



France's N'Golo Kante and Paul Pogba during training —REUTERS

## World Cup semi-final run just the start for young England: Kane

MOSCOW, JUL 12 /- Harry Kane says England restored pride during their run to the World Cup semi-finals and can use the tournament as a springboard for sustained success for a talented young generation. Playing in their first World Cup semi-final for 28 years, England blew a golden opportunity to reach their first final since 1966, surrendering a 1-0 half-time lead to lose 2-1 to Croatia after extra-time in Moscow on Wednesday. The tournament's top goalscorer with six goals, Kane himself missed a huge chance to give England breathing space in the first half. But he believes even brighter days lie ahead for the third-youngest squad on show in Russia. "It hurts now but I know when we look back there are a lot of positives, (a lot of) experience we can take. That's the aim, in two years' time in the Euros to go again and win big tournaments," said the Tottenham Hotspur striker.

"We've shown we can do well in these tournaments and the aim is now not to wait another 20-odd years to get to another big semi-final. It's to go again and try to achieve our dreams. In their run to the last four, England re-engaged with a fanbase disaffected by decades of failure at international tournaments, most notably in a humiliating exit to Iceland at Euro 2016. World Cup fever swept the nation back home and even after the defeat, thousands of England fans at the Luzhnikhi stadium stayed behind long after the final whistle to give their side a rousing send-off. "It's mas-

sive that we had a good tournament and restored pride in the nation. The fans are excited to watch us play and that's how we have to keep progressing," added Kane. "We should be proud and hold our heads up high because we've come a long way from two years ago. Even out there the fans singing after a defeat, it's a proud feeling." England manager Gareth Southgate has taken much of the credit for moulding his young side, not only with a commitment to play attractive and attacking football on the field, but a fresh open attitude with fans and media off it. "This team is very special," said Kieran Trippier who had got England off to a flying start in the semi-final with a fifth-minute free-kick to open the scoring. "It all comes from the manager. Unbelievable manager... I can't speak highly enough of him. He sets the tone, he brought this team together. Everybody knows how close our team is and that all comes from him." Trippier was one of many England players with limited international experience before the tournament who went on to shine in Russia. And he expects a "great future" for England, with most of the current squad still young enough to be around for the 2022 World Cup. "There is a great future going for us, trust me, with this team," added Trippier. "In the future for sure with this manager, with these players, the team is only going to progress and I'm sure we can go far in the next tournaments. "We've got a great team spirit, great chemistry, a very young team. We can succeed and do the country proud."

## Roger Federer knocked out of Wimbledon by Kevin Anderson

LONDON, JUL 12 /- Kevin Anderson produced an astonishing fightback from two sets down to beat eight-time champion Roger Federer 2-6 6-7(5) 7-5 6-4 13-11 in a quarter-final cliffhanger at Wimbledon on Wednesday. The Big South African's hopes looked forlorn as Federer skipped through the opening two sets on Court One with his usual panache but he turned the match on its head to cause the biggest shock yet in a tournament full of upsets. It was his first win against Federer in a fifth attempt as he became the first player representing South Africa to reach the semi-final since Kevin Curran in 1983. Eighth-seed Anderson, 32, saved a match point in the 10th game of the third set and grew in confidence against an increasingly-raged Federer who had won the first set in 26 minutes.

He won the third set to snap Federer's 34-set winning streak at Wimbledon and Federer was clearly shaken as Anderson dominated the fourth set to drag the defending champion into a weary-looking forehand halfway up the net. Anderson stayed cool and sealed victory on his first match point with a powerful first serve which Federer could only return into the tramlines.

