SPORT ↘15
STAGE SET FOR WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS DRAW AS QATAR AWAIT OPPONENTS



SPORT ↘15
ARGENTINA'S MESSI HOPES INJURY SUSTAINED DURING COPA VICTORY OVER CHILE NOT SERIOUS



The Peninsula SPORT
THURSDAY 27 JUNE 2024 | 14

Georgia shock Portugal to make Euros history

GELSENKIRCHEN: Georgia are through to the last 16 of Euro 2024 after yesterday's 2-0 win over Portugal, a historic triumph in the former Soviet Republic's first appearance at a major international tournament.

Khvicha Kvaratskhelia gave Georgia a shock lead against a second-string Portugal team with just over a minute on the clock in Gelsenkirchen.

Georges Mikautadze then ensured Georgia would claim the biggest football victory in the Black Sea nation's history with a 57th-minute penalty.

Willy Sagnol's team qualify from Group F as one of the four best third-placed finishers after their first ever European Championship win, which set up a daunting clash with red-hot Spain on Sunday.

Portugal had already qualified for the next round as group winners and coach Roberto Martinez made eight changes from the team which swept Turkey aside to guarantee first place last weekend.

However, his team were on top for most of the match and looked likely to equalise before Antonio Silva, who gave the ball away for the first goal, was harshly penalised for light contact with Luka Lochoshvili to give away the decisive penalty.

Regardless Portugal will face Slovenia on Monday and, saving any injuries, Martinez will have a mostly rested first XI to call upon.

History makers

Kvaratskhelia was the beneficiary of Silva sloppily giving away possession to Mikautadze, who after scoring in both of Georgia's previous matches with Turkey and the Czech Republic turned provider.

Mikautadze gave a perfectly-weighted pass to Kvaratskhelia who burst through on goal from his preferred position in the inside-right channel and stroked home a precision finish.

It was unfamiliarly clinical finishing from Georgia who would have come into Wednesday's match with more than one point had they made the most of their chances.



Georgia players celebrate after defeating Portugal to qualify for the Euro 2024 Round of 16, yesterday. AFP

From there, Sagnol's team were content to sit back and protect their slender lead as Portugal sent forward waves of attack against a packed defence.

First Ronaldo smashed a free-kick straight at Georgia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili in the 17th minute before he was booked just before the half-hour mark for dissent after what he thought was a foul from Lochoshvili.

Francisco Conceicao hit the side netting while Ronaldo protested to referee Sandro Scherer and moments later Joao Felix fizzed a long-range shot just wide.

Ronaldo's frustrations continued almost immediately after half-time when looked certain to score from a corner only for Lasha Dvali to unwittingly save the day with his back.

Kvaratskhelia then wasted a great chance to double his team's lead before Mikautadze, who has been Georgia's best player in the tournament, stroked in his third goal in as many games from the penalty spot.

Georgia then closed ranks and made rare, but dangerous forays into Portugal's defensive third, holding out for the win to the joy of their supporters. — *AFP*

Turkiye reach knockouts with tense win over Czechs

HAMBURG: Turkiye reached the knockout phase at a major tournament for the first time in 16 years after a bad-tempered 2-1 win over a battling 10-man Czech Republic at Euro 2024 yesterday.

Vincenzo Montella's Turkiye finished second in Group F behind Portugal to progress, as the Czechs were eliminated despite a brave performance on a sweltering night in Hamburg.

Georgia also went through as one of the best third-placed teams after a stunning 2-0 win over Portugal in the group's other final game, eliminating Hungary.

Turkiye will face Austria in the last 16 in Leipzig on Tuesday, their first major tournament knockout match since the Euro 2008 semi-finals when they were beaten by Germany.

The Czechs were reduced to 10 men in the 20th minute when Antonin Barak was given the earliest red card in Euros history, beating the unwanted record set by France's Eric Abidal in 2008.



Turkiye forward Cenk Tosun (left) shoots to scores his team's second goal. AFP

Barak's pair of bookings were two of 18 yellow cards shown in total, with Tomas Chory also shown red after the final whistle in ugly scenes. Hakan Calhanoglu powered Turkiye into a 51st-minute lead, but Tomas Soucek lashed in an equaliser midway through the second half.

A frantic finale to the game ensued as the Czech Republic pushed for the winner that would take them through, but Cenk Tosun ended their hopes on the counter-attack in added time. There were ugly scenes at the final whistle as fans ran onto the pitch, with Czech forward Chory brandished a red card in the aftermath.

