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**EURO 2024**

# Bellingham, Kane rescue England from shock exit

Kane headed winner for Three Lions less than one minute into extra time

**AFP**  
Gelsenkirchen, Germany

England escaped an embarrassing last 16 exit at Euro 2024 thanks to Jude Bellingham's overhead kick before Harry Kane struck in extra-time for a 2-1 win over Slovakia yesterday.

The Three Lions have been hyped as one of the favourites to end a 58-year wait for major tournament glory but looked set to go out with a whimper to Ivan Schranz's 25th minute goal.

However, Bellingham's moment of inspiration five minutes into six added on in stoppage time breathed new life into Gareth Southgate's reign as England boss.

Kane then headed in just a minute into extra-time to set up a quarter-final meeting with Switzerland on Saturday.

"That's the desire and the attitude from the boys. It looked tough for a second there but you keep going... Jude does what Jude does and what an unbelievable goal," Kane said.

Southgate looked certain to fall on his sword after steadfastly refusing to make changes to a side that stumbled through as winners of Group C despite scoring just two goals in three games.

Kobbie Mainoo was introduced for his first competitive start in Southgate's only change and he paid the price with another lacklustre display lacking in any speed or invention for long spells.

The one saving grace of England's performances in the group stage was that a makeshift defence had held up well, conceding just once in three games.

However, they were torn to pieces early on by a Slovakia side ranked 45th in the world.

England did not heed a couple of warnings as David Hancko and Lukas Haraslin were wasteful with big chances.

Slovakia finally punished their more illustrious opponents when David Strelec was given acres of



England's midfielder Jude Bellingham celebrates with England's forward Harry Kane (right) after scoring his team's first goal during the UEFA Euro 2024 round of 16 match against Slovakia at the Arena AufSchalke in Gelsenkirchen yesterday. (AFP)

room to turn and play in Schranz, who confidently stroked past Jordan Pickford for his third goal of the tournament. Despite his lack of experience, Mainoo was one of the few players that threatened to spark England into life as the Manchester United midfielder's effort was deflected wide.

The half-time whistle was met with a chorus of boos but Southgate still stuck to his guns and did not make a change until 25 minutes to go.

England did at least improve on a dismal first half and had the ball in the net within five minutes of the restart.

Phil Foden turned in Kieran Trippier's cross but was caught offside after a VAR review.

Slovakia should have doubled their lead shortly afterwards when England gave away possession and Strelec saw Pickford well off his

line but failed to hit the target from the halfway line.

Southgate's hand was finally forced on 66 minutes by an injury to Trippier.

One of the major calls the England boss will come to regret is only naming one natural left-back in his 26-man squad in Luke Shaw, who has not played a minute for club or country since February.

With Shaw not match-fit, Bukayo Saka was forced to deputise at left-back to make room for the introduction of Cole Palmer.

England's chances seemed to have gone when Kane headed wide a golden opportunity and Declan Rice smashed the post with a long-range pot shot.

Southgate was even derided by the England support for bringing on Ivan Toney deep into stoppage time with chants of "you don't know what you're doing."

However, there was an incredible twist as Bellingham acrobatically turned home Guehi's flick-on from a throw-in the final moments of added-on time.

Kane hailed the goal as "one of the best in our country's history, I reckon."

Slovakia were suddenly rattled and Toney was to have a telling contribution. The Brentford striker headed Eberechi Eze's mishit shot back across goal for Kane to power home his second goal of the tournament.

Slovakia should still have taken the game to penalties when full-back Peter Pekarik failed to turn in a dangerous driven cross from point-blank range.

But England live to fight another day come the quarter-final against an impressive Switzerland, who comfortably knocked out holders Italy 2-0 on Saturday.

**FOCUS**

# Spain ease past Georgia to reach quarter-finals

**AFP**  
Cologne, Germany

Rodri, Fabian Ruiz, Nico Williams and Dani Olmo all scored as Spain came from behind to beat surprise packages Georgia 4-1 at Euro 2024 yesterday and set up a blockbuster quarter-final against hosts Germany.

Robin Le Normand's own goal gave Georgia a shock lead in the 18th minute of this last-16 tie to send their noisy supporters wild in Cologne. It was the first goal Spain had conceded at the competition but they came back to equalise six minutes before the interval courtesy of Manchester City midfielder Rodri.

Ruiz then headed home in the 51st minute and Williams ran through for the third before substitute Olmo made sure of the win as La Roja stay on track to become European champions for the fourth time.

Spain now take on Germany in the last eight in Stuttgart on Friday in a repeat of the Euro 2008 final, which they won 1-0 to begin their golden era of dominance in international football.

Luis de la Fuente's current team are looking to bring back the glory days and they were expected to brush Georgia aside here. They would have ultimately won by a far greater margin had they converted more of their chances, with 16-year-old winger Lamine Yamal squandering several opportunities in his attempt to become the youngest ever goal-scorer at the Euros.

Georgia are ranked 74th in the world, 66 places below Spain. Willy Sagnol's team lost twice to Spain in qualifying, going down 7-1 at home and 3-1 away.

Yet they still qualified for a first major tournament and then made it to the knockout stages

with a stunning 2-0 win over Portugal.

Sagnol said on the eve of this match that his unfancied team had "already won the European Championship" thanks to their remarkable run, and they now go home with their heads held high despite eventually crumbling here. They have a lively attacking partnership between Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Georges Mikautadze that is a danger for any opponent, and Giorgi Mamardashvili has been one of the best goalkeepers at the tournament.