## Djokovic into Wimbledon semis

LONDON, JUL 12 /- Three times Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic was a man on a mission after the former world number one beat Japan's Kei Nishikori 6-3 6-2 6-2 on Wednesday to reach the semi-finals for the eighth time. "I feel like I'm peaking at the right moment," declared the 12th seeded Serb after joining Americans John McEnroe and Pete Sampras in fourth place on the list of most Wimbledon semi-final appearances in the Open Era. The 31-year-old will play either second-seeded Spaniard Rafael Nadal or fifth-seeded Argentine Juan Martin del Potro in the last four. Djokovic had looked in control after the first set on a sunny Centre Court but lost his cool and concentration in the second after a heated exchange with umpire Carlos Ramos. With his 24th seeded opponent saving three break points to hold serve 2-1, Djokovic bounced his racket off the baseline in frustration and then seethed after he was given a code of conduct warning. "You think I ruined the court for just throwing my racket (down)? Do you think that or not? Be honest." The Serb exclaimed, shaking his head. Nishikori promptly broke serve and then held to go 4-1 up before leveling the match at 1-1 but any sense of a fightback, and the possibility of a first Japanese man in the Wimbledon semi-finals since 1933, was short-lived. Nishikori, playing Djokovic on grass for the first time and seeking to end a 12-match losing streak against the Serb, held his own in the third set before running out of steam. Failing to take advantage of three break points at 2-2, he lost his own serve to go 4-2 down in what came to be a turning point. "That was I think the biggest chance I had. But he played a great three points," said Nishikori. "Maybe things



changed if I got the game." After that he was playing better. I think he was playing more aggressive and didn't give me any free points." With the Japanese serving to stay in the match, Djokovic wrapped things up after 2-1-2 hours on the first match point to secure his first Wimbledon semi-final since 2015. "I thought it was unnecessary to get the warning," Djokovic said as he came off court. "I didn't dig on the grass. I know how I threw the racket. He even threw the racket in the fourth set and the umpire said he didn't see him so I get the warning, he doesn't," added the Serb. "So I think it's not fair but it is the way it is. In the mix of emotions and a tough match it happens." The semi-final will be the 32nd of Djokovic's Grand Slam career but he has had to fight to get there.

## Nirmal Chhetri joins FC Goa

MARGAO, JUL 12 /- FC Goa has signed Sri Lankan defender Nirmal Chhetri from NorthEast United FC ahead of the upcoming edition of Indian Super League. Chhetri has been a veteran in the ISL since its inception, playing for Kerala Blasters FC and NorthEast United before joining the Gaurs. The full back started his senior career with Air India back in 2006 before playing for both Bengal giants, East Bengal and Mohun Bagan respectively. He scored three goals for Mohun Bagan, including one on his debut. He was loaned out to Mohan Bagan SC in 2013. In 2014, ISL side Kerala Blasters sought the services of the defender who joined them and helped the team to reach the finals where they lost against ATK. Chhetri then moved to NorthEast United FC where he played the 2016 and 2017 seasons before moving to Goa to join the Gaurs. "The entire country noticed the brand of exciting football that FC Goa played last season and now I have the chance to be a part of it. Coach Sergio (Lobera) did wonders last season and I'm happy to be under his tutelage going forward," Chhetri said about his new team. (PTI)

## Sri Lanka skipper, officials out of South Africa Tests

Colombo, Jul 12 /- Captain Dinesh Chandimal and two top Sri Lankan cricket officials have agreed to sit out the Test series against South Africa pending sanctions, the International Cricket Council said today. Chandimal, coach Chandika Hathurusingha and manager Asanka Gurusinha had pleaded guilty to violating the spirit of the game last month during Sri Lanka's second Test against the West Indies. The ICC said a judicial commission hearing ended overnight, hours before the first Test against the visiting South Africans was due to start at Galle today but a decision would be announced "in due course". "In the interim, Chandimal, Hathurusingha and Gurusinha, who have pleaded guilty, have agreed not to participate in the Tests," SA Cricket's governing body said on Twitter.

## Nadal survives thriller to down Del Potro

LONDON, JUL 12 /- It was a case of down but definitely not out as Rafael Nadal kept picking himself off a slippery and dusty Centre Court surface to storm into the Wimbledon semi-finals with a pulsating 6-7(6) 6-4 6-4 over Juan Martin del Potro. Just 90 minutes after defending champion Roger Federer was sensationally knocked out by South African Kevin Anderson on Wednesday, it seemed as if the grasscourt major would lose to the Argentine Del Potro took a two-sets-to-one lead. It was not as Nadal was playing badly as he had lost only nine points on serve before heading into the ninth game of the second set. But just before that game started, Federer's shock demise was flashed up on the giant on-court scoreboard and it was as if that threw the Spaniard off his stride and he

