

Sweden eye knockout spot, DUTCH SEEK ANSWERS



STAR SPORTS DESK

With Sweden eyeing the knockout rounds and the Netherlands desperate for a response, the NRG Stadium in Houston will play host to one of Group F's most intriguing fixtures when the two sides meet on Saturday.

The two European sides arrive in contrasting moods. Sweden are brimming with confidence after thrashing Tunisia 5-1 in their opener, a result that marked their best goalscoring performance at a World Cup in 88 years. Another victory would secure their place in the knockout rounds and continue a remarkable turnaround under English coach Graham Potter, who took charge last October and guided the Swedes through the European playoffs to reach the tournament.

The Netherlands, meanwhile, are searching for answers after a frustrating 2-2 draw with Japan. Ronald Koeman's side twice led in Dallas but failed to hold on, conceding an equaliser in the 89th minute after retreating into a more defensive setup.

The result raised questions about Koeman's tactical approach and extended an unwanted

record. It was the first time the Dutch had twice taken the lead in a World Cup match and failed to win.

Sweden will take encouragement from that vulnerability. Following their emphatic victory over Tunisia, the Swedes now have the chance to win their opening two group-stage matches at a World Cup for only the second time in their history. The only previous occasion came in 1958, when they hosted the tournament and went on to reach the final.

Yet history also offers a warning. Sweden have won only one of their previous seven World Cup group-stage matches against fellow European nations, although that victory came on American soil when they defeated Russia 3-1 at the 1994 tournament.

For the Netherlands, much attention will focus on Memphis Depay. The Dutch all-time leading scorer came off the bench against Japan but failed to make an impact as he continues to recover from a recent thigh problem.

This will be only the second World Cup meeting between the sides. Their first, a goalless draw in 1974, is remembered less for the result and more for the arrival of the iconic "Cruyff turn" as Dutch Total Football began to captivate the world.

**Sweden can win their opening two group-stage matches at a World Cup for only the second time; the first was in 1958, when they reached the final.

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Tigers fade late, Australia seal series

SPORTS REPORTER

The chase was on, but Bangladesh fell short by seven runs in the second T20I in Chattogram yesterday as Australia clinched the series 2-0 with a match to go.

Given the conditions, it was a good litmus test for the Tigers in the shortest format, especially chasing against a big side.

In pursuit of Australia's 195 for six, Bangladesh produced a strong display in the Powerplay, scoring 72 and had the ammunition to gun down the total. However, momentum slipped from a favourable position, leading to a narrow loss.

Tanzid Tamim and Saif Hassan went into the attack right away in chase to take Bangladesh to 33 for naught in two overs, before the former's soft dismissal after a 15-ball 30 posed the first signs of trouble. Then arrived Soumya Sarkar, and despite looking good the southpaw once again fell trying to clear the long on boundary off Adam Zampa after a nine-ball 15.



Parvez Hossain Emon at two-down attacked the Australia spinners, hitting back-to-back sixes off Zampa as the hosts stayed in the chase. The Emon-Saif duo added 53 from 36 deliveries before Australia fought back. Emon, attempting to take on Aaron Hardie, mistimed his shot in the 13th over as Mitchell Marsh ran back for a brilliant catch.

The Australia skipper's celebration showed the importance of the wicket. Next over, Saif, after playing second fiddle, fell to an awkward shot, holing out at cover chasing a wide delivery after a 33-ball 42.

Needing 67 from 44, momentum was lost with two new batters coming in. Matt Renshaw who batted Australia out of trouble with 52-ball 89, showed what Tigers lacked in their innings.

Before the series, Bangladesh have been undergoing an upsurge in T20Is, losing just one of their last seven series and drawing another. A few nuances can set them into the right track.

Between overs 13 to 17, Bangladesh added just 25 runs, losing three wickets as Shamim Hossain too departed trying to accelerate.

Tawhid Hridoy, meanwhile, was off to a somewhat slow start with wickets falling around him, but he could not quite match the required acceleration alongside Abdul Gaffar Saqlain -- playing just his second international game.

Needing 23 off the last over, they fell short with Hridoy falling off the last delivery after a 22-ball 35.

Emon said Bangladesh "were on track until Saif's wicket shifted momentum", while Hridoy noted that "set batters need to carry on deeper" to finish chases.

"We played really good cricket, but there are a couple of areas we need to develop," Hridoy added at the post-match presentation, but recognised that they have "to chase down in this kind of match" as the Tigers look to continue improvement curve.