Mamardashvili had already saved from Pedri and kept out Dani Carvajal's glancing header before Georgia went ahead.

The move started with a fine piece of play by Kvaratskhelia, who had little room to manoeuvre on the left wing but picked out a pass for Mikautadze, who then released Otar Kakabadze on the right wing.

Kakabadze's cross into the box was a horrible one for Le Normand, who had Kvaratskhelia arriving behind him and could not stop the ball rebounding off him and into the net for the eighth own goal of Euro 2024.

Spain were now vulnerable to the counterattack, which is Georgia's strength, but the men in red continued to dominate the game and kept testing Mamardashvili.

The Valencia shot-stopper made several more interventions in an increasingly wild encounter before the equaliser finally came, Rodri controlling a Williams pass at the edge of the box and stroking the ball into the corner.

Later Ruiz skipped past Giorgi Gvlesiani into the box and fired into the roof of the net to make it 3-1 in 75 minutes.

A delightful control and finish from the edge of the box by Olmo completed the scoring with seven minutes left.



Spain's Nico Williams (right) celebrates with teammate Dani Olmo after scoring a goal against Georgia during the UEFA Euro 2024 round of 16 match in Cologne yesterday. (Reuters)

**GLOBAL CHAMPIONS LEAGUE**

# Back to back wins as Doha Falcons continue flying form in Stockholm

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha/Stockholm

Doha Falcons triumphed for the second week in a row securing the Global Champions League (GCL) win in Stockholm yesterday after Paris.

Jerome Guery, Simon Delestre and Julien Anquetin in round one emerged victorious with Quel Homme de Hus, Dexter Fontenis Z and Z Ice Cube Z in front of an electric crowd.

Last year's overall GCL season Champions Riesenbeck International powered by Kingsland picked up another big points haul after a rocky first part of the season with Christian Kukuk on Nice van't Zorgvliet, Philipp Weishaupt with Zineday and Harry Allen on-board Lukaku vd Bisschop as the only other team on just four faults

but 7 seconds slower to take second place. Much to the Swedish crowds delight, Scandinavian Vikings secured their first podium of the year as Henrik von Eckermann on King Edward, Nicola Pohl with Catz de Sulpice and Evelina Tovek riding Moeboetoe v/d Roshoeve stepped up to the plate in third.

Winning rider Simon Delestre, said, "We really focus for the team [overall] ranking, we are in third now, sometimes we have a bit of bad luck, but we fight for it today."

And fight they did. Taking the win for the second week running, the on form riders Guery, Delestre and Anquetin put the pressure on and came out on top. Following their win, Simon said: "We have a fantastic team spirit, we are all good friends and to fight together instead of against each other is something really cool."

With some movement on the Championship Standings for

the Scandinavian Vikings, a long awaited podium finish finally arrived. Home hero and world number 1, Henrik von Eckermann said, "We haven't had a great season so far, but with a podium it is great, Nicola made a great round and put the pressure on me to not mess it up, but luckily I was on King Edward!"

Teammate Nicola Pohl went on to add, "I must say the atmosphere here was incredible, maybe also because Henrik was on the team it felt like they were supporting us a little extra, and the great fans and great atmosphere really made it a great day!"

Podium veterans Riesenbeck International powered by Kingsland Equestrian finished in a well-deserved second place, ultimately finishing 7 seconds ahead of third. The fourth podium for the 2024 season. Christian Kukuk spoke of the team's reignited champion-

ship hope. He said: "We haven't had as many podiums as last year, a few more second places rather than wins... There are more shows left for the season and we are definitely still fighting for the win."

- 2024 Championship Standings after Stage 9:**
- First:** Stockholm Hearts powered by H&M We Love Horses: 176 points
  - Second:** Doha Falcons: 170 points
  - Third:** Cannes Stars powered by Iron Dames: 169 points
  - Fourth:** Riesenbeck International powered by Kingsland: 161 points

A Doha Falcons rider in action during the Stockholm leg of the Global Champions League in Sweden yesterday. Doha Falcons triumphed for the second week in a row to move second in the overall championship standings.



## FOCUS

## Rohit: Leader of India's World Cup quest

AFP  
New Delhi

He came, he saw and he conquered. Rohit Sharma rose from humble beginnings to captain a high-profile Indian cricket team to World Cup glory and bid goodbye to T20 internationals.

Rohit, 37, lifted the T20 World Cup trophy at Barbados after India edged out South Africa by seven runs in a thrilling final in Barbados.

But after the triumph, two of India's greatest modern-day cricketers including Virat Kohli and Rohit called time on their T20 careers for the national team.

Rohit leaves a lasting legacy in the shortest format having featured in all nine editions, clinching his second T20 crown 17 years after he was part of MS Dhoni's winning team in the inaugural event in 2007.

In the ninth edition, Rohit's India came in as favourites and re-

mained unbeaten with the captain leading from the front with three half-centuries including a winning knock in the semi-final against England. The victory came close to midnight in India, which celebrated like never before, and Rohit announced his retirement in the post-match press conference in the West Indies.

"I loved every moment. I started my India career playing this format. I wanted to win the Cup and say (goodbye)," he said with a salute. "I wanted this badly. Very hard to put it into words," Rohit said on dropping to his knees and celebrating the win.

Called "Hitman" for getting to big scores quickly, Rohit signed off his T20 innings for India as the highest scorer in the format with 4,231 runs including five centuries in 159 matches since his debut in 2007.

