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FOOTBALL

Champs Spain lap up adulation of a million on bus parade

I've always said it, winning with your country is the most beautiful thing there is, above all a World Cup'



Spain's Rodri, coach Luis De La Fuente and Royal Spanish Football Federation President Rafael Louzan with the World Cup trophy during the team's arrival at Madrid.

AFP
Madrid

New World Cup champions Spain began their celebration parade on an open-top bus through the streets of Madrid yesterday evening, with a jubilant crowd of over a million people out to celebrate, local authorities told AFP.

The players, some shirtless, set off on their procession under a blazing sun, along the main arteries in the city centre where a sea of fans in red and yellow were waiting, with the destination Cibeles square.

After flying back from the United States to Madrid, the players were received by King Felipe VI and the royal family, and then Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, before kicking off the parade.

Players passed around the gleaming World Cup trophy and waved to a sea of delighted Spain fans in red and yellow, the day after defeating Argentina 1-0 in extra-time in New Jersey.

Ferran Torres's strike in extra-time was enough to bring Spain their second World Cup, following a first victory in 2010.

"You have shown your grit, your resilience and your courage, always backed by your technical skill, your control and command of the game, combining head and heart," the king told La Roja's stars, who were dressed in suits but changed to more casual clothing for their parade on a hot summer's day.

"Kings of the world" ran the words on the front of their vehicle, with fans chanting "champions" to their heroes.



Spain's Fabian Ruiz along with team-mates celebrates with the World Cup trophy during the victory parade in Madrid. (Reuters)



Fans gather at Cibeles Square in Madrid during the parade as they celebrate Spain's World Cup victory yesterday. (Reuters)

Spain captain Rodri held the World Cup trophy aloft at the top of the stairs as he descended from the Iberia plane that flew the team home after clinching their second star.

Later at Moncloa, Manchester City midfielder Rodri said this was the crowning achievement of his career.

"I've always said it, winning

with your country is the most beautiful thing there is, above all a World Cup," said Rodri.

"This generation grew up watching (Iker) Casillas and (Andres) Iniesta lift the cup and that we can do it today is the biggest thing you can do in football."

Many younger supporters were not yet born when Iniesta's extra-time goal against the Netherlands

secured Spain's first World Cup in South Africa 16 years ago.

Match-winner Torres joked he was "flying, literally" after the team returned from the United States after beating Argentina in New Jersey.

"I'm very happy to see how excited all of the children are... (and) to have the parade and celebrate with all of the Spaniards," he added.

Spain's World Cup winners bus parade started at Moncloa before heading towards Cibeles square, where hordes of fans had reserved their spots hours in advance.

A ceremony involving the players and a concert will then be held at the square, the traditional gathering point for celebrations by the Spanish national team and its supporters.

Over 120,000 people were estimated to be waiting there.

Spain's women's side won the World Cup in 2023, meaning for the first time a country has both trophies at the same time.

In 2030, Spain will defend their crown on home soil, as one of the World Cup hosts along with Portugal and Morocco.

"It's two for two," said Prime Minister Sanchez, of Spain's record in World Cup finals.

"Why not dream of a third in 2030, especially with Spain as hosts?"

The Spanish press was running out of superlatives to describe its heroes after they overcame favourites France in the semi-finals before downing Argentina.

"The kings of all-time!" wrote Marca, celebrating a "second star that will now be stitched onto the Spanish jersey after yet another masterclass in collective play."

Argentina, despite the presence of all-time great Lionel Messi, failed to create clear chances against Spain's well-organised and more positive side in the final.

The pain is immense, says Messi of World Cup defeat

MIAMI: Lionel Messi said yesterday that after Argentina's World Cup final loss "the pain is immense and it's going to take a long time for this wound to heal."

"I'll also hold on to all the good memories," Messi wrote in Spanish on Instagram, alongside a photo of himself wearing his loser's medal following the world champions' extra-time loss to Spain. "Today it's hard to appreciate what we achieved, but this squad reached two consecutive World Cup finals."

"I'd also like to congratulate Spain on winning the tournament," added the 39-year-old, who broke down in tears after the defeat. In the knockout rounds, Argentina came from behind to beat Egypt and England and had to go to extra time to beat Cape Verde and Switzerland. "With the matches we turned around by giving our all - matches that will remain in our memories forever - and with the support of an entire country, which, together with the hard work and effort of this squad, led us to once again be among the best in the world," the Inter Miami forward wrote in the post. Having scored eight goals during the tournament, Messi, an eight-time Ballon d'Or winner as best player in the world, failed to make an impact in the final, much like his team, which was unable to pose a threat to a better-organised Spanish side. At the World Cup, he has now lost two finals, in 2014 and 2026, and won one, in 2022, against France.

Argentinian media reported on Monday that Messi was not expected to make the trip back to Buenos Aires with most of the rest of the squad for what promises to be a subdued homecoming.



