

Teary-eyed Nagelsmann lauds returned belief

AFP, Herzogenaurach

An emotional Germany manager Julian Nagelsmann said Saturday the team's "belief in ourselves has returned" despite a 2-1 extra-time elimination by Spain in the Euro 2024 quarter-finals.

Germany pushed Spain all the way in Stuttgart on Friday, coming from a goal down to send the game into extra time when Florian Wirtz scored an 89th-minute equaliser.

The host nation had a penalty claim denied late before conceding a Mikel Merino goal in the 119th minute.

The tearful coach praised the team after almost a decade of failures at major tournaments and said the performances, built on passionate home support, had bridged gaps between fans and the national team.

"The faith has grown, (the fans) believe in us again," Nagelsmann told reporters at Germany's base camp in the Bavarian village of Herzogenaurach.

"A few months ago it would have been unthinkable for us to come back from a goal down.



"You can tell I'm fighting back tears because it was very emotional. I've always said we need the fans behind us across the country.

"From March onwards, it was clear that the fans felt something. When we see the videos of fans, it's emotional. We would have liked to have given the supporters even more."

Nagelsmann took over in September after Hansi Flick became the first coach in Germany history to be sacked.

After two successive World Cup group stage eliminations and a last 16 loss to England at the Euros in 2021, Germany won just three of 11 games in 2023, giving rise to fears of a disastrous showing on home soil.

The 36-year-old coach however steadied the ship, bringing in a host of new players and dropping several big names from the squad.

Friday's loss was Germany's first defeat in 2024 after an eight-game run which included wins over France, the Netherlands and Denmark.

Asked if he had successfully reset the nation's hopes, Nagelsmann said: "I think we all saw that the hard drive has been cleaned.

"I don't know if it has definitely been completely erased, but it definitely has been cleaned.

"We are much more solid and our belief in ourselves has grown."



A tournament too far for Ronaldo!

NABID YEASIN

Portugal will remember the Euro 2024 as another golden opportunity squandered to get silverware with arguably one of the most talented bunch of footballers, but for their captain, Cristiano Ronaldo, the tournament will remain as a case of whether the 39-year-old forward has stretched his international career one tournament too long.

Portugal -- boasting an enviable midfield of Bruno Fernandes, Bernardo Silva, Vitinha, and Joao Palhinha -- exited Euro 2024 in a lacklustre way, playing out a largely dull 120 minutes in the quarterfinal in Hamburg on Friday night against France, only to lose 5-3 on penalties.

Ronaldo did step up and convert the first spot-kick during the shootout, but the five-time Ballon d'Or winner was largely amiss throughout the game -- like he had been the entire tournament.

Ronaldo skying a Francisco Conceicao cut-back from close range in extra-time -- Portugal's best chance from open play on the night -- or his failure in sprinting past France's William Saliba in the right flank showed that he is neither a threatening presence inside the box nor is he the one to pose threats with his blistering pace like he once used to.

In fact, if anything, Ronaldo looked like he was the one holding a talented Portugal side back -- hogging the free-kicks despite his abysmal record of converting only once from 61 free-kicks in major tournaments -- and shunting

the likes of far more pacy Diogo Jota and Goncalo Ramos in the sidelines.

Did Ronaldo push it one tournament too far this time? If this question was a point to ponder at the beginning of the tournament for which Portugal qualified as the only unbeaten side with Ronaldo top-scoring for his side with 10 in the qualifiers, the Al-Nassr forward has only validated those doubts with his underwhelming performances in Germany.

The former Real Madrid forward is still the record goalscorer in Euros, with 14 goals in 30 matches, but he failed to become the oldest player to score in the tournament. Apart from scoring in shootouts, he has failed to net a single goal in five matches.

It seemed like Ronaldo was about to pip his former Real Madrid teammate Luka Modric, whose goal against Italy in the group stage this tournament saw him become the oldest goalscorer in the history of the Euros at 38 years and 294 days, to the milestone when he stepped up to take a penalty in extra time in their Round of 16 game against Slovenia.

