

'I WILL REMEMBER THIS NIGHT FOREVER'

AGENCIES



After squeezing past Austria in extra-time to reach the Euro 2020 quarter-finals, Italy coach Roberto Mancini said he had expected Saturday's clash to be more challenging than their next tie against either Belgium

or Portugal.

In their bid to return to Wembley for the final on July 11 and lift their first European Championship trophy since 1968, Mancini has already used 25 of his 26 players, showing the depth and breadth of talent available as his side drew on the collective to reach the quarter-finals.

Mancini was also upbeat against his next challenge. The leading strikers of Italy's next potential opponents, Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal and Belgium's Romelu Lukaku, will be familiar to Mancini's players as they play their club football in Serie A with Juventus and Inter Milan respectively.

But Mancini would not be drawn into saying which player he would rather avoid in the next round in Munich. "When you get into the quarter-finals, it is not that easy. Ideally we would like to avoid both, but that is not possible," he said.

Italy were big favourites to progress after winning all three group games but they were far from their free-flowing best as they edged Franco Foda's side to book a last-eight showdown against Belgium or Portugal.

Substitute Federico Chiesa carried on a slice of family history when he struck in Italy's 2-1 extra-time win over Austria. The 23-year-old, whose strike was added to by fellow substitute Matteo Pessina to complete the victory, is the son of former Italy striker Enrico Chiesa who scored against the Czech Republic in Euro '96 at Liverpool's Anfield ground.

However, while Chiesa Sr's side bowed out at the group stage in that tournament, Federico and his team mates are on their way to a quarter-final in Munich.

Matteo Pessina came off the bench to score an all important goal and all anyone could talk about was his faceplant celebration. The Atalanta midfielder ran towards the corner of the pitch before falling flat on his face and sliding across the turf.

Pessina said he 'hasn't yet realized' he scored the winner for Italy against Austria. 'I will remember this night forever.'



SWITZERLAND V FRANCE

Switzerland will aim to produce a shock of seismic proportions during their clash against France in front of up to 25,000 spectators at the National Arena in Bucharest tonight. If they are to progress to the quarter-finals then they will have to stop France's talented array of attackers- Karim Benzema, Antoine Griezmann and Kylian Mbappe. Benzema is in a good form but Mbappe is still struggling to find his shooting boots.

HEAD-TO-HEAD

At Euro: Played-2, France won-1, Switzerland won-0, Drawn-1.
Overall: Played-38, France won-16, Switzerland won-12, Drawn-10.

PLAYERS TO WATCH



Xherdan Shaqiri

3
2
1
9
82%

Matches
Goals
Assists
Attempts
Passing Accuracy

Karim Benzema

3
2
0
7
87%

SPAIN V CROATIA

Spain have finally clicked into gear after a sloppy start but will face their sternest test yet in the last 16 from Croatia, led by a sensational Luka Modric who keeps raging against the dying of the light "He is their motor, the heartbeat of Croatia who conducts their orchestra. All their play goes through his feet," Spain forward Dani Olmo said. "But Croatia is not just Modric."

HEAD-TO-HEAD

At Euro: Played-2, Spain won-1, Croatia won-1, Drawn-0
Overall: Played-8, Spain won-4, Croatia won-3, Drawn-1

PLAYERS TO WATCH



Alvaro Morata

3
1
0
10
83%

Matches
Goals
Assists
Attempts
Passing Accuracy

Luka Modric

3
1
1
3
91%

Abahani, Mohammedan play out dull draw

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani came from a goal down to secure a 1-1 draw against old foes Mohammedan in a Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Cameroonian marksman Yassan Ouatching gave Mohammedan a 30th-minute lead, which was cancelled out by the visitors' Haitian forward Belfort Kervens in the 41st minute. The archivals played out a 2-2 draw in the reverse fixture in Cumilla.

With a sixth draw from 16 matches, Abahani raised their points total to 33, 13 behind leaders Bashundhara Kings. Mohammedan, meanwhile, climbed up to the fourth place in the 13-team table, with 29 points from 16 matches.

Despite the seemingly unstoppable Bashundhara Kings rolling towards a second consecutive title, the Abahani-Mohammedan clash was a prestigious battle in a grander scheme of things. However, neither side managed to show urgency or excite the fans as they did in their previous meeting five months ago.

Six-time professional league champions Abahani looked to be playing without purpose and had no mentionable passages of play and it was instead Mohammedan, whose squad featured players who recently recovered from Covid-19, who appeared hungrier. The visitors cashed in on one of their three attacks inside the span of 10 minutes, starting with Yassan rattling the near post



in the 20th minute.

Two minutes later, Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel sprung into action to deny Yassan, but he was powerless to stop a powerful shot powerful shot, again from Yassan, in the 30th minute.

Abahani awoke from their slumber after conceding, beginning to press for the equaliser, a hunt that lasted 11 minutes. Belfort tapped in to level proceedings after a feeble clearance came his way minutes from the break.

After resumption, Mohammedan coach Sean Lane sent on four pairs of fresh legs but although they added some speed, the visitors could not create any further goal-scoring chances.