The Czechs started strongly despite the tens of thousands of Turkiye fans jeering their every touch, with Lukas Provod forcing Mert Gunok into an early save with a deflected shot.

They were especially dangerous from Vladimir Coufal's long throw-ins, one of which Robin Hranac headed over when unmarked.

But Turkiye were given a huge boost as midfielder Barak caught Salih Ozcan by the halfway line and was shown a soft second yellow card. Turkiye winger Kenan Yildiz received a yellow for a nasty tackle on Hranac before elbowing Coufal in the face without punishment as tempers threatened to boil over.

Knowing defeat could send them home with Georgia leading Portugal, Turkiye started brightly after the break and released the pressure on themselves with a crucial opening goal.

Yildiz had an effort brilliantly saved by Jindrich Stanek, but the Czech 'keeper suffered an arm injury in making the stop and with him struggling to get back into position, Calhanoglu drilled the ball into the bottom corner.

Stanek was immediately replaced by back-up Matej Kovar as part of a triple change.

The Czechs became increasingly stretched as they went in search of the two goals they needed to stay in the tournament and Turkiye's teenage star Arda Guler failed to convert from barely three yards out.

But Soucek gave the Czechs hope when he fired home after Gunok spilt the ball following another Coufal hurl into the box.

The goal survived a long VAR review for a possible foul on the embarrassed 'keeper and a handball, before being eventually awarded to set up a thrilling finish.

Ivan Hasek's Czech Republic threw as many players forward as possible but could not find a moment of magic. Instead, Turkiye hit them on the break and substitute Tosun struck a fine finish into the far corner, before the match ended in fiery fashion. — *AFP*

EURO 2024: ROUND OF 16

SATURDAY, JUNE 29, 2024
SWITZERLAND vs **ITALY** (7:00pm)
GERMANY vs **DENMARK** (10:00pm)

SUNDAY, JUNE 30, 2024
ENGLAND vs **SLOVAKIA** (7:00pm)
SPAIN vs **GEORGIA** (10:00pm)

MONDAY, JULY 1, 2024
FRANCE vs **BELGIUM** (7:00pm)
PORTUGAL vs **SLOVENIA** (10:00pm)

TUESDAY, JULY 2, 2024
ROMANIA vs **NETHERLANDS** (7:00pm)
AUSTRIA vs **TURKIYE** (10:00pm)

Romania, Slovakia advance after tense draw

FRANKFURT: Romania and Slovakia both qualified for the last 16 at Euro 2024 after a tense 1-1 draw in their last Group E game yesterday.

Ondrej Duda put Slovakia ahead in the first half but Romania's Razvan Marin equalised with a penalty before the interval.

With all four teams in the group earning four points from their three games, Romania finished top having scored more goals than second-placed Belgium.

Slovakia went through in third place thanks to a superior goal difference to fourth-placed Ukraine. It was a memorable moment for Romania, who are into the knockout stages of the Euros for the first time in 24 years. Romania had only qualified once for the last 16 in their five Euro appearances. Slovakia are into the knockout stages of a major tournament for the third time.

They reached the last 16 in the 2010 World Cup and made it to the same stage at Euro 2016. Knowing a draw would send both teams through, cynics had suggested they would play out a mutually beneficial stalemate.

Slovakia were inches away from snatching the lead as Lukas Haraslin's free-kick went through a crowd of players and almost crept in at the far post.

It was a warning Romania failed to heed and Slovakia went in front in the 24th minute.

Juraj Kucka whipped in a deep cross that caught the Romania defence standing statuesque, leaving the unmarked Duda free to power his header past Florin Nita from eight yards.

Romania's response was emphatic as they drew level in the 37th minute thanks to an incisive raid from the son of former Barcelona and Real Madrid star Gheorghe Hagi. David Hancko's foul on Hagi was adjudged a penalty by VAR after referee Daniel Siebert initially ruled the offence had taken place just outside the area. Marin stepped up to drill the spot-kick high into the roof of the net to the deafening delight of the hordes of Romania fans who turned the arena into a frenzied mosh-pit.

It was a tense clash that was close to swinging Romania's way when Marin forced a good save from Dubravka before Denis Dragus skimmed the roof of the net.