Spain's Lamine Yamal embraces Argentina's Lionel Messi after winning the World Cup on Sunday. (Reuters)

CEFERIN SKIPPED WORLD CUP FINAL REPORTEDLY TO SHOW DISAPPROVAL OF FIFA

Aleksander Ceferin, the head of UEFA, boycotted the World Cup final to show unhappiness with FIFA, British media reported yesterday. The relationship between European football's governing body and the game's global federation is under strain. One cause was FIFA's unexplained decision to suspend a red card for United States striker Folarin Balogun before a World Cup game against Belgium after US President

Donald Trump asked FIFA head Gianni Infantino to "review" the sending off. UEFA was unhappy that Infantino bowed to perceived political pressure from the host and called the decision by FIFA's disciplinary committee "unprecedented, incomprehensible and unjustifiable" and said it "crossed a red line". Other sources of tension were FIFA's acquiescence when US authorities refused to allow Somali referee Omar Artan to enter the

country. UEFA responded by appointing Artan to officiate its Super Cup final next month. FIFA was also unable to ensure Iran was treated the same way as other teams playing in the United States. Coach Amir Ghalenoei said his team were the "most oppressed" at the World Cup. US Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin said he "danced a happy dance" when Iran were knocked out. UEFA has also, so far, refused to adopt some of FIFA's

World Cup innovations, such as hydration breaks, the "mistaken identity" VAR protocol, which led to the sending off of Brael Embolo in Switzerland's quarter-final loss to Argentina, or the cards for players who cover their mouths talking to an opponent. Ceferin also criticised the enlarged 48-team tournament before it kicked off. "We have a lot of matches that are completely uninteresting," he was quoted as saying in a newspaper in his native Slovenia.

Ceferin has also been publicly critical of World Cup ticket prices. UEFA has said that it would continue to offer two 'fan first' ticket categories at the 2028 Euros in the United Kingdom and Ireland. It said that 40 percent of tickets would either be priced below 30 pounds (35 euros or \$40) or below 60 pounds. It has also promised not to adopt dynamic pricing. Ceferin did attend the opening match of the tournament in Mexico City on June 11.



CYCLING

Evenepoel eyes time trial win to secure 2nd spot

Even Pogacar considers Evenepoel as the favourite for stage 16

Reuters
Evian-Les-Bains, France

Belgian Remco Evenepoel's status as a three-time individual time trial (ITT) world champion makes him the favourite to win stage 16 of the Tour de France today and solidify his position as runner-up to Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar.

Evenepoel capitalised on Jonas Vingegaard's withdrawal from the race on Sunday, after the Dane broke his collarbone in a crash, and eventually claimed a stage win at the Plateau de Solaison to move up to second in the general classification.

While the Belgian is trailing yellow jersey holder Pogacar by five minutes, he has a 58-second lead over Mexico's Isaac del Toro, racing for UAE Team Emirates-XRG, who sits in third.

With his reputation as the world's best time-trialist, the Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe rider is expected to extend his advantage over the other podium contenders in the 26.1-km stage from Evian-les-Bains to Thonon-les-Bains.

"I will try to go again for a stage," the 26-year-old rider, who has won an ITT stage in each of the two previous editions of the Tour, told a press conference on Sunday.



Belgian rider Remco Evenepoel cycles to the finish line to win the 15th stage ahead of Slovenian rival Tadej Pogacar during the Tour de France on Sunday. (AFP)

Even Pogacar considers Evenepoel as the favourite for stage 16.

"He has his day on the time trial. I think he is a big contender," the four-time Tour winner told a press conference on Sunday. The ITT route features a 9.7-km climb at an average gradient of 4.3%.

"There are nine kilometres of climbing, eight kilometres of descent and nine kilometres of flat

terrain so it's quite a comprehensive time trial," the race organiser's sports director Yannick Tala-bardon said, adding that "there's no point in changing bikes" for the climb. "The final section consists of long straight lines in Thonon-les-Bains," he noted.

As the Tour enters its last week, which features three gruelling mountain stages in the final four days, today's time trial will be

critical for riders aiming to secure podium positions. Evenepoel, who has already showcased his climbing strength and ITT dominance, is well-positioned to make further gains.

With Pogacar holding a commanding lead, the main battle may now centre on the fight for second place, where Evenepoel's time-trial expertise could prove decisive.

FOCUS

French judge approved night-time Tour de France doping tests



AFP
Paris

French judge approved the night-time Tour de France anti-doping tests of star riders Tadej Pogacar and Jonas Vingegaard, the public prosecutor's office confirmed to AFP yesterday.

The International Testing Agency (ITA) petitioned the "Paris judge specialising in liberty and detention matters ... to authorise the anti-doping tests that took place overnight between July 18 and 19," the prosecutor's office stated.

Both race leader Pogacar and Vingegaard - the two men who have dominated the Tour for the last six years - were visited overnight from Saturday to Sunday just hours before a crucial mountain stage.

Professional riders and anti-doping testers were at loggerheads after former winner Vingegaard crashed out following the control.

Reigning champion Pogacar led the protests describing being woken up in the middle of the night for a doping test as "inhuman".

Vingegaard confirmed he had been woken at 2:00 am while Pogacar said that testers had been to his hotel at 5:00 am.

Both said that their sleep had

been disturbed.

The ITA issued a statement defending its actions, insisting it had to conduct night-time tests to ensure it operates an "effective" anti-doping programme to protect "the integrity of cycling races".

Under the anti-doping regulations of the International Cycling Union, which delegated its anti-doping programme to the ITA in 2021, the UCI must have "serious and specific suspicions that the rider may be involved in doping activities" to conduct tests between 11 pm and 5 am.

The judges responsible for liberty and detention (JLD) "have concurrent jurisdiction to rule on requests for night-time anti-doping tests," the Paris public prosecutor's office told AFP.

As the wearer of the Tour's yellow jersey, Pogacar is already tested daily after the race.