A celebrated five-time IPL winner for Mumbai Indians, Rohit succeeded Kohli as captain of the team in 2021 in the nation's bid for a first major title since the



India's captain Rohit Sharma (seated) is seen after winning ICC Twenty20 World Cup 2024 final against South Africa at Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados, on Saturday. (AFP)

2013 Champions Trophy.

After heartbreaks including a loss in the final of last year's ODI World Cup at home to Australia, Rohit finally made India believe they could deliver the

World Cup.

In spite of losing the Mumbai captaincy this season, the swash-buckling 37-year-old opener has remained India's go-to batter in the white-ball cricket and will stay

on in ODI and Test format.

Rohit gave India real firepower at the top of the innings and his selfless approach allowed the rest of the batters to play freely.

There was double heartbreak in 2023, however, when Rohit led his side to the World Test final at the Oval and the 50-over World Cup final at home in Ahmedabad only to lose both to Australia.

India's failures, however, did not detract from Rohit's stature around the world.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan called him a "genuine hero" and the "man who has changed the culture" of the team.

Rohit took over the captaincy of the white-ball team in 2021 and a year later became the all-format leader in the cricket-crazy nation's quest for a global title.

Dhoni led India to their last World Cup victory in 2011 at home and then a Champions Trophy title two years later before the team faltered twice in the semi-finals of the 50-over showpiece - 2015 and 2019.

Kohli's inability to lead India to a title began to weigh heavily both with the pundits and with Kohli whose form began to slide.

With record IPL titles under his captaincy belt, Rohit was the chosen one to step in.

Nothing in life came easy for Rohit as he studied on a scholarship after his family was unable to afford the \$3.30 monthly fees.

He overcame all odds to become India's limited-overs star and the only batsman to have scored three double-centuries in one-day internationals.

Rohit, who is often criticised for his visible punch in contrast to Kohli's chiselled frame, has amassed 10,709 runs at an average of over 49 in 262 ODIs for India since his debut in 2007.

His boyhood cricket coach Dinesh Lad, in an interview with AFP last year, said that if his student were to lift the World Cup in Ahmedabad he would be the "richest person in the world".

Little did Lad realise the riches would come a year later.

## SPOTLIGHT

## India announces \$15mn World Cup team prize

'Congratulations to all the players, coaches, and support staff'

AFP  
New Delhi

India's World Cup-winning cricket team will share prize money of nearly \$15mn, the national cricket board said yesterday, as a reward for their "talent, determination, and sportsmanship".

India won a thrilling final by seven runs in Barbados on Saturday to clinch their first major title since the 2013 Champions Trophy.

Jay Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), announced the hefty reward, which will be shared between around 25 people - the entire team including coaches and support staff.

"I am pleased to announce prize money of 125 crores rupees (\$14.9mn) for Team India for winning the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024," Shah said in a statement.

If split equally, that works out to roughly \$600,000 each.

"The team has showcased exceptional talent, determination, and sportsmanship throughout the tournament," Shah added.

"Congratulations to all the players, coaches, and support staff for this outstanding achievement!"

The title victory comes after over a decade of heartbreaks in knockout matches of International Cricket Council (ICC) tournaments.

The cash prize is in addition to the International Cricket Council



India celebrates with the trophy after winning the ICC Twenty20 World Cup 2024 final against South Africa at Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados, on Saturday. (AFP)

record prize pool of \$11.25mn for the tournament.

India, as winner of the competition, will share a pot from that of \$2.45mn along with bonuses, which the ICC said is "the highest amount in the tournament's history".

South Africa will share \$1.28mn for finishing as the runner-up.

After India's win, the cricket-crazy country erupted with midnight celebrations as fans in blue Indian shirts on cars and bikes took to the streets across cities including the capital New Delhi.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on social media yesterday that he had spoken to

the team, congratulating them on their "excellent skill and spirit".

## India's Jadeja retires from T20 after World Cup win

India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja yesterday announced his retirement from T20 internationals, a day after he lifted the World Cup in Barbados. The left-handed Jadeja follows skipper Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli in quitting the shortest format soon after the seven-run win over South Africa in a thrilling final on Saturday.

"With a heart full of gratitude, I bid farewell to T20 internationals," Jadeja wrote in a social media post. "Like a steadfast horse

galloping with pride, I've always given my best for my country and will continue to do so in other formats." He added: "Winning the T20 World Cup was a dream come true, a pinnacle of my T20 international career. Thank you for the memories, the cheers, and the unwavering support."

Jadeja, 35, played 74 T20 matches for India. He took 54 wickets with his left-arm spin and scored 515 runs as a lower middle-order batsman since his debut in 2009.

Both Rohit and Kohli announced their T20 retirements in press interactions after the title win.

## ENGLAND DROP BAIRSTOW FOR FIRST TWO TESTS AGAINST THE WEST INDIES

London: England left out Jonny Bairstow from a 14-man squad announced yesterday for the first two Tests of next month's three-match series against the West Indies, with wicketkeeping duties set to be taken over by the uncapped Jamie Smith.

There was no place in the squad either for Ben Foakes, the first-choice wicketkeeper in a Surrey team where the 23-year-old Smith is often deployed as a specialist batsman.

Smith was one of three uncapped players in the squad, with seamers Gus Atkinson and Dillon Pennington included as England look to rebuild ahead of the 2025/26 Ashes series in Australia.

But left-arm spinner Jack Leach was omitted, with his Somerset teammate Shoaib Bashir the lone specialist slow bowler in the squad.

Bairstow won his 100th cap in England's previous Test, against India in Dharamsala, but a top score of 38 in 10 innings means he could now have played his last Test.

