

England expect but Ukraine believe

REUTERS, Manchester

Whereas Gareth Southgate's team went into their last-16 tie with Germany amid relentless reminders of historic failures against their old rivals and the fear of yet another, they are simply expected to beat Ukraine in Rome on Saturday.

It is not only the media and fans in England, buoyed by Tuesday's victory at Wembley, that makes the Three Lions clear favourites -- any objective analysis of the two teams would reach the same conclusion.

England are ranked third in the world while Ukraine are 24th.

The average player value of the England team is 57.8 million euros -- while Ukraine's is 6.6 million euros.

England's captain Harry Kane is valued at over 100 million euros and Ukraine's top player Oleksandr Zinchenko is worth less than a quarter of that amount.

In the group stage of the tournament, England were unbeaten and finished top of their group while Ukraine lost twice and finished third, the only team with three points to make it to the knockout stage. This is their first Euro quarter-final match while it will be England's sixth.

Ukraine have conceded six goals in their four matches while England have let in none and in seven meetings between the two nations, England have won four times and Ukraine just once.

"It's pretty clear [that England are favourites] -- you've seen them, the players they have, and the level they play at,"

said Ukraine defender Mykola Matviyenko.

"So, yes, it will be difficult but I'll say it again: anything is possible at this stage, and we believe," he added.

While Southgate's men go into this game still buzzing from the electric atmosphere at Wembley, Ukraine are also on a high after Artem Dovbyk's header at the end of extra-time gave them a 2-1 win over Sweden.

The pressure is all on England for whom defeat would mean the tournament is viewed as a failure and they will leave their home turf for the Stadio Olimpico where the crowd will be smaller but probably backing their underdog opponents.

"This is a big challenge for us. We've got to go away from Wembley, to somewhere where there might not be many fans,

it's quite hot, and play an opponent where not many of their players are known to us," Southgate said.

"And then there is this perception now that all we've got to do is turn up and we're on our way. So there is total focus now on Saturday, we need to prepare the right way, and our mentality will be critical," he added.

His counterpart, Andriy Shevchenko, is relishing the chance to take on England at a ground where he played against Roma and Lazio during his years as a prolific goalscorer with AC Milan.

"They are incredibly difficult to score against but their strength shouldn't scare us," he said.

"It should motivate us because everything is possible in football as in life and we will play our hearts out to give our fans even more to cheer about."



Denmark dreaming of 1992 encore



AFP, Baku

Denmark will be dreaming of following in the footsteps of the side who claimed a shock European title in 1992, but standing in their way of a semifinal place at Euro 2020 on Saturday are the Czech Republic, who have sent them packing before.

The Danes were in danger of an early exit after group-stage losses to Finland and Belgium, the first of which was overshadowed by star player Christian Eriksen suffering a cardiac arrest on the pitch. But, roared on by a raucous Copenhagen crowd, they thrashed Russia 4-1 to finish second in Group B, before travelling to Amsterdam to thump Wales 4-0 in the last 16.

Denmark have not reached a major tournament semi-final since lifting the trophy 29 years ago, when they initially failed to qualify but were late replacements for Yugoslavia.

"It's a chance that we might never have

again," coach Kasper Hjulmand said ahead of Saturday's last-eight match against the Czechs in Baku.

"It's many years' work for lots of people. We want to make the most of this chance."

The Scandinavians have gone from strength to strength in the tournament and know victory in Azerbaijan would set up a last-four meeting with either England or Ukraine at Wembley.

On the other hand, the Czechs produced an excellent display to beat the 10-man Netherlands 2-0 in Budapest last time out.

Jaroslav Silhavy's men have reached the last eight at a major championship for the first time since 2004, when they lost to Greece in the semis, by conceding only two goals in four games while relying on in-form striker Patrik Schick.

The Bayer Leverkusen man has netted four times already, including one of the all-time great Euro goals against Scotland, to sit just one behind Cristiano Ronaldo in the race for the Golden Boot.

Multi-story mural for Messi

AFP, Rosario

"From another galaxy... and from my neighborhood," declares a freshly painted mural of Lionel Messi in the Argentinian town where he was born 34 years ago.

The mural covers one end of a four-story building in La Bajada neighborhood of Rosario where the star lived as a child, and faces the primary school he attended.

"We thought of Leo and the admiration we have for him and we thought that there is nothing big enough



to express that in Rosario," Marlen Zuriaga, one of the muralists, told AFP.

The adult Messi has a pair of boots, laces tied together, hanging around his neck. One boot is black and the other gold, depicting the record six Golden Shoes Messi has won as top scorer in Europe.