Haraslin's curler flashed past the far post as the storm abated, but, while there was no winner, both sides ended up celebrating their progress to the knockout stage. — *AFP*

EURO 2024 GROUP STAGE POINTS TABLE

Team	P	W	D	L	Pts
GROUP A					
Germany	**3**	**2**	**1**	**0**	**7**
Switzerland	**3**	**1**	**2**	**0**	**5**
Hungary	3	1	0	2	3
Scotland	3	0	1	2	1
GROUP B					
Spain	**3**	**3**	**0**	**0**	**9**
Italy	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**4**
Croatia	3	0	2	1	2
Albania	3	0	1	2	1
GROUP C					
England	**3**	**1**	**2**	**0**	**5**
Denmark	**3**	**0**	**3**	**0**	**3**
Slovenia	**3**	**0**	**3**	**0**	**3**
Serbia	3	0	2	1	2
GROUP D					
Austria	**3**	**2**	**0**	**1**	**6**
France	**3**	**1**	**2**	**0**	**5**
Netherlands	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**4**
Poland	3	0	1	2	1
GROUP E					
Romania	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**4**
Belgium	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**4**
Slovakia	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**4**
Ukraine	3	1	1	1	4
GROUP F					
Portugal	**3**	**2**	**0**	**1**	**6**
Turkiye	**3**	**2**	**0**	**1**	**6**
Georgia	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**4**
Czech Rep	3	0	1	2	1

Belgium into last 16 as draw eliminates Ukraine

STUTTGART: Belgium qualified for the last 16 of Euro 2024 yesterday after a 0-0 draw with Ukraine, who exited the tournament despite all four teams in Group E finishing level on four points.

Romania took top spot ahead of Belgium after scoring more goals in the group following their 1-1 draw with Slovakia, who also go through as one of the four best third-placed sides.

Belgium supporters reacted furiously at the final whistle in Stuttgart, with captain Kevin De Bruyne appearing to tell his teammates not to go over to applaud them as the whistles and jeers grew louder.

They will play France in the next round and have landed themselves on the tougher side of the draw which also features hosts Germany, Spain and Portugal.

War-torn Ukraine's brave run came to an agonising end as they became the first team since the tournament increased to 24 teams not to progress with four points. Leandro Trossard replaced the suspended Dodi Lukebakio for Belgium, wearing their kit which pays homage to the comic book hero Tintin, with pale blue shirts, brown shirts and white socks. Ukraine were without wingers Mykhailo Mudryk and Viktor Tsygankov because of injury, switching to three at the back with Oleksandr Zinchenko dropping out and Roman Yaremchuk starting after scoring the winner as a substitute against Slovakia.



Ukraine's players applaud the fans after the match. AFP

Romelu Lukaku, who had three goals ruled out in his team's first two games of the tournament, scuffed straight at Anatoliy Trubin early on when well placed after a slick through ball from De Bruyne.

Yaremchuk tested Koen Casteels and he might have given his team the lead if Artem Dovbyk had found him in the area after getting the better of Arthur Theate.

Twice De Bruyne was unhappy with a laser being pointed at his face as he took free-kicks, nearly catching Trubin out at the near post on one occasion.

He had another curling attempt held shortly after Yaremchuk fizzed a pass across the Belgium area while trying to pick out Dovbyk.

Lukaku saw a weak shot smothered by Trubin, who then beat away a much firmer strike from Yannick Carrasco as Belgium chased the goal that would have clinched first place in the group.

Ruslan Malinovskyi's corner left Casteels frantically scooping the ball to safety at his near post as a nervy finish ensued, Ukraine desperately needing a goal that Belgium knew would spell disaster for them.

Johan Bakayoko curled wide for Belgium and Malinovskyi's piledriver was blocked by Timothy Castagne, with Georgiy Sudakov unable to find a way past Casteels in stoppage time as Ukraine's distraught players slumped to the floor at the end. — *AFP*

Stage set for World Cup Qualifiers draw as Qatar await opponents

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA


Qatar players celebrate after beating India in second round of World Cup Qualifiers, in this June 11 file photo.

DOHA: Two-time Asian champions Qatar will discover their opponents in quest of history as stage is set for the FIFA World Cup 2026 – AFC Asian Qualifiers Round 3 draw, which takes place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia today.

The 18 teams, which advanced from the Round 2 of the Asian Qualifiers, will know their fate as today's draw will determine the three groups of six teams each.

These teams will look to secure the six out of eight spots available for Asia as the top two sides from each group will directly qualify for the World Cup Finals to be staged in Canada, Mexico, and the United States, featuring 48 nations for the first time. The Qualifiers will be played from September 2024 to June 2025.

The remaining two berths will be decided through the AFC Asian Qualifiers – Road to 26 Playoff while an additional berth can be secured by an Asian team at an Intercontinental Playoff.

