

Super-sub Watkins and positive England turn up

- Q England have now reached the final in two of their four major tournaments under Gareth Southgate (also Euro 2020).
- Q Ollie Watkins' winner at 89:59 was the latest winning goal scored in the semifinal at the UEFA European Championship/World Cup (excluding extra time). It was also England's only shot on target in the second half of this match.
- Q England are the first side in European Championship history to reach the final despite trailing in both the quarter-final and semi-final en route.
- Q Netherlands have now been eliminated from seven semifinal matches at major tournaments (World Cup/Euros), the second-most of any European nation, after Germany (8).
- Q Xavi Simons' seventh-minute strike was the earliest goal scored in a European Championship semifinal since Alan Shearer against Germany in 1996 (third minute). At 21 years and 80 days, Simons also became the youngest player to score for the Netherlands in the knockout stages of a major tournament (World Cup/Euros).
- Q Harry Kane's equaliser for England was his sixth goal in the knockout stages of the European Championship, more than any other player in the competition's history.



AGENCIES

Ollie Watkins' 90th minute winner in England's 2-1 win over the Netherlands in the Euro 2024 semifinal in Dortmund on Thursday night was not only a perfect example of a typical striker's finish, but it also took a huge burden off coach Gareth Southgate as his team was finally able to deliver a much-craved positive performance in the tournament.

It was an incredible finish from Watkins, who came in as a substitute for Harry Kane just ten minutes before that sweet strike, to an evening that began badly for England as Xavi Simons gave the Netherlands an early lead against the run of play in the semifinal in Dortmund.

Watkins received a pass from fellow substitute Cole Palmer, who also came on with him in the 81st minute, with his back to goal in the first minute of stoppage time, turned and fired low into the far corner to leave the Netherlands bewildered.

"I'm lost for words really," said Watkins, the Aston Villa striker. "I don't think I've

hit a ball that sweet before, and obviously in such a special moment."

According to Watkins, he had 'manifested' the goal beforehand.

"I said to Cole that we were both going to go on the pitch and he was going to set me up, at half-time," Watkins told reporters.

"It happened, I manifested it and as soon as he turned I knew I needed to make a move. You don't get that opportunity very often so I had to be greedy, I had to take it."

However, unlike Watkins, England coach Southgate might not have manifested taking his side to consecutive European Championship finals as it has rarely been a convincing campaign from this England side.

Thursday's game was an emphatic answer after the criticism heaped on the side for a string of languid showings earlier in the tournament, and sets up a mouth-watering final against a slick-looking Spain, who beat France 2-1 in the other semifinal on Wednesday night.

England had frustrated their followers,

looking pedestrian at times in the group phase as well as their knockout games. It was as if they were suffocating at times under a heavy burden of expectation.

Even though there was a contentious VAR call by German referee Felix Zwayer that allowed England to get back in the game through a Harry Kane equaliser from the spot after a brilliant Xavi Simons strike helped the Dutch take an early lead, the individual quality of their players was on full display. They had their opponents pegged back, looking dangerous every time they entered the final third. Phil Foden was exceedingly unlucky not to have England ahead at halftime with some sublime skill but had his effort cleared off the line moments before his long-range

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effort brushed off the crossbar.

The second period was not as dominant as fatigue set in and the Dutch enjoyed their fair share of possession.

But even then, whenever England moved menacingly forward, a goal looked on the cards.

It was almost to script that they engineered victory just before the final whistle, as Watkins emerged an unlikely hero not long after coming on.

The confidence boost cannot be underestimated, especially as an in-form opponent awaits on Sunday at the Olympiastadion.

When they needed to stand up and be counted, the real England came to the party and, after almost a month of gritty competition, the tournament has two worthy finalists.



England debutant Jamie Smith celebrates after reaching his maiden Test half-century during Day 2 of the first Test against West Indies at Lord's yesterday. The 23-year-old wicket-keeper batter put away eight fours and two sixes for a 70-run knock that helped the hosts to take a 250-run lead after they were bundled out for 371.

PHOTO: AFP

GM Zia's son to represent Bangladesh in Chess Olympiad

SPORTS REPORTER



FIDE Master Tahsin Tajwar Zia, son of deceased Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman, will represent Bangladesh in the upcoming 45th Chess Olympiad after winning a tie-breaker to finish sixth in the 48th National Chess Championship at the Bangladesh Chess Federation hall room yesterday.

Tahsin tied with Anata Choudhury for the sixth position with seven points each at the end of the 13-round championship.

A tie-breaker was held yesterday to decide who would finish sixth and claim the fifth and final spot in the Bangladesh team for the Chess Olympiad.

FM Tahsin defeated Ananta with black pieces in the first game and then drew the second match to secure a place in the team.

"I was not thinking about my father's demise or the opponent in the play-off, I just played the game," said the 19-year-old, who wants to represent Bangladesh in Chess Olympiads for many years just like his father.

GM Zia, who passed away after suffering a cardiac arrest during a 12th round match on July 5, finished joint fourth alongside GM Niaz Murshed with eight points each.

As per rule, GM Zia and GM Niaz would've played a tie-breaker to decide the fourth and fifth place and both would've made up the final two spots of the Bangladesh team for the Olympiad.

But after Zia's passing, the sixth place holder, his son FM Tahsin, will take his spot.

