

# ‘Spirit of sacrifice’ & ‘genius’ Yamal pave way for Spain

- At the age of 16 years and 362 days, Spain's Lamine Yamal became the youngest goalscorer at a major tournament (World Cup/Euros), a record previously held by Brazil's Pele against Wales at the 1958 World Cup (17y 239d).
  - Spain are the first side to win six games at a single edition of the
- UEFA European Championship finals.
  - This is the first time France have been eliminated at the semifinal stage of a major tournament (World Cup/Euros) since Euro 1996.
  - Spain are only the second side to reach as many as five

finals of the UEFA European Championship after Germany (6).

- Randal Kolo Muani's opening goal in the eighth minute of the game was France's first goal from open play at Euro 2024, while it was their 87th non-penalty attempt of the tournament.



## AGENCIES

A touch of ‘genius’ from wunderkind Lamine Yamal and a testament to what can be done by improvising on a proven style of play – both of these were on display when Spain dispatched France 2-1 in the Euro 2024 semifinal in Munich on Tuesday night.

Keeping a majority of possession and frustrating opponents by denying them opportunities to be creative – this had been the style of play for Spain for over a decade, during which they won the 2010 World Cup and triumphed in the 2008 and 2012 editions of the Euros.

However, since their last Euro success 12 years ago, that typical Spanish style of play had somewhat been neutralised with their national team unable to win any major silverware after that.

But Spain coach Luis de la Fuente developed on that possession-based football, nurturing a

team of youngsters he had overseen from the age level, and the 63-year-old coach is now enjoying the fruits of it as his team is just one step away from winning the Euro 2024.

De la Fuente hailed his team's quality and cohesion in coming from a goal down to beat France and reach the Euro 2024 final, a feat he took no credit for and said was all about his players' insatiable hunger for success.

De la Fuente said his team had versatility and outstanding individual qualities, which when put together created a special brand of football that would be on show in Sunday's final, regardless of whether the opponent is England or Netherlands.

De la Fuente also hailed his young side who, according to the coach, has not been afraid of sacrificing their dominance over the ball in return for being more aggressive, especially offensively.

“They are very generous in their efforts and work rate. This is just one more sign that this is an insatiable team, that they want to keep improving with the spirit of

sacrifice,” he said.

Spain went behind to an early goal from France's Randal Kolo Muani before teenager Yamal levelled with a brilliant strike in the 21st minute, then Dani Olmo added a second just a few minutes after.

De la Fuente said seeing 16-year-old winger Yamal's performance against France was like watching “a genius”. Named player of the match, Yamal became the youngest-ever male Euros goalscorer.

“We have seen a genius, the product of a genius,” De la Fuente told reporters.

“He's a player we have to take care of – I have to give him the advice to keep working with the same humility and keep his feet on the floor.

“He would keep growing but this maturity and attitude at such a young age is like that of a more experienced player.

“We are lucky he is Spanish and we can enjoy him for many more years.”

Yamal became the competition's youngest player in Spain's first match

and also three on his run to the

De la reserved the rest of including

“We've been about Lamine I have 26 great continued the

“I know (Olmo) and the potential am grateful to him

This new look of De la Fuente has

garnered a lot of praise from experts and fans alike, but for the Spanish coach, the circle will only be completed if he can inspire his team to land the elusive major tournament silverware come Sunday night in Berlin against either England or the Netherlands.

against Croatia provided assists team's final.

Fuente praise for his team, Olmo, talking but

players,” coach.

very well he has...I too.”

Spain already

## HP squad formed with eye on future Australia Tests

### SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday named a few Test cricketers in their four-day High Performance (HP) squad for the upcoming tour in Australia, keeping in mind their 2027 Future Tours Programme (FTP) schedule.

Shadman Islam, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, and Shahadat Hossain Dipu, all part of the current Test setup, are set to tour Australia for their maiden outing in the Oceania region.

The national team is not accustomed to touring Australia regularly, with their last and only Test tour occurring in 2003 which featured two Tests and three ODIs. In 2008, Bangladesh toured Australia again, but only for a three-match ODI series. Since then, the Tigers have fared in Australia for two global tournaments: 2015 ODI World Cup and 2022 T20 World Cup.

As HP team are also scheduled to play a 50-over series and a T20 tournament involving Big Bash teams and a Pakistani side, the selectors included several white-ball cricketers in their squads: Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Afif Hossain, and Shamim Hossain, alongside some budding cricketers fit for the formats.

Although BCB's plan to send some of their Test cricketers to gain experience on Australian soil is receiving applause from different corners,



questions remain on whether their selection for the white-ball matches is justified. Afif, who was a traveling reserve during Bangladesh's recent T20 World Cup campaign, hasn't played a game for Bangladesh since December last year, while Shamim's last outing in national colours came during last year's New Zealand tour.

A 28-year-old pacer, Abu Hider Rony, also found his place in both white-ball squads despite his last international match for Bangladesh being in 2018. National selector Hannan Sarkar claimed they formed the squads prioritising players for specific formats and picking some players who could go on to represent them at top level.

“We have a few Test cricketers in our four-day team. As we are scheduled to play Tests in Australia in 2027 according to our FTP schedule, we want to prioritise these players,” Hannan was quoted in a BCB video released yesterday.