Coached by Marquez Lopez, Qatar – ranked 35th in the world – have fancied their chances of qualifying for the FIFA showpiece for first time ever after a string of outstanding performances this year. They sealed their second straight Asian Cup crown besides finishing on top of their group after an unbeaten run in the second qualifying round for the World Cup. Al Annabi had made their World Cup debut two years ago as the home side.

Lopez now also has a better idea of his bench strength after he tested many youngsters in Qatar's last two games against Afghanistan and India by resting his key players including forwards Akram Afif and Almoez Ali.

The 18 teams have been seeded into six pots for the draw according to the latest FIFA rankings as of June 20:

Pot 1: Japan (17), Iran (20), South Korea (22)

Pot 2: Australia (23), Qatar (35), Iraq (55)

Pot 3: Saudi Arabia (56), Uzbekistan (62), Jordan (68)

Pot 4; United Arab Emirates (69), Oman (76), Bahrain (81)

Pot 5: China (88), Palestine (95), Kyrgyz Republic (101)

Pot 6: DPR Korea (110), Indonesia (134), Kuwait (137)

*FIFA rankings in brackets


Miguel Angel Ramirez (left) will coach Al Wakrah next season.

Al Wakrah appoint Ramirez as coach

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Stars League (QSL) side Al Wakrah yesterday announced the signing of Spaniard Miguel Angel Ramirez as their head coach for the 2024-25 season.

The contract can be renewed for another season, the club announced after Al Wakrah's Vice President Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Khalifa bin Hassan Al Thani signed the contract with the coach.

Angel last coached Spanish side Sporting Gijon while the 39-year-old also served as the manager of Major League Soccer side Charlotte FC.

Besides winning the Qatar Cup title under coach Ali Rahma Al Marri, the Blue Waves finished fourth in the top flight QSL the previous season.


India's captain Rohit Sharma (left) and Yuzvendra Chahal (right) attend a training session on Monday. AFP

Rohit says India 'always under pressure' to end World Cup drought

PROVIDENCE: India captain Rohit Sharma admitted yesterday his team is "always under pressure" to end a world title drought which has now stretched to over a decade.

India tackle defending champions England in the second semi-final of the T20 World Cup today.

The cricket superpower won the inaugural edition in 2007 and were runners-up in 2014.

Their last 50-over World Cup triumph, meanwhile, came on home soil in 2011.

When the tournament returned to India in 2023, Rohit's side were comfortably defeated by Australia in the final despite having won all 10 games on their way to the championship match.

"The Indian cricket team is always under pressure. That's the fact. And it's not just now. It's been since the time I started playing," said Rohit.

Since the 2011 World Cup win, India's lone silverware came courtesy of the 2013 Champions Trophy, a competition restricted to eight Test-playing nations.

In the two World Test Championship finals played in 2021 and 2023, India were runners-up.

India have won 12 of 23 T20 meetings with England but they were crushed by 10 wickets by Jos Buttler's side in the 2022 World Cup semi-final in Adelaide.

Chasing 169 to win, England openers Buttler and Alex Hales knocked off the runs with four overs to spare in a devastating 170-run partnership.

Seven of that India team are in the 2024 squad, including Rohit as well as Virat Kohli and Hardik Pandya who both made half-centuries in that game.

Rohit is desperate his team does not start looking beyond today's match by considering their possible chances in the final on Saturday against either South Africa or Afghanistan.

"Everyone knows in the back of their mind it's a semi-final," said Rohit.

Just like the World Cup last year, India have reached semi-final without losing. They have six wins in six games while a seventh match was washed out.

Their only real scare came in a six-run victory over old rivals Pakistan in the first round group stage.

"We've been put under pressure in certain games during this tournament, but I thought we responded pretty well," said Rohit.

"That is probably because we're not thinking too far ahead. Sometimes if you think too much, sometimes you then will not be able to make the decisions that you want to make on the field.

"It's important that we stay clear in our mind what we want to do."

India swept through the second round Super Eight stage, batting first and seeing off Afghanistan, Bangladesh and then Australia.

In their 24-run win over Australia in Antigua, India piled up their biggest total of the World Cup of 205-5 in 20 overs.

Rohit led the way with a blistering 92 off 41 balls.

"I think that was the big one for us," said the skipper.

"When you play a game against a quality team and when you win like that, everything falling into place, that can give you so much confidence and I think this format is all about confidence."

"We know the batting line-up that Australia has. No score is safe. But for us to defend and win by 20-odd runs was a great confidence boost moving ahead and into this game (on Thursday)." — ***AFP***

Mureb storms to Qatar Coupe de France des Chevaux Arabes win

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Trained by Francois Rohaut and ridden by Anthony Crastu, Mureb won the Gr.2 (PA) Qatar Coupe de France des Chevaux Arabes, sponsored by the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC), at Chantilly, France, yesterday.