FM Tahsin and GM Zia had made headlines back in 2022 by becoming the country's first father-son duo to compete in a Chess Olympiad. After the win, Tahsin revealed how his father wanted to compete in his 18th Chess Olympiad side-by-side with his son.

"My father [Zia] wanted me to play in the Chess Olympiad alongside him just like we had done in the previous one in 2022. He is no longer with us now but I have qualified for the Chess Olympiad."

In the other tie-breaker of the day, International Master Fahad Rahman defeated GM Enamul Hossain Razib to finish as runners-up. Earlier, FM Manon Reja Neer, a 14-year-old chess prodigy, was crowned champion.

ATTACKING GAMBLE pays off for Colombia

REUTERS, Charlotte

Even though unusual, Colombia coach Nestor Lorenzo gambled to stay on the attack against Uruguay despite going down to 10 men, and it paid off as they emerged with a 1-0 win that set up a Copa America final against Argentina.

Colombia took a 1-0 lead before having right back Daniel Munoz sent off in first-half stoppage time of their semifinal in Charlotte, North Carolina on Wednesday.

Down a man for the whole of the second half, Lorenzo opted to keep two forwards on the pitch to create chances instead of sitting back and 'parking the bus'.

"One of the main topics we discuss is that we never want to be one man down. It is almost impossible to maintain performance with 10 players on the pitch," Lorenzo told reporters.

"Teams that were dominating their

opponents when they were one man down were eliminated from the tournament. We really analysed that situation.

"With the formation, we only had two options of 5-4, 5-3-1 or to keep it 4-3-2 and create opportunities. We chose that one

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and God favoured us."

Colombia could have doubled their lead at the end when Mateus Uribe missed two chances, but Lorenzo was just relieved to get the better of Uruguay coach Marcelo Bielsa.

"I think that to beat Bielsa, you need

to walk many miles. He is a referent coach and I really admire him as a person. It was our turn to win, that's all," he added.

Lorenzo also refused to criticise Munoz, who picked up a second yellow card after elbowing Uruguay's Manuel Ugarte.

"Daniel is feeling a bit sad because he's a lion on the pitch and once more he got a bit emotional," he said.

Colombia's victory also set a national record of 28 matches unbeaten and Lorenzo paid tribute to former boss Francisco 'Pacho' Maturana, who went 27 games without defeat.



Italy's Jasmine Paolini reached her first Wimbledon final with a stirring fightback to beat tearful Croatian Donna Vekic 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (10/8) yesterday. The world number seven had never won a main draw match at Wimbledon before this year but managed to secure a second successive Grand Slam final appearance.

PHOTO: REUTERS

BKSP provides backdrop for nourishing mentality

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The calm and quiet surroundings of BKSP, the national sports institute in Savar, provided the backdrop for two different teams' preparations heading into two different kinds of objectives yesterday, with the weather making for interesting training conditions.

The U-19s under coach Naveed Nawaz started their proceedings under cloud cover but would wilt under the hot sun later on. On the other hand, Bangladesh women's team, who are set to play in the upcoming Asia Cup in Sri Lanka, went through their gears.

Under Naveed's watchful gaze and optimism, a new U-19 batch containing "some talented players" is taking shape. He had already produced a championship-winning side in his last stint, with cricketers like Shoriful Islam and Towhid Hridoy coming through.

Soon, the women's side came in for their practice game against a combined side of BKSP boys and women cricketers. Their challenges are knocking hard on the doors with Asia Cup to be shortly followed by T20 World Cup at home.

The tone for what the coaches want these players to aspire to was set from



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

the beginning of the practice match. "Go out there and live your life," one of the coaches told the two openers, Dilara Akter and Ishma Tanjim, as they walked into the middle.

Batting disasters have been too frequent in recent months for the Tigresses. There are big leaps needed to recover the mentality that saw them win against South Africa on their soil. But more than just managing disasters, the coaches wanted a change of approach, geared towards modern T20s.

"We want them to just go out there

and express themselves," head coach Hashan Tillakaratne, a World Cup winner with Sri Lanka, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The efforts to encourage them have proven to be difficult so far. They were bundled out for 73 in the first practice game on July 9 against a combined side of boys and women team's stars. Yesterday, the start was slow before Shorna Akter and Ritu Moni put some tempo to the innings with late runs as they reached 97 for five in 20 overs on a surface which proved to be on the slower side.

Most of the coaching staff believe that only knowledge can help their star players perform up to potential. However, what was important was the body language of the team. They have remained upbeat throughout their sessions. As rain swept the game away in the second innings, there was hope for brighter days.

Meanwhile, 11 of the U-19 stars had HSC exams, and thus 28 out of 39 players showed up. They went through drills in hot and humid conditions. Their coaches feel that extreme weather will breed a tough mentality, not unlike what the women's team management aims for. Both prepare for different causes, but the cradle of Bangladesh sports provides a stunning environment to focus on goals.

As rain clouds loom over BKSP, both teams remain focused on their respective missions. For the U-19s, it's about nurturing the next generation of cricket stars. For the women's side, it's about reclaiming their place among Asian elites and beyond.

With a blend of youth and experience, fueled by determination and the supportive environment at BKSP, it appears both teams are poised to tackle their challenges head-on.