



PHOTO: REUTERS

‘Messi surprises us day by day’

1ST SEMIFINAL
July 6: Brazil v Peru, 5am
(Tuesday), Olympic Stadium.

2ND SEMIFINAL
July 7: Argentina v Colombia,
7am (Wednesday),
Estadio Nacional de Brasília

FINAL
JULY 11, 6AM (SUNDAY),
MARACANÁ

*ALL TIMES ARE BANGLADESH STANDARD

➤ Lionel Scaloni's 18-game unbeaten run as Argentina coach (11 wins, 7 draws) equals Marcelo Bielsa as the second longest in the history of the Argentine national team. Only Alfio Basile has a longer unbeaten run: 33 games between 1991 and 1993.

➤ Messi is the top scorer at the Copa America (4) and has scored 2 direct freekicks for the first time in a single edition of the tournament and he has also the most assists in the competition.

AGENCIES

Lionel Messi scored one goal and created two others as Argentina beat Ecuador 3-0 in Goiania on Saturday to reach the Copa America semi-finals.

In last four match, the 14-time winners will play Colombia, who beat Uruguay on penalties earlier in the day.

Messi teed up goals for Rodrigo De Paul and Lautaro Martinez before firing home an injury time free-kick to cap a stunning individual performance.

The scoreline was harsh on Ecuador, who ended the game with 10 men after Pedro Hicapie's dismissal but had been competitive throughout. "The truth is it was a very tough match. We knew the difficulty of playing Ecuador, who work hard with players who are fast, physically strong, young," said Messi.

"It was a battle until we managed the (second) goal."

Argentina head coach Lionel Scaloni has hailed Messi as "the best player of all time" after he match.

"Leo's game, I honestly don't know if he's going to get tired of being praised every day," Scaloni said at the post-game media conference. "The best thing that can happen for us football lovers is that the stars play until any age they can and we enjoy it."

"Messi is enjoyed even by opponents when they play against him. We are talking about the best player of all time. "It is difficult for a player to be at his level. Neymar may at some point be a similar player but because of what he has done, is doing and will continue to do, we must remember him for who he is."

"Messi surprises us day by day, he gets stronger and stronger and infects us all," said forward Nicolas Gonzalez. "He gives us confidence and joy. You have to continue down this path and enjoy it."

Inter forward Lautaro Martinez added: "We all follow Messi's leadership. Today we saw again how he makes a difference and we are all accompanying him."

Scaloni was content with an emphatic result. "Whoever believes that you can win every game 3-0 easily is wrong especially in this Copa America, which has conditions that are very different," he said.

"I don't know if it's the best moment for the team. I want to emphasize that in this Copa America any of these teams could push any team in the world," he said.

Rampant England fire warning

AFP, Rome



England return to Wembley two wins from a first European Championship title after recording their biggest ever victory at the tournament with a 4-0 demolition of Ukraine in the quarter-finals in Rome.

Having successfully negotiated a trip to the Stadio Olimpico with a flourish, Gareth Southgate's team will have the support of some 60,000 fans when they take on Denmark for a place in the final Wednesday.

Three years on from a bitter World Cup semi-final loss to Croatia, England have the chance to move on from that disappointment and end a long wait for silverware.

With the remainder of the competition to be played in London and Covid-19 restrictions severely limiting travelling fans, they are unlikely to get a better opportunity of adding to the 1966 World Cup win. "Teams have to go on a bit of a journey and they have to go through some pain sometimes to progress," said Southgate.

"We've had some great nights over the last four years but we've also had some painful ones and that's definitely helped



1ST SEMIFINAL
July 7: Italy v Spain, 1am
(Wednesday)
2ND SEMIFINAL
July 8: England v Denmark,
1am (Thursday)

FINAL
JULY 12, 1AM (MONDAY),
WEMBLEY STADIUM

*ALL TIMES ARE BANGLADESH STANDARD

us prepare for another tournament."

Unlike in Russia, where Harry Kane's hot start soon became a distant memory as England entered the knockout phase, the striker looks to have rediscovered his form at the perfect moment.

While the attack clicked into gear on another famous night in the Italian capital, 24 years after a goalless draw here secured qualification for the 1998 World Cup, the defence remains unbreached.

"They gave a fantastic performance, not only the players who started but the players who came into the game," said Southgate.

"The recognition in moments like tonight was that we didn't want to take a backwards step. We really wanted to grasp an opportunity. I thought the players were decisive and ruthless all night," he added. "We are on the right track for sure, but we haven't done nothing yet," said Kane.

"We have got a massive semi-final to look forward to now at Wembley. What an occasion, what a moment to be involved in. We have a vision of where we want to be, we are taking it step by step and so far so good, so we will recover now, take the confidence from this game but look ahead to a tough team in Denmark."



PHOTO: REUTERS

The UEFA EURO 2020 semi-final ties are confirmed following the completion of the quarter-finals. The semi-finals will both take place at Wembley Stadium in London.

