

# SPORT

## Swiss prove their worth on big stage

REUTERS

Switzerland have in recent times been that team people were surprised to see so high in the FIFA rankings, but this summer they have proven their worth on the big stage, having made history at the European Championship.

Since 2012, Switzerland have been no lower than 16th in the FIFA world rankings, often above football nations that they might not be expected to top. They now sit in 13th place, one below Germany and three spots above the Netherlands.

Qualification for the World Cup and Euros has not been a problem, and they have reached the finals in eight of the last nine tournaments since 2004. But getting past the last-16 stage has not come easy.

That all changed this summer, in style. A first major tournament quarter-final since 1954, when they hosted the World Cup, ended in disappointment against Spain. But their shock last-16 victory over world champions France will live long in the memory.

Goalkeeper Yann Sommer could not perform the heroics he did against the French again as Spain progressed after the shootout, but the Swiss exited knowing that they had done all they could.

"We wake up from the dream", declared Swiss broadcaster RSI after their shootout defeat.

Khaka's absence against Spain was a blow, but the Swiss did not let that hold them back. "Penalties are a bit 50:50," Shaqiri said after the match. "I

think we just lacked a little bit of luck today." "I'm just really proud of the team."

In sports, it's often the winners that are acknowledged extensively that may overshadow an individual from the losing side who stood out and won the hearts of many.

Sommer seemed to put his body on the line to make a total of ten saves to help the 10-man Swiss, who had midfielder Remo Freuler sent off for a studs-up challenge in the 77th minute, survive until the shootout.

Despite saving Rodri's penalty, Switzerland had to face an unfortunate exit from the Euro as Sommer's counterpart Unai Simon saved a couple of penalties that led Spain to win the tie-breaker 3-1 and move to the semis.

"But I'm so proud of the team, what we've achieved here with the whole country behind us," the Swiss goalkeeper said after the defeat.

"Honestly, I'd have given it to Sommer," Spain's Unai Simon upon being named UEFA's official player of the match.

Sommer also saved the match-winning penalty [of Mbappe] against France in the Round of 16 in this Euro.

Switzerland coach Vladimir Petkovic hailed his players as "heroes". "My players are the heroes of the night," said Petkovic. "We would have deserved to go through. I have mixed feelings. A lot of pride, because we gave everything and we leave here with our heads held high."

"Yann (Sommer) -- he's a hero," added Petkovic. "He didn't have that bit of luck in the penalty shoot-out."



## 'SPAIN? LET'S ENJOY THIS VICTORY'

There is still next year's World Cup in Qatar to come, but Belgium's "golden generation" will know that elimination on Friday from the European Championship is another opportunity gone. Belgium were among the favourites for the tournament, having spent more than 1,000 days at the head of the FIFA rankings. But after losing 2-1 to Italy in quarter-final in Munich, they admitted they were second-best on the night. "The feelings are sadness and disappointment because I don't feel like these players need to be out of this tournament. The players did everything they could to get as far as we could," said Belgium coach Roberto Martinez.



PHOTO: REUTERS

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Italy's detractors are running out of reasons to doubt their ability to win Euro 2020 after Friday's triumph over Belgium. The Azzurri's record unbeaten run has been well documented during the tournament, and it stretched to 32 matches in Munich.

But the fact that Roberto Mancini's side had not beaten any recognised international football powerhouses during that streak, which encouraged some pundits to raise questions about their ability to go far in the competition.

After Italy recorded back-to-back 3-0 wins against Turkey and Switzerland at the start of the Euros, former France midfielder Patrick Vieira said: "They lack intensity, power, pace, to be even more dangerous going forward... It's still a bit too early to take Italy into consideration, that they can go to the end."

Former England defender Gary Neville felt similarly, quipping: "I do feel once they start to play against the better teams, they won't have enough."

According to world football's governing body FIFA, there are no better teams than world number one side Belgium, who were considered one of the pre-tournament favourites.

But the Azzurri's 13th consecutive win was their most impressive yet as they came out on top not just with the final score, but also in terms of possession and shots.

It was a performance that felt like a statement of intent from a nation that has won four World Cups and one European Championship but has had to rebuild its reputation after the humiliating failure to qualify for the 2018 World Cup.

"Belgium beaten - we're back among the greats of football," said Gazzetta dello Sport's front page.

Coach Roberto Mancini was overjoyed with his Italy team. "We

deserved to win. The boys were extraordinary in the game," he said.

Mancini said his players deserved to savour the triumph before thinking about Tuesday's game against three-times European champions Spain.

"We didn't have a minimum goal, we wanted to do our best, the road is still long, there are two games to go, we'll see what happens," he said.

"Spain? Let's enjoy this victory, then we'll think about it. Congratulations to my boys, they were very good."

Striker Lorenzo Insigne, who scored a curling strike, credited Mancini for building a "fun" atmosphere around the national team squad that has allowed him to put in his best performances.

The win was however marred only by a serious injury to left-back Leonardo Spinazzola, who had to be stretchered off and looks set to play no further part in the tournament.