However, Jan Oblak denied Ronaldo with a brilliant save, reducing the mighty footballing figure into tears -- a sight for which the legions of fans of the ever-so-proud Ronaldo and even the entire world were not ready.

While Ronaldo somewhat redeemed himself when he converted the first penalty from shootout in the Slovenia game before Diogo Costa heroics -- the

Portuguese goalkeeper thwarted three successive penalties -- propelled Portugal to the quarters, that moment of weakness might just have shown that even Ronaldo started doubting himself.

If Ronaldo had made himself known for anything in his illustrious career spanning over two decades is that he always backs himself to get back up and shut the critics with goals and more. But that moment of him breaking down in tears and later apologising to fans for his mistake showed the world a different Ronaldo, who perhaps knows that age has eventually caught up to him but is yet not fully ready to accept the fact.

Ronaldo mentioned that this was his last dance in the Euros, but has not said anything about drawing curtains on his international career yet. "It's too soon and raw after the match to talk about that and there have been no individual decisions made," Portugal coach Roberto Martinez, who has been his biggest supporter in this tumultuous time, said when asked if it was Ronaldo's last game in a Portugal jersey.

Ronaldo's dedication and fitness will most likely allow him to go on for at least a few more years outside of Europe, a route that he had already chosen as he now plies his trade for Saudi Pro League team Al-Nassr. But maybe the time has come for the all-time top international goalscorer to realise that he is only tarnishing the grand reputation that holds him alongside the best footballers in history by overstaying his welcome at the international level.

Raducanu rediscovers Wimbledon 'fun' factor

AFP, London

Emma Raducanu is finally all smiles again at Wimbledon after the former US Open champion rediscovered the fun factor that made her the golden girl of British tennis before a stunning fall from grace.

Raducanu routed ninth seed Maria Sakkari 6-2, 6-3 in the Wimbledon third round on Friday to reach the last 16 at a Grand slam for the first time in three years.

The 21-year-old admitted she is in love with tennis again after struggling to deal with the aftermath of her incredible rise to fame.

She went from an unknown schoolgirl to the talk of tennis in two transformative weeks in New York in 2021.

Aged just 18 at the time, Raducanu's fairytale US Open triumph made her the first British woman to lift a Grand Slam singles trophy since Virginia Wade at Wimbledon in 1977.

She was also the first qualifier in the Open Era to win a major singles title.

She left Manhattan with the world at her feet, but the problems that have dogged her since provide a cautionary tale about the pitfalls of sudden celebrity.

She has matched her best run at Wimbledon from three years ago and tellingly described the victory against Sakkari as "up there with the most fun I've had on a tennis court"

"Winning that match, it's a beautiful feeling and one that I really want to savour."

Djokovic eyes sweet 16

AFP, London

Novak Djokovic will target the Wimbledon fourth round for the 16th time on Saturday as old rival Andy Murray's All England Club career ended on a low note when Emma Raducanu pulled the plug on their mixed doubles plans.

Djokovic is looking to equal Roger Federer's record of eight Wimbledon triumphs and claim a 25th Grand Slam title in total.

He barely broke sweat in his opening match but was pushed to four sets in his second encounter by British rookie Jacob Fearnley, who was still playing college tennis in the United States last month.

Just weeks after a right knee operation, Djokovic feels he is not yet fully up to speed.

"It's not where I want it to be," he said. "The longer I stay in the tournament, I think the better the chances that my movement will improve."

On Saturday, he tackles Alexei Popyrin, whom he beat in four sets at the Australian Open earlier this year.

With defending champion Carlos Alcaraz and top ranked Jannik Sinner on the other side of the draw, and safely into the fourth round, Djokovic can see a clear path to a sixth straight final at the All England Club.

Popyrin, the world number 47, has never made the second week of a Slam.

