

Ambitious Italy face talented Turkey in curtain raiser



For the first time in history, Video Assistant Referee (VAR) will be used in the European championship.

Wembley Stadium will host the semi-final and final for the second time within 25 years.

The opening phase will feature six groups of four teams, with the top two in each progressing to the knockout stage. The four best third-place finishers will also qualify for the last 16, with all of the knockout rounds being played as one-off matches.

If a match cannot start or cannot be played in full, it is, as a rule, played or completed on the next day, if possible at the same venue.

If two teams facing each other in their last group game are dead level, and draw, their position in the group is determined by a penalty shoot-out.

Each team has a maximum of 18 people allowed on the substitutes' bench, including a team doctor.

Goalkeepers can be replaced during the tournament in the event of physical incapacity, even if one or two in the squad are still available.

AGENCIES



Euro 2020 finally kicks off tonight as Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal prepare to defend their title and world champions France seek a rare double a year after the tournament was delayed by the coronavirus pandemic.

France's fearsome forward line makes them favourites to win a third European crown at the pan-continental event, while top-ranked Belgium and a youthful England side will be major threats.

Five years on from their last major tournament appearance, Italy take centre stage once more when they welcome Group A rivals Turkey to Rome's Stadio Olimpico for the opening game of Euro 2020 tonight.

The Azzurri's failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup was a



national sporting tragedy for the four-time world champions.

But manager Roberto Mancini has since built an attractive, exuberant side that comes into the tournament with ambitions of reaching the London final, five years on from the heartbreak of a penalty shoot-out defeat to Germany in the quarter-finals of Euro 2016.

Having three home games in front of around 16,000 fans will be a boost to Italian hopes, which are high inside and outside the training camp.

"This Italy team has more quality than the 2016 team, but we have to prove that," said defender Alessandro Florenzi.

However, the Azzurri face a tough opening day task against a

resilient and talented Turkey side that impressed during qualifying stages and has a penchant for performing in big games.

Turkey took four points from two games against world champions France in Euros qualifying and has since beaten the Netherlands 4-2 in a World Cup qualifier and earned 3-3 scoreline draws with Germany and Croatia in international friendlies.

History is on the hosts' side, though. Italy have never lost to Turkey in 10 previous meetings in all competitions, winning seven and drawing three.

Meanwhile, state-of-the-art technology will bring Martin Garrix, Bono and The Edge together with fans across Europe through virtual performances for a celebratory curtain-raiser prior to the opening match of UEFA Euro 2020 in the Stadio Olimpico in Rome.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

From Kylian Mbappe to Cristiano Ronaldo, Harry Kane to Robert Lewandowski and Gareth Bale to Kevin de Bruyne, established stars are set to shine across Europe this summer. It will also be the perfect opportunity for young players to showcase their talents as fans get the chance to savour some of the best players on the planet. There will be some unfamiliar faces hoping that this is their breakout tournament in the way the 2018 World Cup was for France's Kylian Mbappe. There is plenty of talent on show among the 24 teams involved and players like -- Alexander Isak (Sweden), Phil Foden (England), Jamal Musiala (Germany), Pedri (Spain), Joao Felix (Portugal), Jeremy Doku (Belgium), Jules Kounde (France), Gianluigi Donnarumma (Italy), Dominik Szoboszlai (Hungary), Nuno Mendes (Portugal), Eric Garcia (Spain), Donyell Malen (The Netherlands), Ilya Zabarnyi (Ukraine) and Marcus Thuram (France) -- could make a huge impact at the tournament.



PHIL FODEN



JOAO FELIX



ALEXANDER ISAK

Djokovic and Nadal set for another epic duel

AGENCIES



World No. 1 Novak Djokovic and No. 3 Rafael Nadal, the two goliaths of the game, are headed for yet another collision

in one of the French Open semi-finals tonight.

The winner will meet the survivor in today's first semi-final between No. 5 Stefanos Tsitsipas and No. 6 Sascha Zverev in Sunday's Roland Garros final.

There is no clear favourite whenever these two maestros play against each other. However, one has to give Nadal the upper hand given the match is being played on the Parisian Clay.

Djokovic will be looking for some good old-fashioned revenge against Nadal, who won last year's final for the loss of just seven games. Djokovic was simply pulverized by Nadal in that meeting, and had no answer for the Spaniard's heavy groundstrokes.

Needless to say, he will be hoping for a different outcome this time around. But to do that



Djokovic will need to open up the court with angled cross-court shots and use the drop shot to get Nadal off the baseline. The Serb's first serve, which has earned him a lot of free points this tournament, will also need to be on point if he is to upstage the "King of Clay" at his favourite hunting ground.

Djokovic predicted a "great battle" when he continues tennis's most prolific rivalry in today's semi-final.

"It's not like any other match. Let's face it, it's the biggest challenge that you can have playing on clay



against Nadal on this court. It doesn't get bigger than that.

"There's that extra tension and expectations. The vibes are different walking on the court with him. But that's why our rivalry has been historic I think for this sport.

"I'm confident. I believe I can win, otherwise I wouldn't be here. Let's have a great battle."

Rather unusually, they are meeting in a semi-final than a final, courtesy of Spaniard Nadal having dropped down to world number three and being placed in the same

half of the draw as top-seeded Djokovic.

Should Djokovic manage to get the better of Nadal on Friday he will be the favourite to take only his second French Open title having won it in 2016 when Nadal abandoned the tournament due to a wrist injury.

Since then, Nadal has been unbeatable, extending his record title haul to a jaw-dropping 13.

