

Southgate under pressure as England face Swiss test

REUTERS, Weimar

England's European Championship campaign looked dead and buried before it was salvaged by a remarkable last-gasp goal from Jude Bellingham in the round of 16, but they have barely made their presence felt in Germany.

Gareth Southgate's men take on in-form Switzerland in the quarterfinals on Saturday in Duesseldorf, and the Swiss underlined their credentials by beating defending champions Italy in the last 16.

A couple of weeks ago, England would have relished facing Switzerland – a team they have lost to only three times in their 27 meetings and most recently in 1981.

Murat Yakin's team, however, have

played with a consistency and confidence that has eluded England.

Yakin even said he sympathised with Southgate, who has been lambasted in Germany for not getting more from his talented squad.

"I know this myself from last year a little bit, just focus on the football game, not what we read in the newspapers, that's the only thing we can do as a coach," Yakin said.

Southgate has been criticised for not making many changes to his team but that could be about to change as they practised a back three in training, with Kyle Walker moved to the right of centre three and Bukayo Saka potentially playing as wing-back.

Of concern to Southgate is the fact that defender Marc Guehi, who has been solid on his major tournament debut, is suspended for Saturday's match, John

Khaka acting as the midfield playmaker.

Khaka, who played a pivotal role in Bayer Leverkusen's Bundesliga victory last season, was delighted by Switzerland's



- This will be Gareth Southgate's 100th international match in charge of England, becoming only the third manager to hit the milestone.
- England have lost just one of their last 24 meetings with Switzerland in all competitions (W17 D6), and are unbeaten in 13 (W9 D4) since a 2-1 loss in a World Cup qualifier in May 1981.

- England also aim to become the sixth European side to earn 50 victories at major tournaments – after Germany, Italy, France, Spain and the Netherlands.
- Granit Xhaka has created more chances (8), completed more passes (254) and made more line-breaking passes (51) than any other Switzerland player in this tournament.

Stones has been training with his leg heavily bandaged and Luke Shaw has not played since February due to injury.

While England have not played with three at the back since finishing runners-up to Italy at Euro 2020, it would allow Southgate to employ his wing-backs higher up the pitch.

Yakin, meanwhile, will rely on the experience of Manchester City's Manuel Akanji and Newcastle United's Fabian Schär to anchor the back line, with Granit

win over Italy which was sweet revenge for their 3-0 thrashing by them at Euro 2020.

"I have never seen the Azzurri in such difficulty on the field as against us," Xhaka said. "We won even before going on the pitch, just as they did with us three years ago. They were scared."

England are bidding for their first European Championship title in 11 appearances while a Swiss victory would put Yakin's team into the semifinals for the first time.

Spotlight on Guler, Gakpo in Dutch-Turkey clash

AFP, Berlin

Cody Gakpo and Arda Guler endured frustrating seasons but both have established themselves as their teams' vital players as the Netherlands face Turkey in a Euro 2024 quarterfinal clash on Saturday in Berlin.

"Gakpo is our star," former Netherlands international Pierre van Hooijdonk said on Dutch channel NOS.

Overshadowed by Mohamed Salah at Anfield, where he has played inconsistently, Gakpo has burst into life in Germany as a constant threat coming in off the left.

Half of the forward's 12 goals for his country have come at major tournaments, with three at the World Cup two years ago.

With another he will match compatriots and former stars Ruud van Nistelrooy and Arjen Robben on seven.

"He is a great player who is solid on the ball... and super important for us," said Koeman after the 3-0 last 16 win over Romania, in which Gakpo scored and also brilliantly teed up Donyell Malen.

At the other end, Real Madrid attacker Guler is Turkey's main weapon.

After months of injury problems and struggling to earn a chance in the Spanish capital, Guler burst into life in the final weeks of the season.

With the Spanish title won, Carlo Ancelotti let Guler loose and he blossomed at the perfect time to take the creative controls for Turkey this summer.

The 19-year-old scored a stunning effort against Georgia in Turkey's thrilling opening win and created both of his



- The last two matches between the Netherlands and Turkey have featured 13 goals (6.5 per game). Turkey won 4-2 in March 2021 and the Oranje won 6-1 later that year.
- Arda Guler is one of just three teenagers to score and assist at a single Euros, after Wayne Rooney (4 goals, 1 assist) and Cristiano Ronaldo (2 goals, 2 assists), both at Euro 2004.
- While this is set to be the 15th international meeting between Netherlands and Turkey, this tie is the first fixture between these teams to come at a major tournament.



team's goals against Austria in the 2-1 last 16 win with set pieces.

It is only the fourth time Turkey have reached the quarterfinals of a major tournament and the first since 2008. They are boosted by the return of captain Hakan Calhanoglu and defender Samet Akaydin from suspension.

In the stands at the vast Olympiastadion Turkey have the advantage, despite Oranje fans taking over every city they have visited in their vibrant shirts.

