

What to WATCH

NAGORIK TV
T20 World Cup
USA vs West Indies
Live from 6:30 am
India vs
Bangladesh
Live from 8:30 pm

T SPORTS
Euro
Turkey vs Portugal
Live from 10:00 pm
Belgium vs Romania
Live from 1:00 am
(Sunday)

Copa America
Peru vs Chile
Live from 6:00 am
Ecuador vs
Venezuela
Live from 4:00 am
(Sunday)

Spain and their king buzz with confidence

REUTERS, Gelsenkirchen

Spain fans - including King Felipe - purred with a growing belief that their team can go all the way and be crowned Euro 2024 winners after an utterly dominant victory over defending champions Italy.

"Two weeks ago, I thought it was impossible for Spain to win this European Championship. Now I even think it is probable," Inako Diaz-Guerra, sports editor for El Mundo newspaper, said.

Having defeated Croatia 3-0 in their opening match, La Roja beat the Azzurri in their second group game by a narrow 1-0 margin on Thursday with the only goal coming from Italy defender Riccardo Calafiori who put the ball into his own net.

But the scoreline did not do justice to Spain's complete control of the game from start to finish with young wingers Nico Williams and Lamine Yamal cutting through Italy's defence time and again and Italy chasing shadows in every area of the pitch.

Coach Luis de la Fuente's side would have racked up a string of goals were it not for Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma and the width of the crossbar which denied Williams what would have been a stunning goal to double Spain's lead.

"Despite the narrow result and the own goal, the dominance was constant, and not that boring kind of dominance of holding the ball during the infamous tiki-taka period, but one of flow and real danger," Diaz-Guerra wrote.

Spain's King Felipe was in Gelsenkirchen's Arena AufSchalke for the game.

After the final whistle, the Spanish King told the players that their performance had been spectacular.

"If you keep playing like that, there will be celebrations," he said to applause and cheers in the changing room.

Spain's win guaranteed them the top finishing spot in Group B regardless of the outcome of their last match in the opening phase against Albania on Monday.

They will play a third-placed side from another group in the last 16.

Fans are already expecting to meet hosts Germany in the quarter-finals.

Spanish newspapers said coach de la Fuente was likely to give many of his first-choice players a rest for the Albania game as they plotted their campaign further ahead in the tournament.

"Spain is pure art," exclaimed a headline in As, a sports daily.



Spain's Alvaro Morata, Lamine Yamal and Dani Carvajal celebrate their winning goal during their 1-0 victory against Italy in a Euro 2024 Group B fixture at Arena AufSchalke in Gelsenkirchen on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR

'Little Italy lucky to avoid TOTAL COLLAPSE'

The Italian press were in full agreement with manager Luciano Spalletti's damning assessment of his country's 1-0 loss to Spain on Thursday in Euro 2024, a scoreline which in no way reflected Spain's utter domination of the game.

REUTERS, Leipzig

Riccardo Calafiori's own goal was the only difference between the sides on the scoresheet, but the gulf in class was apparent to all, as a young, exciting, Spanish side threatened to run riot against what Spalletti described as a tired Italy.

"Little Italy" was the headline in La Gazzetta dello Sport which greeted Italians on Friday morning, a clear indication of just how the Spanish had overrun Spalletti's jaded looking team.

The front page also told how "the Azzurri were never in the game", that keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma prevented a total collapse as Spain dominated Italy, but with a note of hope; "a draw with Croatia will be enough".

Former Italy and AC Milan manager Arrigo Sacchi, writing for La Gazzetta dello Sport, said that the difference between the two sides is enormous, but he feels that the manager is not at fault.

"(Spanish manager Luis) De la Fuente's national team plays dominant football, has technical and tactical knowledge, knows how to move and above all, does it with the right timings," Sacchi wrote.

"Italy, unfortunately, is not yet a team: it takes time, it takes patience.

We should learn a lot from this defeat, and I hope that we will try to learn from the mistakes we have made and not be caught up in the usual presumption.

"Let's make one thing clear right away: Spalletti is not to blame. He is a coach who has been working for less than a year, he has inherited a complicated situation and is trying to give a style to a country that has never had one."

Tuttosport went with the headline: "And it still worked out well" - a clear reference to how Spain peppered Italy with 20 shots compared to Italy's four, but the Italians somehow escaped with a narrow defeat.

Corriere dello Sport went with the plain and simple "Reset", saying Italy need to forget the Spanish defeat, again referencing how Italy need just a draw to reach the last 16.

Outside of the sports media, the daily newspapers also featured Italy's downfall on the front pages. "Azzurri dominated, Spain are superior" read La Repubblica, with La Stampa going with "Spanish punishment".

La Stampa also referenced Italy's 4-0 humbling by Spain in the Euro 2012 final. "Only Donnarumma prevents the ghosts of 2012", with the keeper the only player to come away with any praise after the performance in Gelsenkirchen.