Since spending nearly a year out of the game following a horrifying leg break in a freak accident on a golf course, Bairstow has struggled to regain top form. Foakes was England's wicketkeeper during their 4-1 series loss in India and was widely applauded for his work behind the stumps on awkward, spin-friendly pitches.

But he averages under 30 with the bat in Test cricket and England would, ideally, like more runs from their wicketkeeper. Smith appears in tune with the aggressive "Bazball" approach England have adopted under coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes.

He averages 50 in the County Championship this season for title-holders and made a stunning 155 in 179 balls against Warwickshire earlier in the campaign.

Smith has already represented England, playing twice in last year's low-key one-day international series against Ireland. But questions are bound to be asked about his glove work, given Foakes is Surrey's preferred wicketkeeper. The first Test at Lord's starts on



July 10, with the match set to be England great James Anderson's last before the 41-year-old pace-man retires from the format. With fellow new-ball bowler Stuart Broad having retired after last year's drawn home Ashes series, England must now decide how to replace two bowlers who have taken a monumental 1,304 Test wickets between them.

The experienced Chris Woakes was recalled Sunday for the first time since being named player of the series in last year's Ashes. Injuries, however, have deprived England of several rising stars but Sussex seamer Ollie Robinson, who has had repeated warnings about his fitness, was still omitted on Sunday - just days after being hit for a record 43 in an over by Leicestershire's Louis Kimber.

Durham's Matthew Potts has been recalled instead, having taken an encouraging 23 wickets at under 30 in six Tests following a debut in 2022, with both Atkinson and Pennington impressing on the county circuit.

Bashir, 20, was fast-tracked into the England squad in India and responded with 17 wickets in three Tests. But, having been unable to displace Leach at Somerset, he had to go on loan to Worcestershire for first-class cricket this season. Nevertheless, he has still managed to knock Leach out of the Test squad.

**England squad:** Ben Stokes (captain), James Anderson (first Test only), Gus Atkinson, Shoaib Bashir, Harry Brook, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Dan Lawrence, Dillon Pennington, Ollie Pope, Matt Potts, Joe Root, Jamie Smith, Chris Woakes.

## CYCLING

## Pogacar claims Tour de France lead while Vingegaard shows great form

Reuters  
Bologna, Italy

Tadej Pogacar claimed the Tour de France overall lead with a late attack in yesterday's second stage, though the Slovenian may have been surprised by how easily defending champion Jonas Vingegaard followed him despite his recent lack of racing.

While the 2020 and 2021 Tour winner's lightning attack on the ascent of San Luca left fellow favourites Primoz Roglic and Remco Evenepoel seemingly glued to the road, Vingegaard had no trouble keeping up despite entering the race having not competed since he sustained a collapsed lung in a crash almost three months ago.

"Jonas was on my wheel, we can see he's already in great shape. It's going to be very interesting," said

Pogacar, who is looking to become the first rider to win the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France in the same year since the late Marco Pantani in 1998.

While Pogacar will be hoping not to fade over the three weeks of the race after riding the Giro in May, Vingegaard is looking to improve and keep some freshness for the final week.

Tour debutant Kevin Vauquelin was the second French winner in the first two days after being the best of the breakaway in the ascent to San Luca (1.9km at 10.6%) as he gave his Arkea-B&B Hotels team their first win in the race.

Romain Bardet, who started the day in the leader's yellow jersey, finished 21 seconds behind Pogacar to lose the overall lead by six seconds while Evenepoel eventually managed to bridge the gap with Vingegaard and his rival.

"There was a little gap in the



UAE Team Emirates team's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar (right) and Team Visma - Lease a Bike team's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard cycle up the San Luca ascent near Bologna in the final kilometres of the 2nd stage of the 111th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 199km between Cesenatico and Bologna, in Italy, yesterday. (AFP)

middle of the climb and I was not well positioned, my bad," said Evenepoel, who had Ecuador's Richard Carapaz in his slipstream as he battled back to avoid any losses.

Overall, Pogacar leads Belgian Evenepoel and Vingegaard of Denmark, who are second and third, respectively, on added places with no time difference.

Roglic is now 21 seconds down on Pogacar.

Eleven riders broke away early but none of them posed a threat to Bardet's yellow jersey. They opened a 10-minute gap and it became quickly obvious that they would battle it out for the stage win despite a late acceleration from the peloton.

In the leading group, Frenchmen Jordan Jegat and Axel Laurance attacked on the San Luca climb in a stadium-like, deafening atmosphere.

It was the first of two ascents to

San Luca up alongside the Portico which features 666 arches.

Vauquelin, Norwegian Jonas Abrahamson and Nelson Oliveira of Portugal broke free in the flat part leading to the bottom of San Luca.

The Frenchman then upped the pace right away and did not look back.

Abrahamson took second place with another Frenchman, Quentin Pacher, finishing third.

"I've had so many tough times, in training, at the Tour de Suisse, at the French championships, and yesterday I got dropped, I was a bit at the end of my tether," Vauquelin said.

"But I had a sense of revenge and I knew the wheel was going to turn. I turned quickly."

Today's third stage, a 230.8-km ride between Piacenza and Turin, is expected to favour the sprint specialists.