Regarding the middle-of-the-night tests on his direct rivals, Belgian rider Remco Evenepoel, now second in the general classification, remarked on Sunday that "it is inhumane to wake riders up in the middle of the night".

Matteo Jorgenson, a teammate of Vingegaard, described it as a "total lack of respect for the riders." Their Visma team boss Richard Plugge said testing was "necessary" but lamented the timing as "not ideal".

CRICKET

Rohit brushes aside retirement talk

Reuters
London

Former India captain Rohit Sharma has dismissed speculation over his international future, saying his sole focus remains on representing the country and contributing to the team's success.

The 39-year-old's comments came after he struck a blistering 138 off 110 balls in India's unsuccessful chase in the third and final One-Day International against England on Sunday, amid reports that the match at Lord's could be his last appearance in Indian colours.

The hundred ended a lean run in which Sharma had gone 11 ODIs without reaching three figures, a stretch that fuelled questions about his place ahead of next year's World Cup in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

However, the opener retained the backing of the team management.

"My job is with the bat, come and play, represent my country, represent my team. That's what I have been told to do since my debut so that's what I am going to do," Sharma said in an interview on the Indian cricket board's website.

"The noise since I made my debut was there. And till the time I am going to stay here, it is always going to be there.

"So it doesn't really matter too much. What matters is what I do on the field, try and contribute to the success of the team. That's all my focus is right now. And let the noise be there. If there is no noise, there is no fun."

Despite Rohit's innings, India lost the match and conceded the ODI series 2-1.

India next travel to Zimbabwe for a three-match Twenty20 International series from July 23-26 before touring Sri Lanka for a test series next month.

Gill wants India to improve fitness ahead of World Cup
Captain Shubman Gill said India failed to field their best combination in the one-day series against England because of frequent injuries to players, a concern the team must address before next year's



India's Rohit Sharma in action during the third and final ODI against England at Lord's on Sunday. (Reuters)

World Cup. India were without their premier all-rounder Hardik Pandya and his replacement Nitish Kumar Reddy also missed the tour of England with a quadriceps injury. Seamer Harshit Rana and all-rounder Washington Sundar also picked up injuries at different stages of the tour while pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah missed Sunday's decider, which England won by 26 runs to seal a 2-1 series victory.

"If you look at the first squad, we had announced (for the series), from that minimum five players did not play this match," Gill said after their loss at Lord's.

"If one player is injured, you look at playing another combination, two players are injured you look at playing another combination, but if after every match some player is missing then somewhere we are missing a trick.

"If you keep the World Cup as

the goal where we have to play 11 matches in a row, here we have players not being able to finish a two-to-three-match series.

"So there is some limitation where our players are not being able to play continuously, they play one or two matches, they suffer a niggle and then we are forced to play a different combination which we originally did not plan to play ... as a group we need improve our fitness."

England racked up 387-3 against India's depleted attack, while the tourists managed 360-7 in reply.

"Our bowling is a little bit inexperienced," Gill said.

"We were put under the pump in this match and we didn't respond well. We didn't start well in the powerplay. We gave away too many loose balls and then were always chasing the game trying to take wickets, create something which didn't happen for us."

LARA CALLS FOR CELEBRATION OF 'FATHER FIGURE' SOBERS

LONDON: Brian Lara has urged the "whole of the Caribbean" to celebrate Garry Sobers following the death of the West Indies legend. Sobers, widely regarded as cricket's most outstanding all-rounder, died aged 89 on Friday, sparking a flood of tributes from all over the world. Among his many achievements, Sobers's 365 not out against Pakistan in 1958 stood as the highest individual innings in Test cricket for 36 years. That record was eventually broken by fellow West Indies left-hander Lara, who made 375 against England in 1994, with Sobers walking on to the ground to congratulate him after he had gone past 365.

Lara, who first met Sobers as a boy while taking part in a youth cricket competition set up by the Barbados national hero, told *Sky Sports*: "He was a father figure, a general, a mentor in my life,



In this file photo, Sir Garfield Sobers of West Indies with Brian Lara after Lara broke his world record during the fifth Test against England at Antigua in 1994.

so even though I am sad, 89 is a great score. "I want to tell the whole of the Caribbean that we need to celebrate his life." He added: "In each era of West Indies cricket there is a different motivational factor. Sir Clive Lloyd and Sir Vivian Richards wanted to be the best team in

the world. "But I read that in the 1950s and 60s it was about making ourselves independent of English rule and Sir Garfield Sobers, Sir Frank Worrell, Sir Wes Hall fought for a different purpose. "Sir Garfield is the most amazing person I have ever met. Just unbelievable."

COMMENT

McCullum confident he can work with new England Test coach

AFP
London

Brendon McCullum insists he can work alongside England's next Test coach despite being sacked from the role.

McCullum was dismissed as Test boss following England's 2-1 defeat by New Zealand in a series that culminated in the international retirement of red-ball captain Ben Stokes.

But McCullum remains in charge of England's white-ball teams and oversaw a 4-0 T20 series whitewash of world champions India.

On Sunday, there was more success for McCullum's team, with a 27-run win at Lord's to seal England's first one-day international series victory over India since 2018.

England posted 387-3 - the highest ODI total at Lord's - thanks to Ben Duckett's 141, with both Jacob Bethell and Joe Root contributing fifties.

But while England's white-ball teams are making progress, the Test side are on a run of seven defeats in nine matches heading into a home series with Pakistan starting next month.