"Obviously it's a well-anticipated semi-final," said Djokovic, who has 18 Grand Slam titles, two behind the men's record shared by Nadal and Roger Federer.

The pair have faced off 57 times, with Djokovic holding a marginal 29-28 lead but Nadal outdistances the Serb 10-6 in Grand Slam events, including a sweeping 7-1 record at Roland Garros.

The upcoming match will be their first semi-final meeting since Wimbledon 2018.

Nadal won their last match in the Italian Open final in May this year and has not lost to Djokovic on clay in five years.

Salisbury ends Britain's 39-year wait

REUTERS, PARIS

Joe Salisbury ended Britain's 39-year wait for a main draw title at the French Open when he combined with American Desirae Krawczyk to win the mixed doubles at Roland Garros on Thursday.

Krawczyk and Salisbury rallied from a set down to beat the Russian pair of Elena Vesnina and Aslan Karatsev 2-6, 6-4, (10-5) to clinch the title on a sun-bathed Philippe Chatrier court.

Britain's last title at the claycourt Grand Slam had also come in mixed doubles when John Lloyd partnered with Australian Wendy Turnbull to win one of the five main draw titles in 1982.

Salisbury has been playing mixed doubles with Krawczyk since the 2018 U.S. Open.



Mohammad Naim.....70

DPL T20 kicks into top gear

SPORTS REPORTER



A five-wicket haul, the highest total, a flurry of sixes in the final over and the highest individual score of the tournament were all witnessed in the sixth round of the Dhaka Premier League T20 yesterday.

Abahani Limited rode on a blistering opening stand between Mohammad Naim and Afif Hossain to post 183 for five in 20 overs, the highest total in the league this season, as they clinched a 25-run win over Shinepukur Cricket Club.

After being asked to bat, Naim and Afif laid the foundation by adding 111 runs for the opening stand before the latter departed for a 42-ball 54 that included four sixes and three fours. At the other end, Naim went on to reach his fifty off just 35 balls before he was dismissed for 70 off fifty balls with four sixes and four boundaries.

Following a break due to rain, Shinepukur were set a revised target of 149 runs from 17 overs and ended on 123 for five. Pacer Saifuddin bagged three wickets for the bowling side, who, with five wins in six games, now sit on top of the points table.

Young Mahmudul Hasan Joy scored an unbeaten 85, which was the highest individual score of the league so far, but even his magnificent knock was not enough for Old DOHS as they were on the receiving end of a six-wicket defeat to Gazi Group. Mahmudul hit seven sixes and three fours. DOHS, however, posted 136 for seven in 20 overs.

In reply, Gazi were bolstered by a collective approach from their batsmen and chased down the target for the loss of four wickets with an over to spare to register their third win from six games.

Elsewhere, an enthralling encounter between Prime Doleshwar and Prime Bank Cricket Club went down to the wire before Doleshwar fell four runs short and sustained their first defeat in the league.

Needing 31 runs off the last over with a wicket in hand in chase of 152 runs, Doleshwar tail-ender Kamrul Islam struck four sixes to pacer Rubel Hossain, leaving Doleshwar needing a boundary to tie and a six to win off the final ball. But after his heroics, Kamrul could manage only one run, much to Prime Bank and Rubel's relief.

Earlier, Prime Bank posted 151 for seven in 20 overs riding on Mohammad Mithun's 55. In reply, Doleshwar were in a spot of bother right from the start before Kamrul, who also bagged two wickets, changed the complexion of the game with a 12-ball 38.

Meanwhile, pacer Salauddin Shakil's maiden five-wicket haul guided Sheikh Jamal to a comfortable six-wicket win over Partex SC. The left-arm seamer ended with figures of five for 16 from 3.3 overs as Partex folded for 104. In reply, Sheikh Jamal reached the target with six wickets and 16 balls to spare.

Shakib Al Hasan and Mohammedan continued their poor run as they faced a third consecutive defeat, being thrashed by nine wickets by Legends of Rugganj.

For the second time in six games, Shakib was dismissed for a duck as Mohammedan struggled right from the start. Shuvagata Hom's half-century enabled them to post 113 for nine, a target Rugganj chased down for the loss of just one wicket on the back of an unbeaten fifty from Pinak Ghosh.

In the other match of the day, Khelaghar SKS registered five-run win over Brothers Union (D/L method).



BURNS CONTINUES GOOD FORM

England opener Rory Burns, who rescued his side out of trouble in the first Test with a 132-run knock at Lord's, raises his bat after making half-century during the first day of the second Test against New Zealand at Edgbaston yesterday. The left-handed batsman hit 81 as England reached 185 for 6 in 63 overs. Earlier, England captain Joe Root won the toss and elected to bat as James Anderson became the hosts' most-capped player of all time. Anderson, already Test cricket's leading all-time pacer with 616 wickets, was making his 162nd appearance, surpassing the English and record he had shared with retired former captain Alastair Cook.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BFF to introduce salary structure

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is contemplating the introduction of a salary structure for the national footballers in hope that it will enhance the performance of the national football team.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin met five national players -- Ashrafat Islam Rana, Bishwanath Ghosh, Saad Uddin, Mahbubur Rahman Sufil and Tutul Hossain Badsha -- who could not be part of team for the World Cup and Asian Cup qualifiers due to injuries and disclosed his plan at an informal meeting at the BFF House yesterday.

"It will be selected by a technical committee comprising foreign and local staff. I want the players to be in a win-win situation. There will be three categories in the salary structure, which I believe will bring competition among the players because contracts will be reviewed on the basis of performance."

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