



ENGLAND FACE SPAIN PUZZLE

in trophy homecoming quest

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Spain have scored 13 goals so far in this edition – only France in 1984 (14) have scored more in a single edition of the European Championship.

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Aged 17 years and one day, Spain's Lamine Yamal could become the youngest ever player to feature in a World Cup or Euro final, surpassing Pele's record from the 1958 World Cup (17y 249d).

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England boss Gareth Southgate will be the third manager to take charge of more than one Euro final (excluding replays), after Helmut Schön with Germany (1972, 1976) and Bertie Vogts with Germany (1992, 1996), with all three doing so in consecutive editions. No manager has ever lost two finals in the competition before.

AGENCIES

Spain go into Sunday's Euro 2024 final as slight favourites over England after not only being the most attractive team to watch at the tournament but having won every match they have played.

The Spaniards have emerged as a team that can quickly adapt their strategy to their opponents without giving up their direct attacking game in favour of a results-based performance.

They outsmarted France in the semifinals despite falling a goal behind and it took them just five minutes to score twice to take the lead with their relentless pressing game and vertical passing.

With Rodri as their midfield dynamo who possesses impressive passing efficiency with a more attack-minded approach, the battle in the centre of the pitch is expected to play a key role in the outcome.

England will have to wrestle possession from Spain, who also have the outstanding Fabian Ruiz in midfield.

Spain's pressing game has been one of the keys to their success in Germany.

No side has forced more turnovers within 40 metres of the opposition goal, two of which have led to goals.

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This is the third meeting between Spain and England at the European Championships, with England winning 2-1 in the 1980 group-stage, before progressing 4-2 on penalties in the 1996 quarterfinals.

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This is Spain's fifth European Championship final. They won the trophy thrice (1964, 2008, 2012) and lost once (1984). They could become the first team to win the competition on four separate occasions.

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Spain have won all six of their games so far at Euro 2024, already the most wins any side has picked up in a single edition of the competition. Since the introduction of the group-stage in 1980, only France in 1984 (5/5) have won the competition while maintaining a 100 percent win rate.

One of England's problems early in the tournament was failing to take risks in passing forward, even against perceived weaker opposition. In Berlin they have to be brave to get through the first wave of Spanish pressure and into the spaces where they can do damage going forward.

With lightning wingers Nico Williams

and Lamine Yamal ripping up defences and able to score and provide assists, England's fullbacks will have their hands full.

A second successive Euro final for England and coach Gareth Southgate is no mean feat even though they had to endure weeks of criticism, especially in the group phase, for lacklustre performances and with little punching power up front.

England's defence, however, has remained solid and with the pace of John Stones and Kyle Walker, when they do get exposed, they have proved adept at scrambling recoveries.

Spain's ball possession and movement will likely give England their biggest test so far and key to Southgate's side being able to stay in shape is the incredible work of defensive midfield screen Declan Rice who might also be tasked with helping left wingback Kieran Tripper to keep Yamal at bay.

After their largely misfiring group stage, with two goals in three matches, Southgate will have been reassured by what he saw against the Netherlands in the semis when his big names stepped up and started creating sustained danger from out wide and through the middle.

Blessed with arguably the deepest squad at the Euros, Southgate, who is expected to start the same eleven, must also look to use his supreme bench strength to make a difference in the final.



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Forward Angel Di Maria aims to finish his Argentina career on a high. His nine chances created at this tournament are surpassed only by Colombia's James Rodriguez (17), Uruguay's Nicolas de la Cruz (14), and teammate Lionel Messi (13).

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This marks Colombia's third appearance in a Copa America final, having previously won in 2001 and finished as runners-up in 1975. Meanwhile, Argentina, the reigning champions, have reached their sixth final in the last eight Copa America tournaments and are eyeing a record 16th Copa title.

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Argentina are on the brink of replicating the feat of achieving three consecutive major tournament successes, having won three consecutive Copas in 1945, 1946, and 1947. Only Spain have pulled off a consecutive triple crown when they sealed Euro 2008, World Cup 2010, and Euro 2012.

Argentina chase treble, Colombia ready to spoil party

AGENCIES

Argentina have the historic opportunity to match Spain and become the first South American team to achieve the 'triple crown' of three consecutive major tournament titles, which includes a World Cup triumph, if they can defeat a strong Colombia in the Copa America final in Miami on Monday morning (Bangladesh time).

Colombia, however, enter the final at Hard Rock Stadium with an impressive streak of their own. The Men in Yellow are unbeaten in 28 matches, setting a national record, and have arguably faced a tougher route to the final.

While Argentina comfortably secured a 2-0 victory against surprise package Canada in their semifinal in New Jersey, Colombia had to overcome Uruguay in Charlotte with a 1-0 win, despite playing with ten men for the entire second half.

On paper, Argentina are favorites due to their top world ranking and a squad that has been together for several years. However, expectations suggest a closely contested match rather than a one-sided affair.