Asked how he would work with a new Test coach in a potential awkward situation, McCullum said: "Collaboratively, I think. I think once the new coach is put in place, we'll have a good conversation around everything.

"I think ultimately as long as everyone wants what is right for English cricket, there will be some

give and take on certain things. That is the way it is."

Andy Flower, a former England coach, has ruled himself out of succeeding McCullum as Test boss.

Jonathan Trott, an ex-England batsman, and former Australia coach Justin Langer are among the leading candidates to take over from McCullum.

Former New Zealand captain McCullum has been buoyed by England's white-ball form ahead of next year's ODI World Cup in southern Africa.

"I think we've seen some growth in the side over the last couple of series and there is some more growth to come, which is exciting and where my focus is on," he said.

Harry Brook, meanwhile, lauded coach McCullum for his role in England's first one-day international series victory over India since 2018 following an entertaining 27-run win at Lord's on Sunday.

But England captain Brook's decision to turn to Jacob Bethell's part-time spin proved inspired with the Barbados-born youngster bowling Rohit Sharma.

"That was a tough little period, they (India) were obviously getting ahead of the game and playing really well," said Brook, who praised the much-criticised McCullum's tactical input.

"I decided to go off for an over and have a quick chat with Baz to gather his thoughts. Again, it comes back to the communication which has been outstanding throughout the T20s, throughout the ODIs. They have a slightly different view from up there, with the TVs and analytic work and going up there to have a quick chat to see what we could do.

2026 FIFA World Cup: beIN SPORTS unveils historic viewership figures

DOHA: This has been a FIFA World Cup like no other for Arab football – and the region has watched it like never before. With a record eight Arab teams competing at the expanded 48-team tournament, Egypt reached the Round of 16 for the first time in FIFA World Cup history, while the Pharaohs and Morocco became the first two Arab nations ever to reach the last 16 at the same finals. Fans across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) responded in extraordinary numbers, beIN SPORTS can reveal, with Egypt's last-16 epic against Argentina drawing 192.6mn viewers – the most-watched of the tournament's 29 matches involving Arab teams – and Morocco's quarter-final against France attracting a viewership of 151.6mn, according to independent audience measurement by Ipsos.

beIN, the leading sports broadcaster in the region, has shown every match of this summer's tournament live and exclusive, with rights spanning 24 markets across MENA. With the finals staged in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, kick-offs have arrived at 01:00, 04:00 and 06:00 MECCA – and the region has risen for its teams every time, with pre-dawn audiences of more than 100 million proving that when Arab teams make history, distance and time zones are no barrier to passion. Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia carried the region's hopes to North America – and the history-making began early. Qatar claimed their first-ever World Cup point by holding eventual quarter-finalists Switzerland, while debutants Jordan scored in



all three of their group matches – including against world champions Argentina, watched from the stands by King Abdullah II and by 65 million viewers at home. Algeria, meanwhile, progressed to the knockout rounds, where 123.1 million rose for the 06:00 MECCA kick-off of their last-32 tie with Switzerland. No side made more history than Egypt. The Pharaohs claimed a first-ever World Cup™ victory

by beating New Zealand 3-1, then a first knockout win by seeing off Australia in front of more than 157 million viewers – setting up a maiden Round of 16 appearance against world champions Argentina. Leading 2-0 with 12 minutes remaining, Egypt pushed the champions to the very brink before falling 3-2 in an unforgettable finale. With a prime-time 19:00 MECCA kick-off, 192.6mn viewers tuned in – the biggest audience of

any Arab match at the tournament. In Egypt itself, 94% of the entire adult population watched the match – a nation united behind its team. Morocco, history-making semi-finalists in 2022, wrote a new chapter of their own by becoming the first African and Arab team to reach two consecutive quarter-finals. The Atlas Lions defeated the Netherlands (81.1m) in the last 32 to join Egypt in the Round of 16 – an Arab double never before seen at a FIFA World Cup – before overcoming co-hosts Canada (149m) to reach the last eight. Their quarter-final against France in Boston kicked off at 23:00 MECCA and was watched by 151.6mn, including a remarkable 97% of Morocco's adult population. The group stage set the tone. The most-watched first-phase match was Egypt's 1-1 draw with Iran,

which drew more than 107mn viewers to a 06:00 MECCA kick-off. The Pharaohs' 1-1 draw with Belgium (91.7m) and landmark win over New Zealand (84.8m) also attracted huge audiences, as did Morocco's opening 1-1 draw with five-time champions Brazil (75.5m) – a 01:00 MECCA start – and Iraq's meeting with Africa Cup of Nations 2025 finalists Senegal (71.4m). Even Saudi Arabia's 03:00 MECCA encounter with Cabo Verde drew 44.9mn. In total, the 29 matches involving Arab teams attracted a cumulative viewership of more than 2.1 billion. The 23 group-stage fixtures drew 1.25 billion viewers – an average of more than 54 million per match – before the knockout rounds lifted audiences higher still: the six Arab ties drew a combined 854 million viewers, at an average of more than 142mn per match.

GOLF

After taking the long road, Fox bags major glory

‘I’M DEFINITELY NOT FOLLOWING THE TREND AT THE MOMENT’

Reuters
Southport, England

Ryan Fox took the scenic route to major championship glory, but when the defining moment finally arrived, he wasted no time. Twenty-two seconds after playing partner Sam Burns missed a birdie putt that could have forced a playoff, the New Zealander rolled in the winning putt on Royal Birkdale's 18th green on Sunday to complete a British Open triumph decades in the making.