Jessy's moment to shine

SPORTS REPORTER

It's a dream come true moment for Bangladesh's Shathira Jakir Jessy as she is all set to officiate in the upcoming ICC Women's T20 Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in Sri Lanka from July 18-28.

Jessy had previously officiated matches in the ACC Women's Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Hong Kong last year. Apart from conducting regular domestic and international matches, Jessy also conducted a high-stake match between Mohammedan SC and Prime Bank during the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League (DPL) 2023-24.

However, the upcoming Women's Asia Cup will be the biggest international break for the former national cricketer as she will be the first Bangladeshi women's umpire to officiate at any senior level of a regional or global tournament.

"It's obviously a great feeling," Shathira told The Daily Star yesterday.

"After conducting matches during the last Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Hong Kong, I set myself a target to officiate in the Asia Cup. In between, I also officiated matches during the Premier Cup in Malaysia this year along with other international matches and DPL. But the Asia Cup will be the biggest tournament

so far in my career.

"Actually, this is the biggest tournament after the World Cup. I have really worked hard in the last two years for this and finally, my target has been fulfilled," she added.

Shathira feels that the door of opportunities has been opened in this women's umpiring profession after she got exposure, both at the domestic and international level, on a regular basis. Jessy has already conducted 13 WT20Is -- 10 as on-field umpire and three as TV umpire -- and the 33-year-old former cricketer targets to officiate matches in tournaments like the World Cup.

"People all over the world now know about Bangladesh's women's umpiring. I think the acceptance level has increased globally.

"As a women's cricketer, I couldn't go to such a level but after starting umpiring, I think I have achieved something in this profession.

"Now many girls have started taking this profession seriously. The World Cup is knocking at the door and I really hope to officiate matches in that tournament as well," said Jessy, adding that umpires from Bangladesh have the calibre to be among the world's best in the coming days.



'These Canadians' set for rematch with Messi & Co

AGENCIES

Canada reached the semifinals of the Copa America after beating Venezuela 4-3 on penalties after the 90-minute game finished 1-1 yesterday.

Canada will face defending champions Argentina in the semifinal in New Jersey on Wednesday at 6am, Bangladesh Time.

Jacob Shaffelburg fired Canada into the lead in the 13th minute but Salomon Rondon equalised in the 64th, before Canada triumphed in the shoot-out to set up a last-four meeting with world champions Argentina.

The Canadians, under American coach Jesse Marsch, who only took over the team in mid-May, are playing in the Copa America for the first time and produced a relentless display of pressing in what was a frantic game.

Both teams failed to score from the spot twice in the shoot-out, leaving it at 3-3 after five penalties each and sending the contest into sudden death.

Canada keeper Max Crepeau,



Canada captain Alphonso Davies banished memories of his penalty miss at the 2022 World Cup by confidently converting a spot-kick in a shootout victory over Venezuela. In Canada's 1-0 group stage defeat to Belgium at the World Cup in Qatar, Davies had a tame penalty saved by goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, and the North American side eventually exited the tournament with three losses.

who had made a major error for Venezuela's equaliser, made amends as he saved Wilker Angel's kick.

"Everybody needs to realize the respect this country deserves and these footballers deserve," Crepeau told Fox Sports.

"Everybody says 'these Canadians', well these Canadians are in the semi-finals of Copa America".

Canada face a stern test in the semifinals, coming up against World Champions Argentina side.

But after a performance of remarkable energy and determination against a Venezuela team that won all three of their group stage games, Marsch will believe his team could pull off another upset and reach the final in Miami on July 14.

Canada played Argentina in the opening game of the group stage, losing 2-0 to the defending champions and will start as huge underdogs again in the semi-final.

"It's going to take everything. We played them in the group stage, we played well but didn't get the win we wanted," Canada captain Alphonso Davies said.

"Going into this game, we know what's on the line. We win and go forward, we lose and go home. They're going to come out with everything. We're hungrier than ever, we expect a battle as they should."