"Scaloni knows them all by heart. Argentina today have a solidity that is foolproof and they have the added bonus of having the best player in the world,

which is why they are the big favourites," said former Chile and Inter Milan striker Ivan Zamorano, who is covering the tournament is a television pundit.

But former Colombia star midfielder Carlos Valderrama believes a surprise could be on the cards.

"I see Colombia winning on Sunday," he told AFP. "We have a great team to dream about.



fame with his performances in the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, has been showcasing some of his best football at 34 years old in national colours.

For Argentina, there is an emotional aspect as the final also marks a farewell to 36-year-old winger Angel Di Maria, who has consistently delivered on the big stage.

"I'm not ready for my last game with the national team, but it's time," Di Maria said last week.

"A thousand things can happen, but I think that whatever happens I can go out on a high note. I've done everything to be able to leave through that door," he added.

While defender Nicolas Otamendi may also depart, it remains to be seen if this will be the last tournament for Messi, who will turn 39 during the 2026 World Cup.

"I'm living it like everything else in recent times: enjoying it very much and being aware, like Fideo (Di Maria) and Ota (Otamendi), that these are the last battles," the eight-times Ballon d'Or winner said after guiding his team to semifinal win.

As the football world holds its breath for an exciting climax, the final promises to be a fitting culmination to a tournament filled with drama, skill, and the enduring passion of South American football.

"I am optimistic about the national team, because of the process and the results they have been getting, and also because of the way they are playing.

"The team is unbeaten, is playing well in the Copa, with James (Rodriguez) as the best player in the tournament, so we can dream of being champions because we have a great team," he added.

James Rodriguez, who rose to global



Driven by history

Djokovic in record pursuit facing Alcaraz

AGENCIES

Without a title for over six months, Novak Djokovic is now within touching distance of a record 25th Grand Slam trophy – with the all-conquering Serb saying Wimbledon always brings the best out of him.

For a champion who has become accustomed to trampling over the opposition while amassing almost 100 titles in his career, this lean spell is not something he is used to.

The 37-year-old lost in his Australian Open fortress at the start of the year, with his bid to win a record-extending 11th Melbourne Park title cut short in the semifinals.

A knee injury then prematurely ended his French Open title defence last month.

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Djokovic will be playing his 10th Wimbledon final – six on the trot – and the 37th in overall 75 Grand Slam appearances.

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Alcaraz, 16 years younger than Djokovic, is in his fourth Grand Slam final and will be aiming to add a second Wimbledon glory to his 2022 US Open breakthrough and French Open title from last month.

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Djokovic has been victorious in their last two meetings: Cincinnati Open final in 2023, followed by the semifinal of the season-ending ATP Tour Finals.

Tigresses' less than ideal buildup for Asia Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Rainy weather and a lack of facilities hampered Bangladesh women's team's training camp at the BKSP which ended on Friday and left the team somewhat undercooked before they head off to Sri Lanka for the forthcoming ACC Women's T20 Asia Cup on July 16.

The camp started on July 3 and was held keeping the forthcoming regional tournament in mind, scheduled for July 19-28, where they had emerged as champions in 2018 in Malaysia.

The camp was also an opportunity for the girls to identify and hopefully rectify their problems after poor performances in recent home series' against Australia and India respectively.

However, most of their training sessions as well as practice matches got interrupted by the rain, forcing them to shift some of the scheduled practice sessions indoors.

Only two of the four scheduled practice matches could be played to completion while the other two were held partially owing to the downpour.

The previously scheduled match scenario practice session on Friday also couldn't take place due to torrential rain.

Even though the BKSP has multiple cricket grounds, the women's team's preparation was mostly limited to the BKSP-4 ground as the other grounds are occupied in other engagements.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has already taken over the BKSP-3 ground, which alongside BKSP-4 ground will host warm-up matches ahead of the ICC Women's T20

World Cup in Bangladesh, scheduled to be held on October 3-20.

The Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Dhaka and the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium will host the matches in the tournament and both are now under ICC's supervision, as is the rule for all ICC events.

The men's Under-19 team are also running a residential camp at BKSP, scheduled to run till July 20, while the High Performance unit had a training camp in Rajshahi before leaving for the Australia tour yesterday while the Bangladesh Tigers are currently training in Chattogram.



So, when he reached the All England Club final after a 6-4, 7-6(2), 6-4 win over Lorenzo Musetti on Friday, he was finally living up to his own lofty expectations.

Standing in his way to an eighth Wimbledon crown that will see him equal Roger Federer's mark is Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz, who beat Djokovic in last year's title clash.

Djokovic believes the prospect of creating tennis history will provide the "fuel" he needs to defeat Alcaraz.

"I'm aware of what's on the line. Any Grand Slam that I play, there's always history now on the line," said Djokovic. "I will try to use that as a fuel to play my best tennis.

"(Alcaraz) is one of the greatest 21-year-olds we've ever seen in this sport and he will win many more Grand Slams, but hopefully not this one on Sunday," he added.