# Exhausted Croatia train sights on France in final

MOSCOW, JUL 12 /- Croatia's exhaustion after players set for the past two weeks. "This is fantastic. Two players played with half a leg, but they didn't show. In extra-time nobody wanted to be substituted. The show character and is what makes me proud. Nobody gave up," said Dalic. "We prepared to get to the final and we want to play it," he said. "Going to extra-time might be a problem along with the fact France had an extra day to recover but there will be no excuses." For England, the emotions are mixed - pride at reaching the last four is tempered by disappointment at letting a golden opportunity slip through their fingers. They were on course for their first final since 1966 when they took the lead through Kieran Trippier's superb early free-kick, but Croatia hit back through Ivan Perisic and Mario Mandzukic in front of 78,000 spectators. In London, an initial wave of elation turned to heart-break as 30,000 beer-soaked fans in Hyde Park watched their team come up short. Around 26 million people were believed to have watched the match on TV in Britain. But despite the bitter disappointment, captain Harry Kane said England had restored pride during their run to the semi-finals and could use it as a springboard for success. "It's massive that we had a good tournament and restored pride in the nation. The fans

there would be no excuses from his side despite the exertions of the past two weeks. "This is fantastic. Two players played with half a leg, but they didn't show. In extra-time nobody wanted to be substituted. The show character and is what makes me proud. Nobody gave up," said Dalic. "We prepared to get to the final and we want to play it," he said. "Going to extra-time might be a problem along with the fact France had an extra day to recover but there will be no excuses." For England, the emotions are mixed - pride at reaching the last four is tempered by disappointment at letting a golden opportunity slip through their fingers. They were on course for their first final since 1966 when they took the lead through Kieran Trippier's superb early free-kick, but Croatia hit back through Ivan Perisic and Mario Mandzukic in front of 78,000 spectators. In London, an initial wave of elation turned to heart-break as 30,000 beer-soaked fans in Hyde Park watched their team come up short. Around 26 million people were believed to have watched the match on TV in Britain. But despite the bitter disappointment, captain Harry Kane said England had restored pride during their run to the semi-finals and could use it as a springboard for success. "It's massive that we had a good tournament and restored pride in the nation. The fans

are excited to watch us play and that's how we have to keep progressing," he said. "We should be proud and hold our heads up high because we've come a long way from two years ago. Even out there the fans singing after a defeat, it's a proud feeling." Kane looks set to claim the Golden Boot as the World Cup's leading scorer, but the Tottenham star rarely looked like adding to his six goals against Croatia. Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper believes England have "moved forward into a brighter age." England progressed from a group stage exit in 2014 to a semi-final defeat in extra-time four years later. No country on earth would sail further than England in their history after they beat Belgium 1-0 in Saint Petersburg on Tuesday, sparking jubilant scenes in Paris.

## Gareth Southgate proud but England need to 'suffer' FIFA World Cup loss to Croatia

MOSCOW, JUL 12 /- England coach Gareth Southgate said his team needs to "suffer" their loss to Croatia in the World Cup semi-finals and understand the opportunity they passed up before pondering the positives from their remarkable campaign.

Southgate's team made a fine start to their quest to become the first England side to reach the final in 52 years but faded in the second half before going down 2-1 to the Croats after extra time at the Luzhnikhi Stadium. Given they arrived in Russia as rank outsiders, however, Southgate was invited to detail the positives from a campaign that appears to have repaired the rift between England and its team. "I think that's maybe something that we need to focus on at the moment we all feel the pain of this defeat," he told reporters. "Did we expect to be in this position? I don't realistically think any of us did. But 50 years ago to this point and played as well as we have... you want to take these opportunities in life. "The dressing-room is a really difficult place at the moment. There will be a lot of positives to take, it's very hard now to put that into context, it's a bit too soon, really, because I think you have to suffer the result first before you can start to see positives on too quickly." Gifted a relatively soft draw by the early exit of a number of traditional World Cup superpowers, England reached the semi-finals of a major tournament for the first time since Euro 1996, when Southgate was part of the team. They had only previously been in the World Cup semi-finals in 1966, when they won the title on home soil, and 1990 so Southgate said he was trying to balance his pride in his young team with remembering how rare such chances are. "Tonight was a wonderful opportunity for us and you can't guarantee that those opportunities will come again," he added. "But equally we want to be a team that's hitting quarter-finals, semi-finals, finals - that was what we've aimed to do in the long term and we've proved that it is possible. Now we have a new benchmark, a new level of expectation. Many of these players have come of age and I couldn't be prouder of them." Southgate said playing regularly in big matches was a key stage of development for his players and that the way they dropped away in the second half was perhaps a result of their inexperience. "Maybe (that was) a consequence of being ahead and being the most experienced team in the tournament with the chance to get to a World Cup final," he added. "Whether that had an effect on us not wanting to take as many chances as we had, subconsciously, I don't know. "When you get to this stage of the competition, the margins are fine... they've taken two of their chances and we weren't able to respond."