The 12-footer sealed a dramatic one-shot victory for the 39-year-old, who had never previously finished in the top 10 of a major and who was 52nd after two rounds of the Open. Fox's journey to the Claret Jug has been anything but conventional.

“I was a rookie on the DP World Tour at 30. I was a rookie on the PGA Tour at 37 and now a major champion at 39,” Fox told reporters with the Claret Jug perched in front of him.

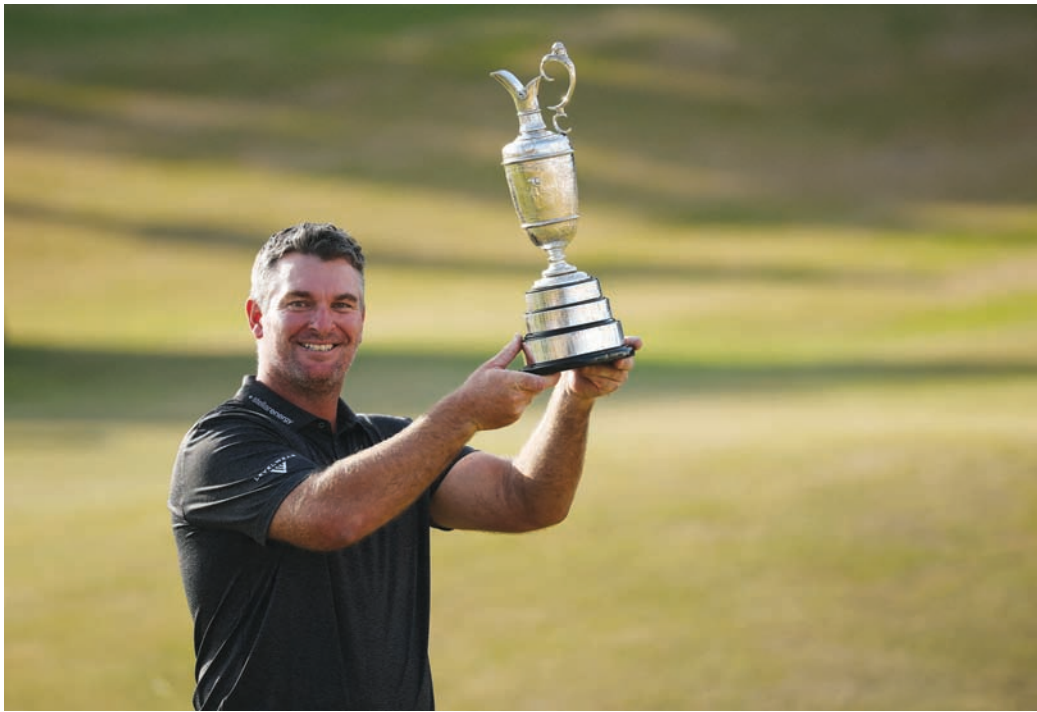
“I’m definitely not following the trend at the moment. If you’d have given me my career up till yesterday when I first turned pro, I would have jumped at it.

“Now I probably would have killed people for it!”

What made Fox's breakthrough all the more remarkable in a game known for its often glacial pace was that it was achieved by a player who rarely lingers over anything.

From the moment American Burns missed, Fox needed barely half a minute to read, line up and hole the putt that made him the first New Zealand man to win the Open since Bob Charles in 1963.

That decisiveness has been part of him for as long as he can remember. “I was always that way as a kid. I see things fast. I was the same when I was playing cricket growing up,” said Fox, son of former All Black great Grant Fox.



New Zealand's Ryan Fox celebrates with the Claret Jug after winning the 154th Open at Royal Birkdale Golf Club, Southport, Britain, on Sunday. (Reuters)

NEVER METHODICAL AT ANYTHING

“I played almost every sport growing up. Tennis I wanted to hit the ball hard, and cricket I wanted to hit the ball hard. Everything just happened fast.

“I was never methodical at anything, to be honest, and it just carried over into golf. The less time I have to think about it, the less bad stuff can creep in there.

“If you tried to slow me down and make me do everything slowly, I think I’d be pretty useless, to be honest.”

Fox earned his first two PGA Tour titles only last year, while the biggest victory of his European career remains the BMW PGA Championship he claimed at Wentworth in 2023.

There were times earlier in his career when even reaching the elite level of professional golf seemed a distant ambition.

“When I turned pro, the goal was just to get on a major tour, to be honest,” he said.

Yet over the weekend at Birkdale, everything accelerated.

A men's major record-equaling 62 on Saturday vaulted him from the middle of the pack into the final pairing alongside overnight leader Burns.

On Sunday as bigger names wavered, he found four birdies over the final six holes of a roller-coaster closing round.

After failing to birdie the par-five 17th, Fox arrived at the 18th needing a birdie to overhaul American Cameron Young, whose brilliant 64 had left him as clubhouse leader for more than two hours.

Only four birdies had been recorded on the hole all day but Fox made mincemeat of it.

A towering drive found the fairway, a crisp nine-iron settled

12 feet from the hole and the winning putt disappeared into the centre of the cup.

“I hit two shots exactly how I wanted to hit them. I didn’t feel anything for the putt; everything was shaking that much,” he said. “I was just happy to hit it somewhat near the hole, and to see it go in was incredible.”

Fox comes from one of New Zealand's most distinguished sporting families.

His father was a key member of the All Blacks side that won the inaugural Rugby World Cup in 1987, while grandfather Merv Wallace captained the national cricket team.