After a frustrating outing where Cristiano Ronaldo failed to contribute in a 2-1 win against Czechia, the Portugal captain would look to turn things around against tonight Turkey, who started their campaign with a 3-1 win against Georgia. The Turks, leading Group F on goal difference, will look for inspiration from their midfielder talisman Hakan Calhanoglu (Inset).

PHOTO: AFP/INSTAGRAM



Scaloni angry, Marsch upset

AGENCIES

Argentina head coach Lionel Scaloni hit out at the temporary grass surface installed for Thursday's Copa America opener against Canada, which his side won 2-0, saying it was unsuited for a major tournament game.

The field at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium is made of artificial turf but organisers installed grass sod on top for this tournament after June 15.

"Thank goodness we won, because otherwise it would have been a cheap excuse to sit here and say this but we've known we were going to play here for seven months and they changed the surface two days ago," said Scaloni.

"It's not good for the spectacle. I'm sorry, it's not an excuse, but it's not a pitch. The stadium is beautiful and with the synthetic turf it should be spectacular, but with the (grass) turf today. Honestly, it's not suitable for this kind of players."

The grass was installed after Atlanta United's last home game on June 15. Meanwhile, Canada coach Jesse Marsch said Argentina should be fined for emerging five minutes late from the dressing room for the second half.

"When they were waiting, I knew that they were looking at video and they were analysing how they wanted to play against us. Now, I wish again the referees would manage that," Marsch said.

"If we were five minutes late, we'd get a fine. There would be a big problem. Let's see what happens with Argentina, I think they have to be fined. How late were they? 20 minutes? 30?"

"It was a long time. But they had that time to prepare how they wanted to play against us in the second half, which if we would have known ahead of time that we could have an extra 10 minutes then we could have prepared some things more."

SHORT CORNER

Denmark's men footballers refuse salary rise to secure equal pay for women

Denmark's male footballers have refused a salary increase for playing for the national side to gain their female counterparts equal basic pay, the players' union said on Friday. "The men's team chose not to ask for a salary increase... to improve the conditions of the women's team," union spokesperson Magnus Hviid told AFP.

Messi becomes most capped player in Copa America history

Argentina star Lionel Messi became the most-capped player in Copa America history on Thursday as he reached 35 appearances in the opening match of the tournament against Canada, which the defending champions won by 2-0 in Atlanta.

Italy legend Roberto Baggio injured in burglary

Italy's 1993 Ballon d'Or winner Roberto Baggio had stitches inserted in a head wound after being struck on the head during a burglary as he watched Euro 2024 at home with his family, Italian media reported on Friday. Five armed individuals broke into his home near Vicenza in northeastern Italy.

*Read full stories on The Daily Star website

Another youth football league to begin without a purpose

SPORTS REPORTER

The BFF Under-18 Football League is set to get underway today in three separate venues with youth squads of nine Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) outfits, who are taking part seemingly just to fulfil a condition and avoid the federation's fine.

The purpose behind the youth team is that all top flight clubs would train and maintain youth teams round the year to strengthen the pipeline and then participate in the junior league with their respective youth teams. However, other than Bashundhara Kings, no other team has an active youth team.

Just like the previous four editions of the competition - the first three being held in a tournament format - all clubs except Bashundhara Kings held trials at the last minute to form a squad for the tournament.

The scheduling of the tournament also reflects the neglect it is receiving from the game's local governing body, as the 36-match-long tournament will be completed in less than a month, forcing the players to risk injuries by playing matches with little rest period in between.

The club officials and coaches said that financial constraint, accommodation problem and an overall lack of a systemic process were the main reasons why they did not have permanent

youth squads.

"There is no system in place to develop the professional league and the youth league. The federation is holding the youth league and we are also participating in it, otherwise the federation will fine the club Tk 20 lakh," said Mohammedan SC manager Imtiaz Ahmed Nakib.

Nakib also informed that they formed their squad in less than two weeks by selecting some players from trials, who will join 10-12 players who played for Mohammedan in the 2021-22 season, the last edition of the youth competition.

"I think the clubs can train the junior players round the year if they really want to do it, though there is a crisis of accommodation and financing," Abahani assistant coach Pranotosh Kumar said.

"The young players are leaving the clubs after one-and-a-half month's training and the competition. The players hardly benefit with this short period of training," he added.

The former national player also thinks that the hectic schedule may hamper the purpose of the league as the players won't get enough time to recover.

Fortis FC manager Rashedul Islam sees the league format a positive change that will give the players an opportunity to play eight matches instead of three to four matches they would otherwise get in the tournament format.

"Some 10-12 junior players have been with our senior team but all of them except one were ruled out in the medical test. So, we conducted a five-day trial with some 400 players to pick 30 players for the league," Rashedul said.