\*\*Italy have set a new record for the longest winning run at the European Championship, qualifying included, their 15th consecutive victory taking them past opponents Belgium (14, 21-03-19 - 27-06-21) and Germany (14, 03-09-10 - 22-06-12).

\*\*Italy have won their last 13 international matches (F36 A2) and are unbeaten in their last 32 internationals (W27 D5); their last defeat was in September 2018 (against Portugal).

\*\*Italy's five-match winning streak at EURO 2020 is their best ever sequence of consecutive wins at the finals and equals the record set by France (1984), the Netherlands (1988 to 1992) and the Czech Republic (2000 to 2004).

## Gauff in fourth round again

REUTERS, London

Seventeen-year-old American Coco Gauff matched her dream Wimbledon debut as she again reached the fourth round with a 6-3, 6-3 defeat of Kaja Juvan on Saturday.

Gauff, the 23rd seed, stormed through the opening games with a barrage of power serves on Centre Court but was asked some awkward questions by 102nd-ranked Juvan.

As she often does, Gauff had all the answers as she reached the second week and a last-16 clash with Germany's former Wimbledon champion Angelique Kerber.

When Gauff reached the fourth round as a 15-year-old qualifier in 2019, it was something of a sensation.

Two years later, despite her age and playing in only her seventh Grand Slam tournament, Gauff's progress is far less of a surprise and she is now a serious title contender.

Gauff raced into a 5-1 lead against Juvan in 18 minutes but briefly went off the boil as she lost the next two games.

After winning the opening set she then established a lead in the second. Although Slovenian Juvan fought tenaciously, she could not knock Gauff out of her stride.

## Batsmen enjoy fruitful warm-up

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh had a fruitful outing on the first day of a two-day warm-up game against a Zimbabwe

Select XI at the Harare Sports Club Ground yesterday.

The visitors reached 240 for two after 67 overs with Saif Hasan, Najmul Hossain, and Shakib Al Hasan scoring fifties after electing to bat.

Two of the most experienced cricketers, Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim, did not participate in the warm-up game as both are recovering from injuries.

Tamim has injured knee while Mushfiqur hurt his finger during the Dhaka Premier League. Both are expected to take part in the lone Test match starting from July 7.

On the pitch, Bangladesh lost opener Shadman Islam for a duck, the left-hander unable to score despite facing thirty deliveries.

Saif Hasan, who looked in fine touch at the other end, was then joined by Najmul.

Saif reached a fifty and after scoring 65 off 108 balls, a knock that included 13 fours and a six, the right-hander retired to give others an opportunity.



Najmul also looked solid and the left-hander was taken off the field after reaching his fifty to give experienced players Shakib and Mominul Haque a chance to utilise the center wicket ahead of the Test.

Shakib, who has struggled with the bat ever since returning from a year-long ban, looked in a different mood and smashed the bowlers all across the park.

Meanwhile Mominul remained cautious but was caught and bowled by leg-spinner Brighton Chipungu after scoring 29 off 77 balls.

Shakib continued to punish the bowlers and reached his fifty off 49 balls with a cover drive and eventually retired on 74 off 56 balls, which included 14 fours and a six. Liton Das and Mahmudullah Riyad were at the crease when the umpires called off the days' play.

If Emma Raducanu managed to get any sleep before making her Court One debut at Wimbledon on Saturday, it is unlikely that even in her dreams would she have seen herself reeling off eight games in a row in a 6-3, 7-5 third-round win over Sorana Cirstea. The 18-year-old is a symbol of Britain's multi-cultural society, having been born in Canada to a Chinese mother and Romanian father, but on Saturday she was being hailed the world over as she produced an electrifying performance to reach the Wimbledon fourth round on her Grand Slam debut.



PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'We can play under all kinds of circumstances'

Brazil set up semi-final clash with Peru

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Standard Time) in the first semifinal of Copa America 2021.

In an incredible game of football, Peru emerged as the first semifinalists with a 4-3 penalty shootout win against Paraguay following a dramatic 3-3 draw. Brazil progressed to the last four, thanks to a narrow win against Chile despite a red card for Gabriel Jesus early into the second half.

The opening game of the quarterfinal was an exciting, fascinating encounter from start to finish while second tie between the last two Copa America champions was more closely fought than their form coming into the game suggested.

Brazil were unbeaten in 11 games and topped Group B, while Chile finished only fourth in Group A and have drawn four of their last six matches 1-1.

Brazil finally survived as Lucas



Paqueta put the reigning champions 1-0 up within seconds of coming on as a half-time substitute. "We were beaten by the favourites, the team playing at home," said Chilean midfielder Arturo Vidal. "At least we will leave with our heads held high."

Vidal however blamed the Argentine referee for his side's Copa America elimination to Brazil on Friday, calling him "a clown" who "thinks he is the star of the show."

"We managed to withstand something that rarely happens to this team. It was a big test for us." The match-winner may have been Paqueta but Brazil's real inspiration behind the victory was Neymar. The PSG ace was in top form again and helped create the goal for Paqueta with some fine work on the ball, strengthening his case for the Copa America 'player of the tournament' prize.



PHOTO: TWITTER

### WHAT TO WATCH

SONY SIX  
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Live from 4:00 pm