“Similar goes for one-day and T20 teams. I think it's a very good stage where the players can express themselves and gather experience,” he added.

HP chairman Naimur Rahman Durjoy earlier insisted that they have arranged the tour for pipeline cricketers' betterment to “give game-time opportunities”, and now it's up to them to “utilise the opportunity and take themselves to next level”.

“We want to continue the process and increase the facilities from the board,” he added.

Whether the series will have a significant impact on Bangladesh cricket in the future remains to be seen.

## MESSI ENJOYING ‘last battles’ for Argentina

AFP, East Rutherford

Lionel Messi said he was enjoying his “last battles” with Argentina after the 37-year-old found the net in a 2-0 win over Canada on Tuesday to book a place in the Copa America final.

After a lacklustre display against Ecuador in the quarterfinals, Messi looked back to himself again, connecting with Angel Di Maria and strike partner Julian Alvarez, who also scored.

“I'm living it like I lived it in the last Copa America, in the last World Cup...these are the last battles and I'm enjoying them to the maximum,” he told TyC Sports after the win set up a meeting with

Uruguay or Colombia in the final.

Messi, now playing with Inter Miami in Major League Soccer, has yet to indicate whether he will continue to play with Argentina in the 2026 World Cup.

But asked about Messi's “last battles” comment, Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni asked for calm.

“We have to leave him alone, he knows that we will not be the ones to close the door on him. He can stay with us as long as he wants, even when he retires...Let him decide what he wants,” he said.

Messi has chance to win a third straight major title with his national side following their 2022 World Cup triumph and their 2021 Copa America win.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner

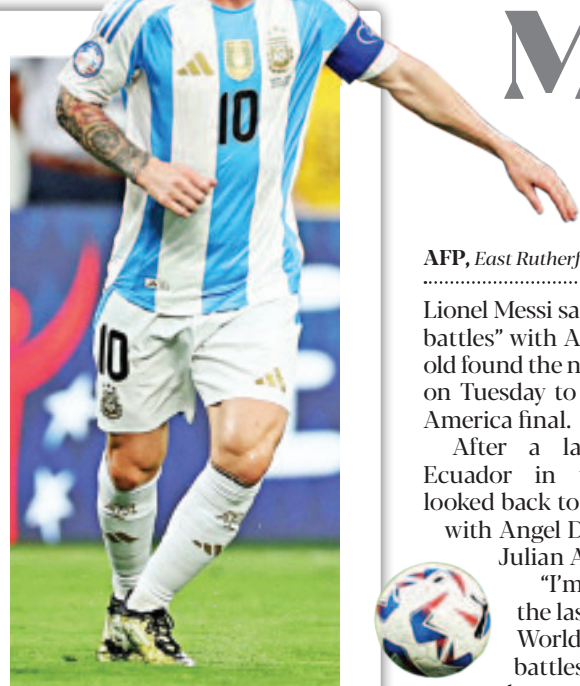
referenced veteran team-mates Di Maria and Nicolas Otamendi and said that the success was validation for the difficult barren years the team had suffered.

“The truth is that it's crazy what this group has done, what the Argentina national team has been doing,” Messi said on TyC Sports.

“It's not easy for us to be in a final again, for us to compete again to be champions,” he added.

Messi also added that it has been a difficult tournament for Argentina.

“It's a difficult Copa, evenly matched, with very bad pitches, with high temperatures, very tough teams, and for us to be in a final again is something to enjoy,” he said.



## Krejciikova sets up Rybakina clash

REUTERS, London

Barbora Krejciikova reached her first Wimbledon semifinal on Wednesday with a 6-4, 7-6(4) win over Latvian 13th seed Jelena Ostapenko in the battle of former French Open champions.

The Czech 31st seed kept her composure from the back of the court to force her opponent into 35 unforced errors across the match as Ostapenko's bid for a second Grand Slam title since her first in 2017 unravelled on Court One.

The 27-year-old Ostapenko had power in her serve but struggled to place it, landing less than 50% of her first serve during the opening set. Krejciikova, French Open champion in 2021, broke in the third game and went on to clinch the opener.

Ostapenko rallied to break her opponent in the second set and open a 4-1 lead. However, mistakes once again dogged her game and Krejciikova put together a run of four winning games to go 5-4 up.

The match went to a tiebreak and a brilliant

crosscourt forehand from Krejciikova found the far line to give her a mini-break from which she went on to close out the match, sealing her first win over the Latvian in their four most recent encounters.

The Czech will face 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, who beat Elina Svitolina 6-3, 6-2, in the other quarterfinal.

Over the course of the last five days, the grasscourt major had started to resemble an indoor tournament with matches on the two main showcourts taking place under cover.

The retractable roof on Centre Court was finally open under a clear blue sky on Wednesday as Rybakina produced a majestic performance in front of Britain's Queen Camilla to reach the last four for the second time in three years.

The Russian-born Kazakh, the only women's champion left in the draw, sealed the first set with a 115mph thunderbolt and fired down another ace – her seventh of the match – to complete the one-sided victory.



England pacer Gus Atkinson celebrates after casting West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite on Day 1 of the first Test at Lord's yesterday. On his debut, the 26-year-old right-arm pacer was the destroyer-in-chief for his side as he returned seven wickets for 45 to help bundle out the visitors for 121.

PHOTO: AFP