

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.



Spain scrape into semis

AFP, Saint Petersburg



Goalkeeper Unai Simon was the hero as Spain edged past 10-man Switzerland 3-1 on penalties on Friday to set up a Euro 2020 semi-final against either Belgium or Italy.

After a 1-1 draw in Saint Petersburg which saw the Swiss play for 43 minutes a man down, Simon made two saves in the shoot-out to help keep Spain's bid for a record fourth European crown alive.

It was heartbreak for Switzerland, who were bidding for reach the semi-finals of a major tournament for the first time in their history.

Spain forged ahead early on when Denis Zakaria put through his own net, but Switzerland were the better side for long periods and Xherdan Shaqiri, standing in for the suspended Granit Xhaka as captain, equalised in the 68th

minute.

The Swiss were reduced to 10 men with 13 minutes remaining, though, when midfielder Remo Freuler was controversially dismissed for a tackle on Gerard Moreno.

Switzerland goalkeeper Yann Sommer, the hero of the penalty shoot-out win over world champions France in the last 16, made a string of fine saves in extra time.

But Simon saved from Fabian Schär and Manuel Akanji, while Ruben Vargas blazed over in a tense finale as Spain snuck through, with Mikel Oyarzabal smashing home the winning spot-kick.

The 2008 and 2012 winners had made a dream start to this quarter-final, taking the lead in fortunate circumstances in only the eighth minute.

A corner was cleared only as far as Jordi Alba, whose left-footed volley was diverted past Sommer by Switzerland

midfielder Zakaria, only playing in place of Xhaka.

It was the 10th own goal of Euro 2020, more than the other 15 editions combined.

Alvaro Morata wasted an excellent opportunity by heading too close to Sommer when unmarked, but then Switzerland started to grow into the game.

Silvan Widmer headed off target from a corner, before Steven Zuber thought he had won a penalty only to be flagged offside.

Zakaria came agonisingly close to making up for his earlier own goal when his header span narrowly wide.

Switzerland had an even better chance for a leveller in the 64th minute, as Shaqiri sparked a quick counter-attack which ended with Spain goalkeeper Unai Simon reacting well to keep out Zuber's stabbed effort at his near post.

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.

COPA AMERICA 2021

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 quarter-finals.

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.

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.



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.