TENNIS

# Murray to make Wimbledon decision today



Britain's Andy Murray attends a press conference on the eve of the 2024 Wimbledon Championships at The All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
London

Andy Murray will decide today if he can play singles at his final Wimbledon, admitting he still does not have "100% feeling" in his leg following back surgery. Two-time champion and former world number one Murray underwent surgery to remove a cyst from his spine last week. "The operation on the back wasn't insignificant," said 37-year-old Murray who will train again today before deciding if he is fit enough to play his scheduled first round match tomorrow. "I don't have 100% feeling and sensation in my leg yet but it's getting better every day." He added: "I want to give it every single chance that I can to get there. I'm going to play another set again tomorrow. I'm doing some physical testing in the morning to

see sort of how far off I am. Then I will probably make a decision tomorrow evening." Murray explained that the cyst compressed nerves and caused him to lose most of the control in his right leg. "It's kind of like if you sleep on your arm funny, you wake up and you've got a dead arm," he said. Murray is due to face Czech world number 38 Tomas Machac tomorrow. If he can't make that date, he still hopes to play doubles with brother Jamie before bringing the curtain down on his Wimbledon career which began 19 years ago. "Obviously with doubles, although you're covering less distance and less court, you still need to be able to move pretty explosively," said Murray. "I'm hoping that with each day that passes the likelihood of me being able to play will increase. It's impossible for me to say because I also want to go out there and be

able to play to a level that I'm happy with." Murray claimed his first Wimbledon title in 2013, ending Britain's 77-year wait for a men's champion, with a straight sets victory over career-long rival Novak Djokovic. That was a triumph that did not lack a bump or two as Murray needed to come back from two sets down to defeat Fernando Verdasco in the quarter-finals. **Second Wimbledon title** Murray added a second Wimbledon title for good measure in 2016 with a straight sets triumph against Milos Raonic. It was his third Grand Slam title, having picked up his first major at the US Open in 2012, just weeks after having lost to Roger Federer in his maiden Wimbledon final. However, since his 2016 All England Club triumph, Murray has not passed the quarter-finals. He missed the 2018 tournament

with injury while 12 months later sat out the singles after undergoing hip surgery. That year, he played men's doubles as well as mixed with Serena Williams. Injury has been a constant problem for Murray in the twilight of his career. He has played with a metal hip since 2019 while this season saw him damage ankle ligaments in Miami when he went down to defeat to Machac. Murray made his Wimbledon debut in 2005, reaching the third round where he took a two sets lead before losing in five to 2002 runner-up David Nalbandian. "Everyone has their idea of how they want to finish their career, how they would want it to go," he said. "I probably would have seen that happening probably at Wimbledon. Obviously I have the Olympics coming up. But, yeah, I would love the opportunity to play here one more time."

PREVIEW

# Djokovic battles to save legacy of golden generation

'JUST THE THOUGHT OF MISSING WIMBLEDON WAS NOT CORRECT'

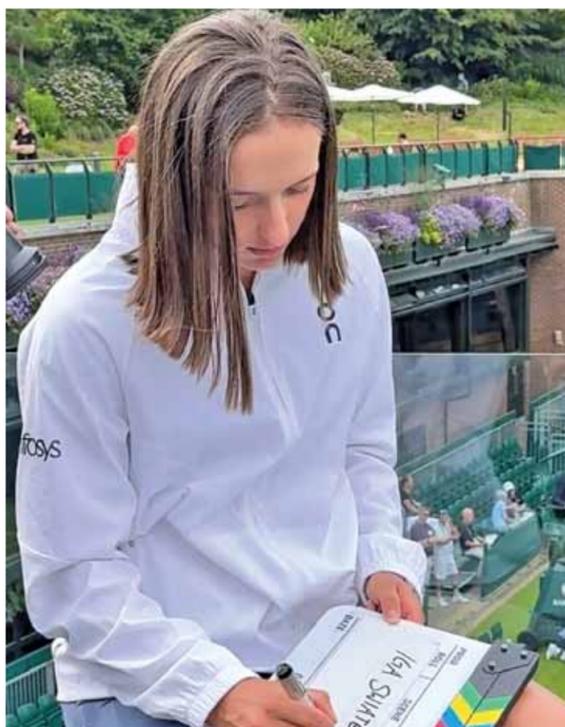
AFP  
London

Novak Djokovic is poised to mount a one-man battle to preserve the legacy of Wimbledon's golden generation in the face of an increasingly successful new wave spearheaded by Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner. However, the odds will be stacked against the seven-time champion and the holder of 24 Grand Slam titles when the tournament gets underway today. Arriving in London having recently undergone knee surgery, the 37-year-old Serb, runner-up to Alcaraz last year, has seen his Grand Slam powers eroded in 2024. He succeeded as Australian Open champion with Sinner with the Italian also taking his world number one ranking. Djokovic then saw his French Open crown pass to Alcaraz after he limped out of Paris suffering from a torn meniscus in his right knee. If Djokovic equals Roger Federer's record of eight Wimbledon titles, he would become the oldest champion of the modern era. "I have this incredible desire to play, just to compete," said Djokovic who will take on 123rd-ranked Vit Kopriwa of the Czech Republic in his opener tomorrow. "Just the thought of missing Wimbledon was not correct."

With Federer now retired, Rafael Nadal skipping the tournament to focus on the Paris Olympics and Andy Murray playing in the aftermath of a back operation, there is definitely change in the air in south-west London. Germany's world number four Alexander Zverev on Saturday predicted this year's Wimbledon will be the "most open in 20 years". The likelihood is that for the first time since 2002, the men's final on July 14 will not feature at least one of the 'Big Four' who have swept up 19 of the last 20 titles. Alcaraz, at 21 and 16 years Djokovic's junior, is already a three-time major winner. He captured the US Open in 2022 while still a teenager, defeated Djokovic in a five-set final at Wimbledon in 2023 before seeing off Zverev in another five set at the French Open this month. Alcaraz, who opens Centre Court action today against 262nd-ranked Mark Lajal of Estonia, has a chance to complete a rare French Open-Wimbledon double in the same season. "I know that it's going to be a really difficult and big challenge for me, but I think I'm ready to do it," said the Spaniard. Sinner, 22, made the semi-finals at Wimbledon last year and celebrated his first grass-court title at Halle this month. The top-seeded Italian has racked up four titles in 2024, losing just three of 41 matches. He faces



Serbia's Novak Djokovic (left) and Sebastian Korda of the US during a practice session ahead of the Wimbledon which starts today. (Reuters)



Iga Swiatek of Poland prepares for a TV interview at Wimbledon yesterday. Swiatek, the French Open winner, is the top seed.