After a promising debut by winning the Prix Norniz (PA) last month, the three-year-old Mureb, found another gear in the second start of his career, to win the race.

Al Asayl France-owned Mureb travelled well behind the leader Safre Tourettes.

After entering the home stretch, the grey gelding tried to make headway on the inside of the leader, but the gap quickly closed and he dropped to the last. Once in the clear, Mureb showed a turn of foot to beat Al Jori by half a length. Wasib finished third.


Mureb takes the lead as he races to win the Qatar Coupe de France des Chevaux Arabes yesterday.

"The horse showed a flash of class today. He has really accelerated and has a lot of room for improvement," Crastus said.


Argentina's Lionel Messi and teammates celebrate after defeating Chile. AFP

Messi hopes injury sustained during Copa victory over Chile not serious

EAST RUTHERFORD: Lionel Messi hopes a leg injury sustained during Argentina's 1-0 Copa America win over Chile is "nothing serious."

Playing a day after his 37th birthday, the Argentina superstar received treatment on the thigh area of his right leg for nearly two minutes after getting kicked by Gabriel Suazo in the 24th minute on Tuesday night.

Messi, however, stayed on the field as the defending champion clinched a quarter-final berth.

He told reporters after the match that it was "nothing serious".

Messi added: "Its bothering me a little bit but I was able to finish the match. It was hard for me to move freely, particularly side to side. We'll see tomorrow how it feels."

Messi said he's also been dealing with a sore throat and fever in recent days.

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said during his post-game news conference that he had not spoken with Messi but wasn't concerned about the injury.

Scaloni cited Messi sprinting half the length of the field along with Ángel Di María and Lautaro Martínez late in the game.

"That's my last image," Scaloni said.

Martínez scored the only goal following a scramble in the 88th minute after a corner by Messi.

Scaloni said he's planning to rest several starters in Argentina's last Group A match, against Peru on Saturday in Florida.

Argentina will win the group unless they lose to Peru in Miami Gardens and Canada beat Chile in a game played simultaneously in Orlando.

The Canadians can overtake Argentina on goal difference. Argentina are on plus-three and Canada minus-one. — ***AP***

Alcaraz to take part in Charlotte exhibition in December

CHARLOTTE: Defending Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz will take part in a tennis exhibition in Charlotte on Dec. 6.

The third-ranked Alcaraz will face Frances Tiafoe in one match, while Madison Keys and Sloane Stephens will meet in another at the Spectrum Center, home of the NBA's Charlotte Hornets.

"All eyes will be on Charlotte as some of the biggest names in tennis face off in an event unlike any other,"

Charlotte Sports Foundation executive director Danny Morrison said.

"Expect unparalleled, elevated hospitality that only the Queen City can provide and, of course, elite competition in a sport that's captivated the world."

Alcaraz won this year's French Open, making him the youngest male tennis player to win a Grand Slam on all three playing surfaces - hard, clay and grass.

"I am appreciative for the opportunity to compete in the Charlotte Invitational this December," Alcaraz said.

"Fans can expect an incredible night and we look forward to providing an unforgettable experience for all in attendance."

Match times are still to be determined.— ***AP***


Carlos Alcaraz

The third-ranked Alcaraz will face Frances Tiafoe in one match, while Madison Keys and Sloane Stephens will meet in another at the Spectrum Center, home of the NBA's Charlotte Hornets.

Raducanu saves match point against Pegula to reach Eastbourne quarters

EASTBOURNE: Emma Raducanu saved a match point before beating second-seeded Jessica Pegula 4-6, 7-6 (6), 7-5 to reach the quarterfinals of the grass-court Eastbourne International yesterday.

The 2021 US Open champion was 6-5 down in the second-set tiebreaker before coming back to record her first win against a top-10 opponent. Pegula is ranked No. 5.

The 21-year-old British player won when Pegula's forehand from the back of the court went wide. A relieved Raducanu dropped her racket and placed her head in her hands before waving to the home crowd.

"I'm pretty drained right now," she said. "I would say this match is one of the more meaningful ones to me."

Raducanu will be a wild-card entry for Wimbledon next week, after missing last year's tournament because of injuries.

Also in the second round, Britain's Katie Boulter won 6-4, 7-5 against Jelena Ostapenko, and fourth-seeded Madison Keys beat Anhelina Kalinina 7-6 (5), 6-1. — ***AP***


Emma Raducanu reacts after winning a point against Jessica Pegula. AFP