'Could hear the bone snap'

AGENCIES

Canada midfielder Ismael Kone was scheduled to undergo surgery on his injured left leg after sustaining the ugly injury in his national team's 6-0 win over Qatar on Thursday in Vancouver.

Coach Jesse Marsch said postmatch, according to The Athletic, that he "could hear the bone snap."

"Your heart goes out to him," Marsch said. "Everybody's shaken for him."

The coach added, "I haven't spoken to Ismael yet, but he's at the hospital. He will prepare for a surgery. I'm going to go see him after this press conference. We'll see exactly what we decide to do for him. His family is with him at the hospital, so his mother's there and his family."

In the 51st minute of the Group B match, Qatar midfielder Assim Madibo attempted a tackle on Kone, but his right foot brought Kone to the ground. Trainers were immediately called onto the pitch as Kone was in visible discomfort before

being stretchered off moments later.

Sitting up on the stretcher, Kone gave a thumbs-up sign to the fans while taking oxygen.

After a video review, Madibo was shown a red card, Qatar's



second of the afternoon, leaving the team with nine players to finish the match.

Kone was replaced by Nathan Saliba, who scored in the 64th minute. Canada improved to 1-0-1 (4 points) to tie Switzerland for the top of the group standings, while Qatar dropped to 0-1-1 (1

point).

At the end of the match, Marsch and Qatari coach Julien Lopetegui had a tense exchange as they shook hands. In response to Lopetegui's comments, Marsch gave a dismissive wave.

"It's a huge loss for us," Marsch said of Kone. "He'll be fine. Right, we'll get him good doctors, we'll get him back. Obviously, our heart is with him, but that kid's got a big future, and he's a big part of everything we do."



GET OUT OF MY WAY

England coach Thomas Tuchel no longer has to rely on the stadium's giant screen to locate his own players. After complaining that a wall of photographers blocked his view of the pitch during the national anthems before England's 4-2 win over Croatia on Thursday -- forcing him to watch his team on the giant screen instead -- FIFA revised its policy, allowing coaches to move around the photographers for a clear view of their players, while photographers themselves may now be grouped closer to the halfway line.

PHOTO: X

1000th WC kick-off awaits Tunisia and Japan

STAR SPORTS DESK

Tunisia and Japan will write their names into FIFA World Cup history on Saturday when they meet in Monterrey in the tournament's 1,000th match, but both sides have far more immediate concerns than the milestone itself.

The Group F encounter comes at a pivotal moment, particularly for Tunisia, whose campaign was thrown into turmoil after a crushing 5-1 defeat to Sweden in their opener. The loss cost coach Sabri Lamouchi his job, with Herve Renard rushed in to revive the North Africans' fading hopes.

Renard faces an immediate test against a Japan side he regards as Asia's best.

"I know very well the quality of this team," the Frenchman said. "Japan are the best team in Asia."

The four-time Asian champions backed up that reputation in their opening match, fighting back twice to earn a 2-2 draw against the Netherlands in Dallas. Daichi Kamada's dramatic 88th-minute equaliser highlighted the resilience of Hajime Moriyasu's side.

"We were trailing behind a very difficult opponent," Moriyasu said. "The players were united as one, fought to the end and did not cease to persevere."

Yet the Japan coach admitted his team wanted more than a point.

"We were aiming to get three points, not one point."

With Sweden leading Group F on three points and both Japan and the Netherlands on one, bottom-placed Tunisia know defeat could leave their World Cup hopes hanging by a thread.



Tigresses eye winning return against Pakistan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will take confidence from their recent success against Pakistan in white-ball cricket when they face their South Asian rivals in a crucial Group A match of the ICC Women's T20 World Cup at The Rose Bowl in Southampton on Saturday.

The Tigresses have enjoyed a favourable record against Pakistan in recent years in both T20I and ODI formats. Bangladesh have won three of their last five WT20Is against Pakistan, including a 2-1 home series victory in 2023.

Their dominance has also extended to the 50-over format, where Bangladesh have claimed four wins from their last six ODIs against Pakistan, including victories in the 2022 and 2025 World Cups, as well as a 2-1 series win in 2023.

Bangladesh enter the contest in a stronger position in the group standings. Nigar Sultana Joty's side began their campaign with a six-wicket victory over the Netherlands before suffering a nine-wicket defeat against Australia. Pakistan, meanwhile, are still searching for their first points after defeats to India and South Africa in their opening two matches.

Joty said her side had already put the disappointing loss to Australia behind them, where Bangladesh were outplayed in all three departments, and shifted their focus to the must-win encounter against Pakistan.

The match is scheduled to start at 7:30pm Bangladesh time and will be broadcast live on Star Sports Network.