Germany's Yannick Hanfmann in his opener today. Wimbledon will also bid an emotional farewell to two-time champion Murray. The 37-year-old British star, who famously ended Britain's 77-year wait for a Wimbledon men's champion with his 2013 victory, plans to bow out at the Olympics. He is due to face 38th-ranked Tomas Machac of the Czech Re-

public tomorrow but whether or not he makes it on court is still in doubt. Now ranked at 115 in the world, Murray has undergone surgery to remove a cyst on his spine. Already playing with a metal hip, the former world number one damaged ankle ligaments against Machac in Miami in April in another brutal indication of the physical setbacks endured by the sport's marquee names.

"It's complicated, and it's made more complicated because I want to play at Wimbledon one more time," said Murray. "I would say it's probably more likely that I'm not able to play singles right now." He is, however, set to play doubles alongside brother Jamie.

**Swiatek the player to beat** In the women's event, world number one Iga Swiatek, fresh from a fourth French Open title and fifth Grand Slam title, arrives on a 19-match win streak. The 23-year-old Pole's best run at Wimbledon was a quarter-final spot in 2023. Swiatek faces 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin in the first round. US Open champion and world number two Coco Gauff, made her breakthrough at Wimbledon as a 15-year-old qualifier in 2019 when she made the last 16. She also pushed through to the fourth round in 2021 but has a point to prove after a first round exit to American compatriot Kenin in 2023. Gauff starts against compatriot Caroline Dolehide, ranked 52. Third-ranked Aryna Sabalenka, the Australian Open champion and a semi-finalist at Wimbledon in 2021 and 2023, said she is still not "100% certain" of playing. The Belarusian is due to face 106th-ranked Emina Bektas of the United States today but a shoulder injury which forced her retirement at the Berlin grass-court tournament last week has not healed. When asked if she will withdraw from the tournament, she said: "There's always a chance". Marketa Vondrousova became the first unseeded player to win the women's title 12 months ago but history is not on her side if she is optimistic of a repeat. Serena Williams, in 2016, was the last woman to successfully defend the title.

## BAGNAIA CLAIMS THIRD CONSECUTIVE DUTCH MOTOGP



Ducati Lenovo Team's Francesco Bagnaia celebrates on the podium after winning the race at the TT Assen Grand Prix, Netherlands, yesterday. (AFP)

**Assen, Netherlands:** Francesco Bagnaia claimed his third consecutive Dutch MotoGP yesterday ahead of championship leader Jorge Martin to narrow the gap to 10 points in his quest for a third straight world title. Enea Bastianini completed the podium at Assen after a magnificent ride which saw him battling through the ranks from 10th place on the grid. But it was polesitter Bagnaia who led from take-off on his factory Ducati to ride a flawless race, capping a memorable weekend after his success in Saturday's sprint race. After giving a riding masterclass, the rider from Turin said: "It's incredible. I had to push from the start and suffering a bit from the rear tyre. But lap-by-lap I improved. We were very fast, very precise... I am very satisfied," added Bagnaia, 27, who twice broke the Assen lap record over the weekend. He praised his Ducati team, saying "the bike was fantastic." The weekend's win in Assen again also highlighted Ducati's dominance in the manufacturer's championship standings, delivering the fifth full Ducati podium in a row.

"Pecco" Bagnaia's race never looked in doubt as both he and Martin opened a sizeable gap from the pack early on. But the space between the first placed Italian and his Spanish rival also stayed constant around the 4.5km (2.8 mile) track - and although Martin pushed hard, he failed to reel in a rampant Bagnaia. "At the end of the race I had nothing left. I tried my absolute best to catch him," Martin said. "But Pecco was just on another

level. We just didn't see any chance to be first this weekend, and then I had the penalty," Martin added, after being demoted three places on the starting grid for riding slow on the racing line in qualifying on Saturday. Martin, who is leaving for Aprilia next season said it was a "difficult" weekend for the Prima Pramac Ducati team. He said however the team "improved a lot" with each day at the legendary Assen track known as "The Cathedral". The real battle was for third place, which turned into a titanic struggle between Bastianini, Aprilia's Maverick Vinales, Marc Marquez on a Gresini Ducati and Fabio Di Giannantonio on a VR46 Ducati. After rounds of racing ping-pong, Bastianini passed Vinales with four laps to go and held the third spot to the chequered flag ahead of the Spaniard. It was 26-year-old Bastianini's first podium position at Assen. Vinales eventually lost fourth place to Giannantonio after it was determined that he exceeded track limits in the final round. Fellow Spaniard and veteran rider Marc Marquez finished fourth, and although he seemed to make a few mistakes on the track, did well to recover from a fall in the sprint race on Saturday. His good work was undone however when race officials afterwards penalised him for riding with incorrect tyre pressures - which saw him drop down to 10th. Vinales eventually ended fifth behind Di Giannantonio, with South Africa's Brad Binder in sixth on a KTM.