ITALY V SPAIN

This is the fourth straight EURO in which Italy have played Spain. At UEFA EURO 2008, Spain won 4-2 on

penalties after a 0-0 quarter-final draw in Vienna. Four years later, they drew 1-1 in the group stage in Gdansk and then met again in the Kyiv final, Spain winning 4-0. Italy turned the tables with a 2-0 round of 16 win at Stade de France. In 2018 FIFA World Cup qualifying, they drew 1-1 in Italy and Spain won 3-0 at home, and they have another semi-final lined up in October in the UEFA Nations League in Milan.

ENGLAND VS DENMARK

England and Denmark have met once at a EURO, a 0-0 draw in the 1992 group stage in Malmo. Ten years later, England won their World Cup round of 16 tie 3-0 in Niigata. More recently in the UEFA Nations League, it was 0-0 in Copenhagen in September 2020 before Denmark won 1-0 at Wembley a month later thanks to a Christian Eriksen penalty.

Can Shakib reignite the spark in Harare?



MAZHAR UDDIN



In his illustrious international career spanning 15 years, there were rarely any instances when doubt could be cast over Shakib Al Hasan's ability to perform, in any department of the game.

And expectations from Shakib rocketed sky-high ever since the star cricketer returned to international cricket, after serving the one-year ban by the International Cricket Council, in October 2020.

However, following the much awaited comeback to competitive cricket, the 34-year-old somehow just could not rediscover his usual mojo, especially with the bat, and genuinely struggled to live up to his standards. And to make matters worse, his off-field antics have also contributed in keeping him in the limelight for all the wrong reasons.

Although it is still early days as the stellar all-rounder, since returning from the ban, has played no more than one Test match against West Indies, where he even scored a half-century.

The concerns over his game, since his comeback, have likely surfaced mainly due to his lack of form in the limited-overs format where he scored a mere fifty in six ODIs coupled with a poor run of form in the domestic circuit. Shakib's top score in eight games of the recently concluded Dhaka Premier League T20 competition was an unimposing 37 runs.

Thus, all eyes will once again be on this star cricketer during Bangladesh's tour of Zimbabwe where Shakib seems determined to make an impact with the bat, having quick-fired a seventy in the two-day warm-up game.

"As I have said previously, Shakib needed to return to international cricket through Test cricket since he was making a comeback after a big gap. When you return to cricket after such a pause and not batting well afterwards, your game is bound to be questioned," said his childhood mentor and prominent cricket coach Nazmul Abedin Fahim.

The Tigers will kick off the series with a lone Test match against the host from July 7. According to Fahim, it will be better for Shakib to patiently utilize his time in the middle and be in control over his decision-making process with the bat and allow Test cricket to inevitably let him bat at his desired pace.

"I think, Test format presents an opportunity to Shakib but I have observed that he was in an aggressive mood with the bat during the warm-up game. Maybe it's his current emotional state which is forcing him to prove to himself that he is still good enough but that's how some people may end up expressing themselves," Fahim added. "I am counting on this Test match and no matter how he plays overall, I want him to stay at the crease as long as possible against Zimbabwe."

The high standards which Shakib has set over the years have certainly made him a victim of his own success. And it remains to be seen if the Harare Sports Club creates the stage where the champion cricketer finally rekindles his old form.

Denmark taking Eriksen inspiration to Wembley

AGENCIES

Denmark have reached the Euro 2020 semi-finals on the back of an unbreakable bond generated by Christian Eriksen's cardiac arrest in the early stages of the tournament, coach Kasper Hjulmand said after Saturday's 2-1 last-eight win over Czech Republic.

Hjulmand found that out on Saturday, his mind wandering from the match even as his team was playing in the European Championship quarter-finals.

"I thought about him during the game and after the game," Hjulmand said.

"I still think about Christian every single day and that he should have been here." "We are happy



that he survived and we carried him in our hearts all the way to this match and to Wembley. The fundamental values of football came through in those seconds and those days and we all remembered why we started to play football.

"I keep thinking how amazing it would be to see him play (in the next match). He's still a big part of the team and he's a big part of our road to Wembley."

According to La Gazzetta dello Sport, Eriksen sent a WhatsApp message to his Denmark teammates after their win against the Czech Republic: 'I am proud of you.'

Goalkeeper David Ospina celebrated becoming Colombia's most capped player on Saturday by saving two penalties in a shootout to give his country victory over Uruguay and a place in the Copa America semi-finals. Ospina made a record 112th appearance in Brasilia, moving clear of the previous national record he shared with the iconic Carlos Valderrama and was the hero after he saved spot kicks from Jose Maria Gimenez and Matias Vina. He dedicated the victory to his civil strife-torn country that would have been one of the twin hosts alongside Argentina before South American football's governing body CONMEBOL moved the tournament to Brazil over coronavirus pandemic concerns and social unrest in Colombia. "We just want to give joy to our country, a country we want to be full of peace, full of people sharing and enjoying, because we have a beautiful country," said Ospina.



PHOTO: TWITTER