



While Harry Kane and his England team have breezed through to the semifinals, Croatia have had to navigate troubled waters on their way. However, if both teams play to their potential, tonight's semifinal in Moscow could turn out to be a top spectacle for football lovers.

PHOTOS: AFP/REUTERS

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## Southgate in no mood to change winning formula

REUTERS, Repino

England manager Gareth Southgate says he is not about to change his team's approach for Wednesday's World Cup semifinal against Croatia, saying he wants the "same again" from his young side.

Although Croatia are the most difficult opponent England will have faced in the tournament, Southgate's words suggest he will continue with his attacking formation and personnel.

Asked what he would be demanding from his players, the England coach told ITV: "To be able to keep doing

what we have been doing, play with real defensive discipline, good organisation, tactical awareness and then with the ball play with the freedom and expression that we have and the same patterns and movements that we have shown."

While Croatia possess arguably the best central midfield pairing in the tournament in the shape of Real Madrid's Luka Modric and Barcelona's Ivan Rakitic, Southgate's language does not indicate he is about to bring in Eric Dier as an additional defensive midfielder alongside Jordan Henderson.

But he is certainly well aware of the threat that Croatia present in the centre of the field.

"They of course have a very strong midfield so, (it is about) denying them space and making sure awareness of distances and coverage of the pitch is correct and (knowing) the right moments to press. The higher the level of opponent, if you press in a disorganised fashion, then you will get picked through and we have got to be conscious of that," he said.

The contribution of Raheem Sterling remains a polarising debate in England with the Manchester City player

without a goal for his country since October, 2015 but Southgate says the forward's contribution in Russia has been essential.

"I think Raheem has been fundamental to the way that we have played - his movement, the positions he takes up, his pressing of the ball, his work-rate for the team, the winning of free kicks and corners, his speed to stretch teams," he said.

Contrary to England, Croatia had to come through a gruelling extra time against hosts Russia and then a penalty shootout. But Southgate thinks talk of that handing a physical advantage to England is being overplayed.

"We experienced the extra time and penalties (against Colombia) and we know the physical and emotional consequence of that," he said.

"But any team in a World Cup semifinal is going to find the energy and going to find the motivation. So we won't win the game just because Croatia had half an hour more football than us three days ago, we've got to win because we play better."

In keeping with his even-handed and calm style, Southgate said his team were neither complacent nor too pumped up for Wednesday's clash at the Luzhniki Stadium, England's first World Cup semifinal since 1990.

"None of us are satisfied and none of us are particularly hyped-up. It is a game that is very evenly matched, we know what we want to do and we have to focus on our preparation and make sure that we control the controllables as we have attempted to do for every game," the manager said.

"We are just going to stick with what we have been doing all the way through".



## 'Three Lions' roars up charts

AFP, London

Football anthem "Three Lions" is leading the race to top the Official Singles Chart this Friday as Gareth Southgate's England prepare for their World Cup semifinal against Croatia.

Officialcharts.com said the song, performed by comedians Frank Skinner and David Baddiel and the Lightning Seeds, had shot up from 24 to number 1 at the halfway stage on Monday's chart update.

It has accumulated 24,000 downloads and 2.6 million audio streams since Friday.

"Three Lions (Football's Coming Home)" was originally written for Euro 96 - the last time England qualified for the semifinals of a major tournament -- and hit the number one spot twice.

A re-worked version with new lyrics for the 1998 World Cup in France also spent three weeks at the summit.

The song is one of the UK's best-selling singles of all time, with both versions combined having sold 1.6 million.

Pop star George Ezra, enjoying his second week at number one with "Shotgun", has urged fans to get behind "Three Lions".

## Modric the maestro

AFP, Moscow

"We keep hearing the same question and we give out the same answer", said Croatia's Ivan Perisic last week.

Every time a Croatian player appears before the media at this World Cup, he knows a question about Modric is coming, and every time the answer reflects the admiration there is in the squad for their captain.

The 32-year-old has been outstanding in his team's run to a semifinal against England in Moscow on Wednesday, picking up the man-of-the-match award in three of Croatia's five matches.

Modric has scored twice in Russia, including a fabulous goal in the 3-0 win over Argentina in the group stage, and twice netted in nail-biting penalty shootouts against Denmark and Russia.

