as she walks after losing her wicket, dismissed by England's Mady Villiers off the bowling of Sophie Ecclestone, during the Women's Test at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (Reuters)

TOUR DE FRANCE

Van der Poel braves the heat to win stage 9

AFP
Ussel, France

Cobbled classics specialist Mathieu van der Poel claimed his third Tour de France win yesterday with victory in the ninth stage, which was shortened due to intense heat.

The 31-year-old Dutchman, a former world champion, won a sprint amongst his three breakaway companions with Tobias Johannessen taking second and Tom Pidcock third.

"It was a super hard day. The start of the Tour was not great for our team, but I think, like always, we stayed calm," he said.

"We have a really nice group here and we kept believing that it will turn around... but it's really nice to go to the first rest day with a win."

Having worked as a sprint lead-out man for his Alpecin Premier Tech team-mate Jasper Philipsen - who had finished fourth and fifth in the sprint stages - in the previous two days, Van der Poel finally had a chance to go for a stage win for himself.

Reigning champion Tadej Pogacar came home in the chasing peloton six seconds behind the winner to maintain his lead in the overall standings ahead of today's first rest day.

The four-time champion leads two-time winner Jonas Vingegaard by 2min 42sec with Mexican Isaac del Toro a fur-

ther 45sec back. Van der Poel, a three-time winner of both the Tour of Flanders and Paris-Roubaix - the two most important one-day cobbled classics - had previously won Tour stages in 2021 and 2025.

RED-ALERT

This stage was shortened by around 30km due to a "red alert" weather warning in the central Correze region.

Temperatures once again reached close to 40C, although in parts on the stage it was nearer 30C.

There was a furious battle from the beginning of the 154.6km run from Malemort to Ussel to make it into the day's breakaway.

It was not until about halfway through the stage that an eight-man breakaway finally went clear on the steep 3.8km-long Suc au May climb.

The group never eked out a lead of more than a minute and a half but they worked well together.

Van der Poel then attacked out of that group with 25km left on the final categorised climb of the day, the 900m-long, and equally steep, Mont Bessou.

Only Norwegian Johannessen, Frenchman Alex Baudin and Briton Pidcock were able to follow and then it was a full-throttle charge to the finish line with a 50-second lead over the significantly-reduced peloton.

The breakaway riders had plenty in the



Alpecin - Premier Tech team's Dutch rider Mathieu van der Poel celebrates on the podium after winning the 9th stage of the 113th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 154.6 km between Malemort and Ussel in central France, yesterday. (AFP)

bag and even slowed down in the final kilometre in a cat-and-mouse game before the final sprint.

But when Van der Poel launched that, it was clear that he would be too strong for the others.

"I was not so sure. I spent a lot of energy

trying to keep the break alive," he admitted.

"There was a lot of pressure from the bunch. The roads were horrible for a breakaway with a headwind the whole day.

"We fought for it and I'm happy to finish it off."

POGACAR CALLS FOR CALENDAR OVERHAUL DUE TO HEATWAVE

Tour de France king Tadej Pogacar said yesterday that if he had his own way, he would not race at all in the hottest summer months.

The 27-year-old Slovenian was speaking after the ninth stage of the Tour de France in the central Correze region which had been shortened by around 30km because of a "red alert" warning due to an intense heatwave. Every day since the 113th edition of the Tour started in Barcelona nine days ago, riders have braved temperatures of up to 35C to 40C.

Some, such as Australian veteran Luke Durbidge, have suggested starting the stages earlier in the day but Pogacar dismissed the effectiveness of such a move.

"It's a big topic to discuss, but if I could have the power to change all, I would change all the calendars, and I would not race in July and August in the hot places and do a completely different calendar," the Tour leader said.

"Yesterday there was one proposal that we could start at 10:00 am, but for me at 10:00 am it doesn't change anything because then you finish at the big heat. For example, today we arrived and finished way cooler than at the start. So then you need to start at 8:00 am or 9:00 am, or even before. But I think the body can adapt to that as well, that you wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning and do a stage at 8:00 am."

COMMENT

‘Lucky’ England must improve despite entering semis: Tuchel

BELLINGHAM HEROICS EDGE ENGLAND PAST NORWAY AND INTO WORLD CUP LAST FOUR

AFP
Miami

England manager Thomas Tuchel said his team were “lucky” to squeeze past Norway 2-1 after extra-time to reach the World Cup semi-finals, but praised “world-class” Jude Bellingham after his two goals dragged the Three Lions to victory.

A furious Tuchel was in little mood to celebrate despite England reaching the last four for just the fourth time in history after Bellingham’s double overturned Andreas Schjelderup’s opener.