“I had no pressure on me to follow in any of their footsteps,” Fox said. “I was lucky enough to carve my own path.”

That path led through the rolling dunes alongside the Irish Sea coast to golfing glory on Sunday.

FOCUS

DeChambeau had ‘threatened’ to call Trump over penalty



Bryson DeChambeau of the US on the 18th hole during the final round of the 154th Open Championship. (AFP)

AFP
London

Bryson DeChambeau reportedly threatened to call US president Donald Trump in a bid to resolve his rules row at the British Open.

DeChambeau was given a two-shot penalty on Friday after tournament officials ruled he had improved the area of his backswing by flattening down some long grass on Royal Birkdale's fifth hole.

The 32-year-old American is believed to have hinted he would call Trump during lengthy discussions with the officials regarding the penalty, which dropped him from second place and two off the lead on Friday.

The two-time major winner is a friend of Trump, serving on the President's council on sports, fitness and nutrition, playing golf with him and making an appearance at the White House in May.

Trump asked FIFA to review a red card shown to USA forward Folarin Balogun during the World Cup, and football's world governing body suspended the player's one-match ban.

DeChambeau wanted a similar intervention, but Trump apparently did not get involved on this occasion.

It is not known whether DeChambeau made contact with

Trump privately, but on Saturday R&A chief executive Mark Darbon was asked whether the President had been in touch.

“No, I have not received a call from President Trump,” he told *BBC Sport*.

“Irrespective of which player this affected, it is the same decision – from a rules perspective it was clear cut.”

It is understood that after his round on Saturday, DeChambeau visited Darbon, where his request to gain possession of his scorecard from the previous day was declined.

Rory McIlroy responded to the DeChambeau's penalty by calling his rival's antics “preformative”.

“I won’t pretend to be up here and defend Bryson,” said McIlroy. “I’m not particularly fond of him. I think a lot of it’s performative. I think a lot of it’s for attention.”

DeChambeau finished the tournament in 14th place, six shots behind champion Ryan Fox, and refused to speak to the waiting media on Sunday.

“A lot of ups and downs this week, to say the least. But I’m proud of the way I fought through it,” DeChambeau said on Instagram.

“Thank you to all my supporters for carrying me through. Onwards and upwards from here. Congratulations to Ryan Fox on an incredible win!”

BOTTOMLINE

Women’s Tennis Association mandates one-time gene test for eligibility

Reuters
London

Tennis players will be required to clear a one-time gene test to compete on the women's tour, the WTA said after updating its eligibility policy yesterday.

The WTA said the once-in-a-lifetime test for the SRY gene, which helps in determining biological sex, can be conducted via a cheek swab or blood test, with the new policy coming into effect today.

The previous WTA policy permitted transgender women to participate if they declared their gender as female and then maintained a lowered testosterone level for a period of two years before competing.

There are no known transgender women currently active at any level of professional tennis.

“Eligibility to participate in WTA tournaments will be confirmed through a required, one-time screening process for the SRY gene,” a WTA spokesperson told Reuters.

“Player screening will begin in 2026, following all appropriate confidentiality and data privacy safeguards and concurrent with a comprehensive player engagement program.

“The WTA recognizes that this is a sensitive and complex issue and is committed to treating all players with dignity and implementing the policy in a respectful and thoughtful way.”

Transgender player Renee Richards competed on the women's professional tour from 1977 to 1981 before coaching tennis great and gay rights trailblazer Martina Navratilova.

Navratilova, an 18-time Grand Slam singles champion, has been an outspo-

ken critic of the inclusion of transgender athletes, while world number one Aryna Sabalenka last year said it would be unfair for women to face transgender players.

Others, such as Billie Jean King – the 12-time Grand Slam singles champion who won the original “battle of the sexes” in 1973 – see transgender exclusion as discrimination.

Several sports federations, including World Athletics and World Boxing, have introduced similar gene tests in recent years.

In March, the International Olympic Committee said only biological female athletes whose gender has been determined by a one-time test would be eligible to take part in female category events at the Olympic Games.

Transgender advocacy groups say excluding transgender athletes amounts to discrimination.

Critics of transgender inclusion say going through male puberty imbues athletes with a musculo-skeletal advantage that transition does not mitigate.

Wimbledon finalist Muchova to miss Canadian Open after minor surgery

Wimbledon finalist Karolina Muchova said yesterday she would miss next month's Canadian Open after undergoing minor surgery. The 29-year-old Czech lost to compatriot Linda Noskova 6-2 5-7 6-3 in the Wimbledon final earlier this month.

It was the second Grand Slam final defeat of Muchova's career, following her loss to Poland's Iga Swiatek at the 2023 French Open.

“I had to undergo a small surgery that will keep me off the court for a few weeks. Everything went well, and I’m already working on my recovery,” Muchova posted on social media. “Sad to be missing Toronto this

year. I was really looking forward to making my debut there, but recovery comes first.” The world number six has struggled with a series of injury setbacks during her career, including recurring wrist problems. Muchova did not disclose the nature of the injury or provide a timeline for her return, but she is expected to be fit for the US Open, which begins next month.

Meanwhile after four grueling months on the sidelines due to a right wrist injury sustained at the Barcelona Open in April, Carlos Alcaraz is set to make his highly anticipated return to the ATP Tour.