FOCUS

## McLeod secures spot at Paris Olympics

World Indoor long jump bronze medalist Carey McLeod booked his ticket to the Paris Olympics on Saturday with an 8.38 metre jump on the penultimate day of the Jamaica National Senior and Junior Championships to win his first national title in Jamaica. McLeod, who was surprised by his winning mark, told Reuters it confirmed that his preparations to challenge for a medal at the Olympics were on target. "The distance opened my eyes a little bit more as I wasn't expecting to jump that far," he said.

"I will now go back to the drawing board and keep working because the job is never done until we get what we need at the Olympics." Wayne Pinnock, who won silver at the last world championships, came second with a mark of 8.27m. "Twice women's triple jump world championship silver medalist Shanika Ricketts leapt 14.5m to win her sixth national title and qualify for her third straight Olympics. Ricketts was not satisfied with her winning distance, but said she still had time to improve.

## FORMULA 1/ AUSTRIAN GRAND PRIX

# Russell gifted victory after Verstappen, Norris collide

'The team has done an amazing job to put us in this fight and you've got to be there in the end to pick up the pieces'

AFP  
Spielberg bei Knittelfeld, Austria

George Russell claimed a dramatic victory for Mercedes yesterday after a sensational late collision between series leader Max Verstappen of Red Bull and his nearest rival Lando Norris of McLaren in the closing laps of an action-packed Austrian Grand Prix.

It was the British driver's second career victory, endorsing the improved form of the Mercedes team in recent races, as he made the most of Verstappen's impulsive and aggressive move against Norris, to finish 1.9 seconds clear of Oscar Piastri in the second McLaren.

"Incredible!" said Russell, who had registered Mercedes' last win in Brazil in 2022.

"I think it was a tough fight out there at the beginning of the race just to hold on to that third place and I saw on the TV that Max and Lando were getting pretty close - and I knew Lando would want to try to get that race win.

"The team has done an amazing job to put us in this fight and you've got to be there in the end to pick up the pieces."

Carlos Sainz finished third for Ferrari ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in the second Mercedes and Verstappen, who was fifth, despite collecting a 10-second penalty for causing the crash with Norris, who was forced to retire his damaged car.

On a hot day in the Styrian Alps, with air temperatures touching 29 degrees and the track at 49, Verstappen made his now customary flawless start from pole.

Russell also made a good start from third and fought Norris for second on the opening lap.

Verstappen pitted on lap 23, followed by Norris and the rest, passing the race lead to Piastri until he pitted on lap 25. Piastri rejoined sixth and order was restored with everyone on hards, except Russell who took a second set of mediums.

"He launched straight into me - I couldn't turn right into the box,"



Mercedes' British driver George Russell (also inset) crosses the finish line to win the Formula One Austrian Grand Prix on the Red Bull Ring race track in Spielberg, Austria, yesterday. (AFP)



said Norris, complaining about Verstappen's alleged unsafe release by Red Bull.

"Yeah, we're on it," came the reply.

By lap 41 Verstappen was grumbling about his tyres.

"I don't know what's happening," said the champion who had only a fresh set of hards or used mediums left to run.

By lap 44, Verstappen's lead was down to 6.4 seconds before

Russell, also struggling, pitted for fresh hards, re-joining sixth. He swiftly set a fastest lap and passed Sainz for fifth behind Hamilton, who was behind the two McLarens.

With the leaders extending their stints to make a two-stop strategy work, back-markers like Leclerc in 12th on three stops were faster on track, but stuck behind Verstappen until he pitted again with Norris on lap 51.

The Dutchman suffered a slow stop due to a 'sticky' left rear and Norris on fresh mediums was only 2.2 behind as they rejoined in P1 and P2. Verstappen was on used mediums, delivering the prospect of a thrilling duel to the flag.

Norris was three-tenths adrift before passing him on lap 59, but ran wide and off-track.

He gave the position back and received a warning for exceeding track limits before attacking again

only for Verstappen to run wide and rejoin.

The battling pair eventually collided on lap 63 at Turn Three where Verstappen moved across to hit Norris's car and both suffered punctures, gifting the lead to Russell as they limped back to the pits.

Verstappen's front left was damaged and Norris's right rear, with sufficient damage for the McLaren to retire as Verstappen

rejoined in fifth, only to receive a 10-second penalty for causing the crash which led to a brief Virtual Safety Car.

Nico Hulkenberg came home sixth for Haas ahead of Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull, Kevin Magnussen in the second Haas, Daniel Ricciardo of RB and Pierre Gasly of Alpine.

Leclerc finished 11th in the second Ferrari after a race of four pit-stops following a first lap incident.

## FOOTBALL

## Canada into Copa quarters after 0-0 draw with 10-man Chile

Reuters  
Glendale, United States

Canada played out a dour goalless Copa America draw with 10-man Chile on Saturday to claim second place in Group A and progress to the quarter-finals, while the Chileans finished third to exit in the group stage for the first time since 2004.

The draw moved Copa America debutants Canada up to four points in Group A, five behind leaders Argentina, who had already qualified for the quarter-finals. "We knew coming into these games that it was not going to be easy," Canada captain and Bayern Munich fullback Alphonso Davies told OneSoccer afterward.

"We have to fight and we have to battle. And we have to do whatever we can to survive. And yeah, at times obviously we suffered. But we suffered together. And we got through it together."

Two-times champions Chile ended with two points and Peru finished bottom with one after losing 2-0 to Argentina in Saturday's other match.