“We made life very, very difficult for ourselves today,” Tuchel said in an animated on-field interview moments after his team’s win.

“The result is fantastic. The last four is amazing, but I’m not happy with the performance.

“The commitment is there, but it made life very, very difficult for us in the way we played, how we played, sloppy, lots of safety, not fast enough, not enough. We were lucky today.”

Bellingham was less than impressed with his manager’s reaction.

“Whatever. Whatever,” said the Real Madrid midfielder after a gruelling 120 minutes in the searing Miami heat.

“It’s difficult out there. It’s a tough shift. All the players are putting in a tough shift. So my thoughts and appreciation go to the players who put in a good shift out there.”

England will now face either Argentina or Switzerland in Atlanta on Wednesday as they attempt to reach the World Cup final for the first time in 60 years.

Tuchel said later he had no doubt over his players’ effort but was adamant that his team would need to improve to progress further in the competition.

“I’m impressed with the shift that they put in, the effort, the belief and to overcome adversity and to dig in and find ways to win is on the absolutely highest level,” the German coach said at the post-match press conference.

“Full credit to the team, we found a way in the last four. This is of course the most important but the analysing head of me and the football coach still thinks that we can and have played better football.”

England were fortunate in two major refereeing decisions.

Bellingham’s first goal was allowed to stand despite Norwegian protests that the ball had struck the TV camera suspended above the pitch in the build-up.



England’s midfielder Jude Bellingham celebrates scoring his team’s second goal with team-mates Harry Kane and John Stones during the World Cup quarter-final against Norway at Miami Stadium in Miami Saturday. (AFP)

Norway also had a second goal disallowed in the second half after a VAR review for a foul by Erling Haaland before a corner had been taken. “We were lucky. I stand with that,” added Tuchel.

“No one ever denies that you need luck to go far in tournament football. You need moments where you’re lucky, otherwise it’s just not possible

“I see no harm in admitting it. It’s just the way I felt.”

Tuchel was more fulsome in his praise for Bellingham, who again rose to the occasion to be a national hero.

After scoring twice in England’s memorable 3-2 win over Mexico in the Estadio Azteca in the last 16, Bellingham moved alongside Harry Kane on six goals in six games at this World Cup with his two goals in Miami. “World-class performance from a world-class player,” said Tuchel. “In big, big moments, crucial moments, he was absolutely top class.”

England manager Thomas Tuchel gives instructions to Noni Madueke during a hydration break. (Reuters)



Solbakken says ball hit camera cable for crucial England goal

Norway coach Stale Solbakken said Saturday he was convinced the ball struck an overhead camera cable before England scored a crucial equaliser in their World Cup quarter-final victory.

While FIFA swiftly issued a statement after Norway’s 2-1 defeat in Miami to say that a chip sensor embedded in the ball showed no sign of it hitting a cable, Solbakken was adamant.

“That was unlucky for for us,” Solbakken said. “The ball fell straight down from the sky, so it changed its direction. “But we can’t do anything about that. I don’t think we will play the game again. So, that’s how it is.”

The flashpoint came in first-half stoppage time when Norway goalkeeper Orjan Nyland’s long clearance appeared to suddenly change trajectory and fell into the path of England player Elliot Anderson, who launched the attack which led to Jude Bellingham’s equaliser. Norway’s players protested on the field to French referee Clement Turpin - who could have disallowed the goal ordered a drop ball under FIFA rules - but to no avail.

Solbakken expressed sympathy for Turpin’s refusal to disallow the goal.

“He says that he didn’t see it himself, and that he didn’t get any message that it actually happened, and that’s a good explanation,” Solbakken said of the French official.

“And since FIFA says that there was no touch, and that there is no signal from the chip and the ball, then he can’t do anything about it.

“But the ball fell straight down just in front of the bench. So I mean, it did touch it.

“If there’s been no sound or nothing from the chip, what can I say against that? But the ball drops down straight from heaven.”

In its statement FIFA said the chip sensor technology - used to disallow a goal in Croatia’s knockout defeat to Portugal earlier in the tournament - showed there was “no evidence” of the ball hitting the cable.

(AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

We put Norway on the map, says Haaland after World Cup exit

AFP
Miami

Erling Haaland said Norway’s World Cup performances had inspired a new generation despite the disappointment of a 2-1 quarter-final defeat to England after extra-time on Saturday.

Haaland failed to score for the first time in 15 competitive games for his country in Miami as Jude Bellingham’s double fired England into the last four.