The setback forced the 23-year-old Spaniard to sit out of Grand Slams at Roland Garros and Wimbledon. While his team chose to bypass the Canadian Open to ensure his wrist had fully healed, the reigning champion has officially been named to the start list for the Cincinnati Masters in August

LOSS

'Legendary' former Liverpool and England star Keegan dies aged 75

AFP
London

Former Liverpool and England star Kevin Keegan has died aged 75 after battling cancer, his family announced yesterday.

Keegan, regarded as one of the greatest players of his generation, was diagnosed with stage four cancer and underwent treatment in January.

"It is with immense sadness that we announce that Kevin Keegan has passed away at the age of 75," a statement from Keegan's family said.

"The former England player and manager had been battling cancer and was surrounded by his wife and daughters in his final moments."

Keegan, a dynamic striker nicknamed "mighty mouse", won

the English top-flight title three times with Liverpool after starting his legendary career with lowly Scunthorpe.

He also won the European Cup in 1977 and the FA Cup in 1974 during an iconic six-year spell at Anfield before joining German club Hamburg in 1977.

Keegan, who scored 21 goals in 63 games for England, won the Bundesliga title with Hamburg in 1979 and helped them reach the European Cup final the following year. He was voted the European Player of the Year in 1978 and 1979.

Keegan returned to England to play for Southampton and Newcastle, retiring in 1984 after starring in the Magpies' promotion to the top tier.

"We are devastated to learn of the passing of Kevin Keegan, one of the most iconic, influential and deeply-loved figures in our club's history," Newcastle said in a state-



Former England star Kevin Keegan has died after battling cancer, his family announced yesterday. (AFP)

ment. "Kevin was more than a legendary footballer and manager. He was the beating heart of Newcastle United for generations of supporters.

"As a player, he brought world-class talent, ambition and belief to St James' Park, helping to transform perceptions of what Newcastle United could be.

"As a manager, he ignited our city. Kevin gave supporters hope and pride, and led a team whose style, spirit and passion captured the imagination of football fans around the world. He was so much more than an entertainer."

Keegan's 'entertainers'

Southampton added: "We are devastated to learn of the passing of Kevin Keegan. Kevin signed for the club in 1980 as the holder of the Ballon d'Or and brought great joy to fans at The Dell and across the football world."

Turning to management in 1992, he led Newcastle to promotion to the Premier League in 1993. Keegan established them as a force in the top-flight, dubbed "the entertainers" as they finished runners-up to Manchester United after blowing a big lead in 1995-96 title race.

His clashes with United man-

ager Alex Ferguson - including his famous "I'd love it if we beat them" rant - took a toll on Keegan, who eventually resigned in 1997. He went on to manage Fulham before taking charge of England in a turbulent spell from 1999 to 2000, quitting the role of national team boss just hours after a 1-0 defeat against Germany at Wembley.

England had failed to make it out of the group stage at Euro 2000 during Keegan's reign. Keegan also spent four years as Manchester City manager before finishing his managerial career with a brief return to Newcastle in 2008.

"Kevin, a double Ballon d'Or winner, was a much loved husband, father and grandfather. The family would like to thank Kevin's incredible medical team for all their support," his family's statement added. "This is a hugely difficult time and they are requesting space and privacy."

FOCUS

Superb Spain worthy winners of World Cup

'We attack together and defend together, and that is one of the key things'

AFP
East Rutherford, United States

It was a World Cup in which football's biggest names sprinkled stardust over the tournament, yet in the end the trophy deservedly went to a formidable if unspectacular Spain side who were simply too strong, even without Lamine Yamal being at his thrilling best.

The 19-year-old winger was the focus of so much attention, but he initially struggled to find full fitness and finished with just one goal, in a group-stage win over Saudi Arabia. This World Cup, the first to feature 48 teams, had an average of 2.96 goals per game, making it the most prolific since 1970.

Spain scored only 14 times in eight games, but they take the trophy home after silencing Lionel Messi and defeating a disappointing Argentina 1-0 at the end of extra time at the MetLife Stadium on Sunday. La Roja completely outplayed the defending champions, but needed a Ferran Torres goal in the 106th minute to become world champions for the second time.

The key to their success was a remarkable defence which conceded only once in the whole competition, against Belgium in the quarter-finals.

Protecting that defence as brilliantly as ever was the captain Rodri, and it was telling that he was named player of the tournament rather than Messi, Kylian Mbappe or any of the other attacking superstars on display. There were echoes of 2010 in South Africa, when Spain won their first World Cup with a fantastic side whose success was also built around a watertight back line.

"When you don't concede I think it is much easier to win," said Marc Cucurella, the floppy-haired full-back who recently signed for Real Madrid from Chelsea.

"We attack together and defend together, and that is one of the key things about this team."

Messi and Argentina did not muster a single shot on target as their attempts to become the first team to successfully defend the World Cup since 1962 fell flat.

In the semi-finals, Spain had also shut out France's remarkable attack, including Mbappe who still ended the tournament as the top scorer with 10 goals.

"If you could speak to all the gloves I have worn in this World Cup, I think they would tell you they didn't have much work to do," joked goalkeeper Unai Simon.

Behind Mbappe and Messi, who got eight goals, in the race for the golden boot were Jude Bellingham, Erling Haaland, reigning Ballon d'Or Ousmane Dembele, and Harry Kane. Some of the most recognisable faces of this World Cup, but their teams could not match Spain, who are the first country to be world and European



Spain's Gavi, Lamine Yamal, Pau Cubarsi, Unai Simon, Ferran Torres and team-mates celebrate with the World Cup trophy. (Reuters)

champions at the same time since they did the double themselves in 2008 and 2010. The future looks just as bright - Yamal and fellow 19-year-old Pau Cubarsi are now part of an elite group of only 10 players ever to have won the World Cup as teenagers.