Chile exited the tournament without a single goal to their name, prolonging a scoring drought in which they have netted only three goals in their first six 2026 World Cup qualifiers. Needing to win and have other results go their way, Chile had their uphill task made even harder after Gabriel Suazo was shown a second yellow card in the 27th minute for bringing down Richie Laryea.

The red card was protested angrily by Chile's players, who criticised the refereeing after the match.

"CONMEBOL has to be a little more efficient and learn from what Europe is like. It is no excuse,



Canada's Liam Millar celebrates the team's progression to the last eight stage after the CONMEBOL Copa America 2024 Group A match against Chile at Exploria Stadium in Orlando, Florida. (AFP)

but refereeing like that makes you angry. A red card ruins the whole game," Chile forward Alexis Sanchez said. "I apologise to the people for this elimination, but we are going to do everything to go to the World Cup."

Chile also felt aggrieved after Canada defender Moise Bombokito appeared to elbow Rodrigo Echeverria in the fifth minute of the match but VAR did not review the incident.

Captain Claudio Bravo, sidelined through injury, shared a video of the incident on X, saying: "It is unbelievable that with the technology that exists today in soccer, they can screw you over in this way."

"It is very hard to understand, it is impossible to compete against this. We leave with our heads held high, we gave everything!"

In the first half, Chile created more scoring opportunities, with Victor Davila coming closest with

a volley that flashed wide of the right post in the 21st minute.

However, the dismissal of Suazo shifted the balance in Canada's favour.

In the 38th minute, Jonathan David collided with Chilean goalkeeper Gabriel Arias while attempting to lob a volley over him. Despite Canada's appeals for a penalty, the referee remained unmoved. Arias was again called into action in the 42nd minute, rushing off his line to deny Stephen Eustaquio's shot from the edge of the area.

Chile continued to press after the break but failed to seriously challenge Canadian goalkeeper Maxime Crepeau, before beginning to flag under the tropical conditions as the game progressed.

Canada thought they had taken the lead in the second minute of stoppage time through substitute Tani Oluwaseyi, but the goal was ruled out for offside.

## FOCUS

## Italy, Spalletti forced to reboot after Euros title defence disaster

AFP  
Berlin

Italy are back at square one after a humbling exit from Euro 2024 as Luciano Spalletti was tasked yesterday with revitalising the Azzurri despite his role in an embarrassing title defence.

A shockingly one-sided 2-0 defeat to Switzerland in Berlin, where Italy won the 2006 World Cup, led to last-16 elimination after Spalletti's side had scraped through the group stage by the skin of their teeth. Saturday's limp loss was one of the lowest points in the history of one of the world's most important football nations, and the latest in a worrying large number of recent humiliations, including missing out on the last two World Cups.

Italy were pinned back in the first half and after Ruben Vargas' brilliant strike doubled the Swiss' lead seconds after half-time they were easily held at arm's length.

On Italy's national broadcaster RAI, the verdict was swift and brutal: "unacceptable", "slow and predictable", said discon-



solate commentators, while the headlines in Sunday's newspapers ranged from "Shameful" to suggesting the players take up farming. Spalletti's future as Italy coach had been in doubt ahead of a press conference organised on Sunday afternoon.

However the 65-year-old was confirmed in his post as Italy's football chief Gabriele Gravina said a "long-term project" could not be abandoned. "The match last night brought us back down to zero, and it's from there that we need to start again," said Spalletti. "We deservedly qualified for the last 16, even if it was hard-earned. We knew we had a very hard group. "But up un-

til we qualified for the knockout stage I could see the team react and adapt to difficulties in a way which was clearly different to what we saw last night."

Spalletti had cut a less lucid figure on Saturday evening, complaining that his players did not come into the tournament in the right condition to compete and suggesting that Italy were affected by the heat in Berlin's Olympiastadion.

It was not a convincing explanation for such disjointed performances over four matches and those comments followed a series of bizarre outbursts from Spalletti, who took the Italy job last summer with a huge amount of credit accrued after leading Napoli to a historic Serie A title.

But his reputation has taken a big hit after an awful tournament in which took a drastic turn for the worse after being comprehensively outclassed by Spain in their second Group B fixture.

"There's only one way to change things and that's that when we fall - and unfortunately we fall quite often - we learn how to get back up again," Gravina told reporters.

### Juventus sign Brazil star Douglas Luiz from Aston Villa

Juventus signed Brazil midfielder Douglas Luiz from Aston Villa in a deal worth a reported £42.3m (\$53.5m) yesterday. Luiz agreed a five-year contract with the Italian club as he became the latest player to leave Villa Park due to the Premier League club's financial fair-play cost-cutting. Signed from Manchester City in 2019, the 26-year-old spent five years with Villa and was a key player in their surprise fourth-place finish in the Premier League last season. Luiz, who scored 22 goals in 204 appearances for Villa, completed his medical ahead of the Juventus move while on international duty with Brazil at the Copa America.

"I'm really happy to be a Bianconero. I can't wait to

play in the Allianz Stadium. See you soon and Forza Juve!" Luiz said in a social media video.

The Premier League club announced Luiz's departure on their website, saying: "Aston Villa can confirm that Douglas Luiz has joined Juventus."

Luiz, who helped Brazil win a gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics, was voted Villa's Player of the Year in 2022-23. But Villa's need to comply with the Premier League's Profit and Sustainability Rules (PSR) forced boss Unai Emery to agree to Luiz's sale. PSR rules permit losses of up to £105m over three years. Villa have already sold Tim Iroegbunam to Everton for £9m during the close-season, while Chelsea paid £19m for Omari Kellyman.