The coolness displayed by the Real Madrid playmaker in the last-16 tie against the Danes was particularly impressive -- having missed a penalty late in extra time, he still stepped up to score another spot-kick only a few minutes later.

After once again starring as Real won a fourth Champions League crown in five seasons by beating Liverpool in Kiev in May, Modric will be almost assured of winning the Ballon d'Or if he can lead

Croatia all the way to improbable World Cup glory.

"I've known Luka for a number of years, not only with the national team. We played at club level as well," says striker Mario Mandzukic.

"He deserves all the accolades he gets from the media and public. He has worked very hard to get to this point.

"He is our captain, our leader, we follow him and if the team manages a great result and he gets the Ballon d'Or he will

deserve it, and I want it for him."

For a country like Croatia, with a population of little over four million, to be in the semifinals of the World Cup is a remarkable achievement.

Modric been an admirable leader for his team on the field, allowing them to match the great side of 1998 that reached the last four in France.

Now they are looking to go one step further, but just getting this far is a source of great pride for Croatia.

If Modric can rouse himself to control another match against England, they have every chance.

"Hopefully we will go a step further than in 1998. We have everything needed to do that, a great team, great staff and I hope we will make the extra step," Modric said.



A mural in Zagreb displays Croatia's best footballers -- captain Luka Modric, former captain Darijo Srna and striker Mario Mandzukic. PHOTO: AFP

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## KEY BATTLES

AFP, Moscow

### JORDAN HENDERSON V LUKA MODRIC

Just over six weeks on from Liverpool's defeat to Real Madrid in the Champions League final, Henderson has his chance to exact revenge on Modric and extend his incredible run of 30 matches without defeat in an England shirt -- the longest unbeaten run for any player in England's history.

Henderson's leadership, discipline and distribution as Gareth Southgate's deepest-lying midfielder has been key to allowing Jesse Lingard and Dele Alli to get forward and score goals in Russia.

However, that midfield faces its toughest test yet with Modric in the form of his life at 32.

Modric has played defence-splitting passes, scored goals and dictated the rhythm of the game during three man-of-the-match performances in the four games he has completed at the World Cup.

After a third Champions League success in as many years, Modric



England's young goalkeeper Jordan Pickford has been a revelation at this year's World Cup and he will be expected to play a crucial role in their semifinal against Croatia tonight. PHOTO: AFP

has even been touted as a Ballon d'Or candidate should Croatia go all the way.

### HARRY KANE V DEJAN LOVREN

Facing the tournament's top scorer brings back bad memories for Lovren. The Liverpool defender was replaced after just half an hour into a

4-1 defeat by Tottenham in October after being run ragged by Kane.

It was a performance that many believed would end Lovren's career at Anfield. But he fought to win back Jurgen Klopp's confidence at club level and has marshalled a Croatian defence that shut down Lionel Messi

and Argentina in the group stages.

In total, Kane has scored five times in five meetings with Lovren and will look to seal the Golden Boot by adding to his six goals already at the World Cup.

### KIERAN TRIPPIER V IVAN PERISIC

Trippier has been one of the breakout stars of the World Cup. Nicknamed the "Bury Beckham" for the similarities in the quality of his crossing to the former England captain, Trippier is rivaling Neymar and Kevin De Bruyne for creating the greatest number of chances at the tournament so far.

Southgate's 3-5-2 system with another natural right-back, Kyle Walker, in the back three has allowed Trippier to get forward at every opportunity. But his defensive capabilities will be examined up against Perisic.

The Inter Milan winger has scored five times in his past 11 appearances at major international tournaments and is the one player in the Croatian attack with the pace to stretch the England defence.

## Ukraine offers job to Vukojevic

AFP, Kiev

Ukraine's football federation said Tuesday it had offered a job to former Croatia international Ognjen Vukojevic and offered to pay his fine over a pro-Ukraine clip he posted during the World Cup.

The Croatian football association removed him as an assistant in its delegation at the tournament in Russia and FIFA fined Vukojevic \$15,000 over an Instagram video featuring him and Croatia defender Domagoj Vida, who shouted "Glory to Ukraine!"

Vida used to play for Dynamo Kiev and Vukojevic also played for the Ukrainian club and now works for them as a scout.