The Manchester City striker had scored seven times in his four games at a major international tournament to carry Norway to the quarter-finals in their first World Cup for 28 years. That run included eliminating Brazil in the last 16 as Haaland struck twice to knock out the five-time winners. “How we put Norway on the map is maybe one thing that touches me the most,” said Haaland. “Hopefully now we can establish something when it comes to Euros, World Cups and everything because our generation is amazing and also all this gives motivation to young people back in Norway that it’s possible to play a big stage in the world with a Norwegian shirt.”

Haaland’s brand as a global superstar has soared in recent weeks with waves of new American fans taking to his affable off-field personality as well as his goalscoring



prowess. He is hoping Norway can build on their success in the United States to become a powerhouse in the coming years. “It’s kind of difficult to take in this kind of a show or rollercoaster that we’ve been in now for the last six weeks,” added the 25-year-old. “I think this changes Norway, I think it changes me. I’ve said it many times, we’re building on something in Norway.

“It’s about maintaining this because again we’ve shown that it’s possible to be one of the biggest football nations in the world.”

Bellingham and Haaland spent two seasons together as teammates at Borussia Dortmund and remain close friends - he said England were lucky to have the Real Madrid midfielder. “We had so much fun together and I’m not surprised that he scores two goals today and performs the way he does,” added Haaland.

“I think he’s one of the best in the world and he’s a midfielder. He still scores goals, he still manages to dribble every single player on the field. It’s just praise for Jude, I think he’s unbelievable. England is lucky because everybody would want a Jude in the team.”

Despite Norway needing a goal, Haaland was substituted at half-time in extra-time as he struggled to cope with the searing Miami heat. Norway boss Stale Solbakken said his only regret was possibly not taking off his talisman sooner. “It was not a tough decision to take him out because he was finished and maybe I should take him out before,” said Solbakken. “We used all his energy and power for game after game. He also got a dead leg in the second half, so that combined with the fatigue - he did everything he could. “He scored seven goals in five games

for us. A fantastic World Cup.”

Senegal part ways with coach Thiaw after World Cup exit

Senegal coach **Pape Thiaw** has been sacked in the wake of his side’s last-32 elimination at the World Cup, the Senegalese Football Federation (FSF) announced yesterday.

“Following a meeting of the (FSF) executive committee, it was decided to initiate proceedings to relieve national team coach Pape Thiaw, as well as the entire coaching staff, of their duties,” the federation said in a statement. It added that FSF president Abdoulaye Fall will hold a press conference on Monday to explain the “reasons behind this decision” and “to discuss the future”.

Thiaw, 45 and a former Senegal international, took over as national team boss in 2024. But he paid the price for a disappointing World Cup, in which the Lions of Teranga suffered two defeats in the group stage, against France and Norway, before a 5-0 victory over Iraq secured their place in the knockout rounds. Senegal were then knocked out by Belgium in the round of 32, losing 3-2 after extra time, despite having led 2-0 until the 86th minute. Under Thiaw, Senegal won the Africa Cup of Nations final in January before being stripped of their title as a punishment for walking off the pitch during the chaotic final against Morocco.

Italy icon Maldini gets key role with Italian FA

Italian football icon Paolo Maldini has been appointed technical director of the national football federation (FIGC) looking to rebuild after Italy’s failure to qualify for a third consecutive World Cup. “Maldini has always been my target,” said newly-appointed FIGC president Giovanni Malago. “I felt he was the right person to oversee the FIGC’s technical sector - a role that encompasses not just the senior national team, but the entire youth national team setup.

“We are embarking on a four-year commitment designed to take us from now through the next World Cup in 2030, with the European Championship along the way.”

The 58-year-old Maldini will work alongside Leonardo, the former sporting director of Paris



Saint-Germain and AC Milan, who will be his advisor, the FIGC added. Maldini will also assume the role of president of Club Italia, the body overseeing all national teams across all age groups, both men’s and women’s.

This is an unprecedented dual role in the FIGC, giving Maldini ultimate authority over all sporting decisions. His primary mission will be to revitalise the Azzurri who have lost their place among the global elite after missing out on the last three World Cup tournaments despite a European triumph in 2021. Maldini and Malago, who was elected FIGC chief in late June having previously headed the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics, must quickly find a new coach.

Maldini’s former AC Milan teammate Gennaro Gattuso resigned as head coach after Italy lost to Bosnia-Herzegovina on penalties in a European play-off for the 2026 World Cup in late March. Former Italian international Antonio Conte has been touted as a possible successor having held the role between 2014 and 2016. Conte left Napoli after two seasons last month.

Maldini spent his entire playing career with AC Milan, winning seven Italian league titles and five Champions League trophies.

Capped 126 times for Italy, he played in four World Cups and three European Championships, with his best results runner-up finishes in the 1994 World Cup and Euro 2000.