The Argentina captain is currently leading his team at the Copa America in Brazil where he was the top scorer in the group stage with three goals.



Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed posted this picture on his Facebook page yesterday evening, following a practice session at the Harare Sports Club ground.

The pacer is part of the Test squad that reached Zimbabwe on Wednesday and have since participated in two training sessions. The only Test match of Bangladesh's month-long tour will begin at the Harare Sports Club ground on July 7.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK

COPA AMERICA 2021



URUGUAY V COLOMBIA

Uruguay are currently fourth in World Cup qualification, and overcame a minor crisis during the Copa America 2021. The opening game, a 1-0 loss to Argentina, was their fourth consecutive match without scoring, a very disappointing statistic from a squad with some firepower. They broke the run with a 1-1 draw against Chile, won their next two games and seem to be moving in the right direction.

Colombia are fifth in World Cup qualification, behind Uruguay on goal

difference. They began the Copa with a tight win over Ecuador, confirming a bright start to the reign of new coach Reinaldo Rueda. Subsequent results, though, have not been impressive. The defeat to Brazil was controversial, while

the loss to Peru and the draw with Venezuela were plain disappointing. They are simply not the same creative force in the absence of James Rodriguez.

PLAYERS TO WATCH:

Uruguay, of course, are spearheaded by the old attacking firm of Atletico Madrid's Luis Suarez and Manchester United's Edinson Cavani. The future, though, belongs to Real Madrid's Federico Valverde, the motor of the side with his lung power and range of passing from midfield.

Aside from James' absence, Colombia will be missing another key player. Juan Cuadrado is suspended, and will be hard to replace. His absence makes a tight game all the more likely, in which Colombia hope that Wilmar Barrios can be as effective as he was against Brazil in his defensive midfield role.

HEAD-TO-HEAD:

Uruguay have won 20 matches, lost 13 and drawn nine matches in 42 times they met Colombia. The last meeting ended in a 3-0 win for Uruguay in November last year.

ARGENTINA V ECUADOR

Argentina's 1-1 draw with Chile in the Copa opener made it three draws in a row; just like in the recent World Cup qualifiers, Argentina had taken the lead, looked bright but were pushed back and forced to share the points. Since then, though, it has been all wins, usually with fast starts and early leads. They lie second in

World Cup qualification and are looking like a better, more consistent team than at any time since the 2016 edition of the Copa.

Ecuador put together three fine wins late last year in World Cup qualification. But their form in June was not good, with two defeats in the qualifiers (they stay third in the table) followed by four games in the Copa without a win. Three draws were enough to get them into the quarterfinals.

PLAYERS TO WATCH:

It is impossible to look beyond Lionel Messi



for Argentina. Now their most capped player, he is in superb form, and in the last two years he seems to be emotionally integrated into the side as never before, turning himself into a vocal leader. At the other end, Emiliano Martinez is shaping up as Argentina's best keeper for ages, and Cristian Romero has quickly established himself as the first-choice centre-back.

Ecuador are sweating on the fitness of some of their key players -- Jhegson Mendez and Moises Caicedo, who will need to fight to win the midfield battle, and senior striker Enner Valencia, whose power and intelligence might trouble the Argentina defence. There could be a role for the great hope Gonzalo Plata, an awesomely strong winger who cuts in from the right onto his left foot.

HEAD-TO-HEAD:

Argentina have won 21 times, lost five times and drawn 10 times against Ecuador. The last meeting was a 1-0 win for the Albiceleste in October last year.



BCB's AGM postponed

SPORTS REPORTER

With the growing coronavirus threat and following a nationwide lockdown, the upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) scheduled for July 7 has been postponed for indefinite period.

The chairman of the BCB's media committee, Jalal Yunus, yesterday informed that the BCB will fix the new date for the AGM depending on the improvement of the current pandemic scenario.

"The AGM is not going to take place on July 7. We had almost finalised everything but as the coronavirus situation changed recently, we have to wait until things improve so that we can discuss this again," Jalal told media.

The board was set to announce the date for the upcoming BCB elections at the AGM.

BPL, BCL suspended

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has temporarily suspended the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) due to inclement weather.

Earlier, the BFF had convinced authorities to continue the leagues at two venues during the 'strict lockdown' in the greater interest of clubs and players. But now they are utterly incapable of holding BPL matches at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS), which turned unplayable following incessant rain.

"Considering the weather forecast and maintenance, it may take three to four days to resume the league," professional league manager Zaber Bin Taher Ansari said, adding that they needed to take care of the rain-affected astro-turf of Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium where BCL matches took place.