Djokovic ready to be first among equals

AFP, London



Novak Djokovic targets a record-equalling 20th major and sixth Wimbledon title from Monday which will edge him tantalisingly closer to becoming only the third man in history to complete a calendar Grand Slam.

The world number one has already won a ninth Australian Open and second French Open this season.

That has put him halfway to emulating Don Budge (1937) and Rod Laver (1962 and 1969) in sweeping all four majors in the same year.

It is a feat even his closest rivals Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal have never managed.

"Everything is possible," said 34-year-old Djokovic after winning the French Open earlier this month when asked if the Golden Slam of all four majors and Olympic gold was a realistic target.

Djokovic memorably captured a fifth Wimbledon in 2019, saving two championship points to defeat Federer in the longest ever final at the All England Club at four hours and 57 minutes.

He was deprived of defending his title in 2020 when Wimbledon was cancelled due to the pandemic.

Djokovic has won seven of the last 11 Slams as he ramps up his assault on the record of 20 majors held jointly by Federer and Nadal.

The Serb starts his defence on Monday against British world number 250 Jack Draper who was born just six miles (9.5km) from the All England Club.

Nadal, the Wimbledon champion in 2008 and 2010, has already withdrawn from this year's tournament, still scarred by the



bruising loss to Djokovic in the French Open semi-finals.

Eight-time winner Federer, meanwhile, will be 40 in August and won just one match on grass at Halle in the build-up to Wimbledon.

Federer, who underwent two knee surgeries in 2020, won the last of his eight Wimbledons in 2017 and the most recent of his 20 majors in Australia in 2018.

The Swiss star has lost three finals to Djokovic at the All England Club -- 2014, 2015 and the epic 2019 clash.

"Truthfully, I don't think my goal was to play till, whatever, 39 or 40 or more," said Federer on Saturday. "It was maybe more like 35 maybe I was thinking, which was already a high number at the time."

Federer, in the opposite half of the draw to Djokovic, begins his campaign on Tuesday against France's Adrian Mannarino against whom he holds a 6-0 head-to-head advantage.

The rest of the current top 10 have endured relatively mediocre Wimbledon records.

Only 33-year-old Roberto Bautista Agut, a surprise semi-finalist two years ago, has reached further than the last 16.

Daniil Medvedev has made only the third round but was buoyed Saturday by a first grass court title in Mallorca.

Dominic Thiem has withdrawn due to a wrist injury.

Alexander Zverev had a best last-16 run in 2017 but was a first-round loser two years ago while Andrey Rublev has yet to get past the second round.

Tigers brace for tough Zim tour

SPORTS REPORTER



Many consider Bangladesh to have been a better side than Zimbabwe across all formats in recent times, but the Tigers upcoming tour to Southern African is not going to be an easy assignment.

Bangladesh are scheduled to travel to Zimbabwe tonight, visiting the landlocked nation after eight years, to take part in a lone Test match followed by three ODIs and as many T20Is. On their previous tour of Zimbabwe, the Tigers lost the three-match ODI series 2-1 and managed to draw the two-match Test and two-match T20I series.

With the three-match ODI series also part of the ICC ODI Super League, the Tigers will surely look to bag as many points as they can to secure a place in the top eight, which would grant qualification to the 2023 World Cup.

Although Bangladesh won a three-match ODI series 2-1 at home against a relatively inexperienced Sri Lankan side last month, there are still quite a few areas where the team management would like to see improvement, especially in the tough conditions of Zimbabwe.

An ideal preparation for the visitors would have been if the just-concluded Dhaka Premier League had followed its usual 50-over format. On the flipside, the positive is that the players at least got some match practice before departing even though it was in T20s.

"I think keeping the ICC ODI Super League in mind during the tour will be crucial," said former captain and member of the selection committee, Habibul Bashar. "It won't be a walk in the park for us. Zimbabwe are a tough opponent at home, especially in Harare, so we will have to be on our toes," he added.

Bangladesh's recent performances in the longest format have also left a lot to be desired, as they followed up a defeat in a two-match Test series at home against the West Indies with another series defeat in Sri Lanka.

While the good news is surely the return of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan in all three formats, Mahmudullah Riyad's last moment inclusion in the Test squad due to Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim missing the series also raised questions over the selectors' lack of consistency, especially after Mahmudullah's last Tests were against Pakistan in 2020, when he was asked to improve his performance to regain a place in the Test side by head coach Russell Domingo.

"I would like to clear that Mahmudullah is not a backup option in the Test side. Since he was dropped from the Test team, we tried few players.

Does Bangladesh cricket team have the luxury to treat Mahmudullah Riyad as a back-up option in Test cricket? Scan the QR Code to read the story.



But we felt there was no other option for such a tough tour. So we decided to include Mahmudullah considering his experience and because he didn't announce his retirement from Tests. Another reason is Shakib's return, which allows us to have an extra batsman or a bowler in the side," Bashar added.

According to Bashar, the selectors are considering Mahmudullah for the long run in the Test side although he has done nothing exceptional during this period that merited consideration. That reflects a clouded vision when it comes to looking to the future instead of going backwards.