HOSTS IN 2030

Coach Luis de la Fuente, who took over following the disappointing last-16 exit at the 2022 World Cup, is a veteran at 65 but has achieved astonishing results and has a contract until Euro 2028. Before the tournament, so much attention was on the big-name coaches who came into international football with huge reputations.

Carlo Ancelotti and Thomas Tuchel failed to live up to the expectations of Brazil and England respectively, while Mauricio Pochettino could only lead the United States to the last 16 and Julian Nagelsmann's Germany disappointed. "These players are exceptionally talented and it is an honour to accompany them," said De la Fuente, happy to stand back

and let them bask in the glory.

The last two decades have seen Spain firmly shake off their reputation as international football's great underachievers, and they have now won two World Cups and three European Championships since 2008, as well as one UEFA Nations League. They will be back in action in just two months with Nations League games against England and Croatia.

For now, though, they can enjoy being world champions again, and think about the tantalising prospect of defending the trophy in 2030 - that will be the first time in World Cup history that the holders have defended the title on home soil.

Aside from Mbappe, who became the first player to win multiple FIFA World Cup Golden Boot awards for his 10 goals show, it didn't come as a surprise that the rest of the awards went to Spanish players after their remarkable run to the country's second World Cup title. Rodri collected the Golden Ball award, given to the best overall player in the tournament. While

SPOTLIGHT

Coach Garcia exit signals Belgium's generational shift

AFP
Paris

Rudi Garcia has left his role as Belgium coach after his side were knocked out of the World Cup quarter-finals, the Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) said yesterday.

Garcia, 62, took over the Red Devils in January 2025 before guiding them to a last-eight loss to eventual tournament winners Spain. The Frenchman replaced Domenico Tedesco and also helped Belgium secure their place in Nations League A with an ageing generation of big names players such as midfielder Kevin De Bruyne, forward Romelu Lukaku and goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois.

"We sincerely thank Rudi Garcia and his staff for their dedication, professionalism and commitment over the past 18 months," the RBFA said.

"And wish them every success in the future," it added.

Garcia's spell in charge was his first job in international football having had notable stints with Lille, Roma and Marseille.

In 2023, he lasted just five months at Napoli before being sacked after only 16 games.

At the World Cup, he was unable to take Belgium further than the last eight. Their third-place finish in 2018 remains their best performance at the competition.

Tedesco had only managed to take the squad to the last 16 of Euro 2024. His predecessor Roberto Martinez lost his job after a group stage exit at the World Cup four years ago.

"Rudi Garcia has undoubtedly

contributed to the revival of the Red Devils," RBFA sporting director Vincent Mannaert said.

"He was appointed national coach in a difficult sporting and financial context.

"Thanks in particular to his commitment and experience, team cohesion was restored and an excellent result was achieved at the last World Cup, Lannaert added.

Belgium finished top of their group and hammered co-hosts the US 4-1 in the last 16 in a game overshadowed by President Donald Trump asking FIFA to suspend Folarin Balogun's red card ban. "I leave Belgium in League A of the Nations League and among the 8 best teams in the world," Garcia said on Instagram.

"Only Spain, the new world champions, against whom we were the only team to score a goal in eight matches, prevented us from going even further in the most prestigious of competitions," the former Lille midfielder added.

Garcia kept faith with the likes of de Bruyne, Lukaku and Courtois, all 33 or older for the competition, from their fabled "Golden Generation" which also included Eden Hazard and Vincent Kompany.

He also placed faith in a younger generation of players such as attackers Jeremy Doku and Charles De Ketelaere and defender Nathan Ngoy.

"I'm ready once again, to pursue new ambitions with a national team or at club level," Garcia said.

"I wish Belgium all the best as they continue the generational change that I took pleasure in helping to start," he added.



Belgium's head coach Rudi Garcia gestures on the touchline during the World Cup quarter-final against Spain at the Los Angeles Stadium in Inglewood on July 10, 2026. (AFP)

VILLA SIGN JOAO GOMES FROM WOLVES

Aston Villa won the race to sign Brazil midfielder Joao Gomes from Wolves yesterday in a deal worth a reported £38mn (\$51mn).

Villa moved for Gomes after Chelsea agreed to sign England midfielder Morgan Rogers from Unai Emery's side.

The 25-year-old, who has won 10 caps for Brazil, was also a target for Atletico Madrid, but Villa convinced him to make the switch from Championship side Wolves. Gomes made 130 appearances for Wolves after signing from Flamengo in 2023, but was unable to stop them suffering relegation from the Premier League last season.

His move to Villa Park is part of a major overhaul of the Europa League winners' squad. Rogers is set to depart in a £17 million deal that will set a new record fee for an English player.

Villa also sold Youri Tielemans to Manchester United earlier in July, while Belgium midfielder Amadou Onana is out until next year after suffering a serious knee injury at the World Cup.

Emery swooped for Freiburg's Swiss winger Johan Nzambi on Friday in a £50mn transfer that stands as Villa's new record fee. Wolves technical director Matt Jackson said: "Joao deserves everything he gets from the game. He's the type of professional that coaches love and players love, so he will go on to be the outstanding player that we know he is."