"It will be an away match," Netherlands

defender Daley Blind warned his teammates on Thursday, with around three million Turks living in Germany, many supporting their team fervently.

However, Turkey will be held back in one aspect as defender Merih Demiral will miss this quarterfinal clash after UEFA suspended him for two games on Friday for making an alleged ultra-nationalist salute when he scored his second goal in their 2-1 last-16 win over Austria on Tuesday.

The ban is a significant blow for Montella's side, already missing the

suspended Orkun Kokcu and Ismail Yuksek -- by contrast the Netherlands have their full complement available.

And that is what Koeman's men, who, according to Gakpo, "are not yet where we (they) want to be", will be hoping to capitalise.

If Netherlands can get through their Turkey test then fans can start dreaming of a second Euros triumph, with England or Switzerland awaiting in the semifinal in what has been dubbed the "easier" side of the draw.

Tigers brace for challenging Test fixtures

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are all set to brace the Test challenge from next month after competing mostly in the T20 format for the last couple of months in the buildup to the T20 World Cup, which concluded on June 29 in the USA and West Indies.

The challenge will start with a two-match series against Pakistan which will be followed by series against India, South Africa, and the West Indies respectively in the coming five months where the Tigers will compete in a total of eight Tests, two each against these four strong opponents.

India and West Indies had already confirmed the itinerary of the full-fledged Bangladesh tours, scheduled for September-October and November-December, respectively, while on Friday, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) officially announced the fixture of their home series against Bangladesh.

According to the itinerary, Bangladesh will play the first Test in Rawalpindi on August 21-25 while Karachi will host the second Test between August 30 and September 3.

In between the India and West Indies tours, Bangladesh will host South Africa on home soil, although the itinerary of the series is yet to be confirmed.

BANGLADESH TOUR OF PAKISTAN

- First Test in Rawalpindi from August 21-25
- Second Test in Karachi from August 30-September 3



Bangladesh haven't been in a Test mood since their last home series against Sri Lanka in March-April where they showcased an underwhelming performance in both matches to lose the series.

The poor batting display of the batters had significant impact on Bangladesh's performance in the series as they failed to cross the 200-run mark in three of their four innings. Apart from Mominul Haque and Mehidy Hasan Miraz, none of the batters could score any fifty in the series.

Although the Bangladesh national team were mostly occupied with T20 assignments, a number of Test players have been involved in camps across multiple venues of the country under the 'Bangladesh Tigers' banner.

Bangladesh, who have a disastrous record against Pakistan in Tests as they lost 12 out of 13 matches with six of those being innings defeats, toured Pakistan last in 2020 where they lost the opening match in Rawalpindi by an innings and 44 runs.

The tourists were scheduled to fly to Pakistan again to play another Test but the surge of Covid-19 saw that fixture abandoned.

Bangladesh's current Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto, who was part of the Rawalpindi Test and made 44 and 38 runs in two innings respectively, admitted that they need to provide their A game in Pakistan to do well against the hosts.

"As a team, we are looking forward to returning to Pakistan for the ICC World Test Championship," Shanto was quoted in a PCB press release on Friday.

"Playing in Pakistan is always a challenging but exciting prospect, and we will have to be at our very best to compete against a formidable side in their backyard," he concluded.

The series will also give a clear indication where Bangladesh are actually heading into the ongoing ICC Test Championship 2023-25 cycle in which they are currently placed eighth among nine teams with one win in four matches.

A lot to fix for Brazil against in-form Uruguay

STAR SPORTS DESK

Coming up against Uruguay, the standout performers of this Copa America so far, Brazil, missing their key player Vinicius Jr, will have a lot to fix in this heavyweight quarterfinal clash at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas on Sunday morning.

Uruguay have shown that they have the credentials to go all the way this year, though, and can be optimistic of success on Sunday as they secured a 2-0 victory over Brazil in their last competitive meeting in 2026 World Cup qualifying in October last year.

Brazil have reached the knockout rounds of the Copa America for the third successive tournament, but they missed the chance to secure top spot in Group D after they were held to a 1-1 draw by Colombia.

What would see Brazil coach Dorival Junior, who is yet to taste defeat since taking the charge of the Selecao in

January, scratch is head is the fact that he would have to go without his star player Vinicius for this clash. The Real Madrid forward, who scored twice in their 4-1 win over Paraguay in the group stage, will be missing this game due to a suspension for receiving two yellow cards in the group stage -- against Paraguay and Colombia.

Dorival could swap Arsenal winger Gabriel Martinelli directly in the left-wing or he could go for fitting in the young prodigy Endrick alongside his soon-to-be Real Madrid teammate Rodrygo and Barcelona's Raphinha in the right flank.

With Brazil already struggling to find their way into opposition's defence in this tournament, Dorival will know he is up for his toughest challenge so far in this Copa against a Uruguayan side that have not only racked up nine goals -- most by any team so far -- but have also been defensively solid as they let in just one in stoppage time in a 3-1 win over Panama in the first game.





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