## Croatian fans celebrate FIFA World Cup semifinal win

ZAGREB/MOSCOW, Jul 12 /- Jubilant Croatian fans honked their car horns and let off fireworks after their soccer team came from behind to beat England 2-1 in extra time in the World Cup final against France. Mario Mandzukic put Croatia ahead after scoring in Moscow's Luzhnikhi Stadium, giving the Balkan nation its first ever place in the final in its history. "The result that surprised even some fans. "We had hoped (for this) and we believed in our team, but the feeling when we finally entered the finals cannot be compared to anything," said Ivan Perisic, 41. The veteran city of a million people came to a standstill as Croatians watched the game on screens in squares and streets. In Zagreb, the capital, more than 10,000 people gathered in the central square to watch the match despite rainy weather. Loud cheers rang out after each goal, fans waved the red, white and blue national flag, and after the final whistle Croatian TV showed wild celebrations breaking out in towns and cities. In the seaside city of Dubrovnik, fans in red and white checked Croatian shirts gathered in the bars, cafes and restaurants. In the afternoon sun, singing songs in anticipation of the night ahead. Cars and vans drove through the streets with Croatian flags stretched tightly across their bonnets, honking their horns at each other as workers clocked out for the day early and headed home to watch the game.

## England fans crushed after FIFA World Cup ouster but hope for bright future

LONDON/MOSCOW, Jul 12 /- Some England soccer fans sobbed while others cheered as their team emerged from the Luzhnikhi Stadium in tears and being hugged by others while jubilant Croatian supporters celebrated around them. "It was a good game. Croatia deserved to win," Mark Burcher, 50, said. Asked how far he thought the still young England team could progress in the next World Cup, he said: "This far, not the final." "A couple of weeks ago, I would have taken this result," said one man in a red England shirt who declined to give his name. "It's something to have got this far." But Raj Singh, a Canadian who supports England because he has relatives in Britain, said the team may have passed up their best opportunity in their lifetime to reach a World Cup final.

## England fans crushed after FIFA World Cup ouster but hope for bright future

final, avoiding most of the heavyweight teams in Russia. "They've been unbelievable the whole tournament but at the end of the day, it was our best chance ever and we haven't taken it," Reece said. After watching their team stumble at major tournaments for decades, often falling to much smaller nations, England supporters had begun to think that 2018 might be a different story. If they had beaten Croatia, England would have reached only their second World Cup final. In their other appearance, in 1966, in London, they entered popular folklore by beating West Germany, an achievement that many fans have long thought they would never see again. Despite taking the lead early in the first half on Wednesday, England suffered the fans' biggest advantage of what appeared an unusually easy route to the

fluffed his lines to drop his serve. After Nadal squandered four set points in the third set tiebreak, with a double fault on one of them, Del Potro made him pay as he pounced on his first chance to raise his prospect of another astonishing upset on day nine of the championships. But the second seed stayed alive by taking the fourth set before the gripping drama continued in an electrifying deciding set in which both players were left drenched in sweat and slipping over as they chased after binding winners. Nadal ended the four hour and 48-minute thriller with a backhand volley winner past a lunging Del Potro who ended the contest lying flat on his stomach. Next up for the Spaniard is a blockbuster last four showdown with Serb Novak Djokovic.

## Nadal survives thriller to down Del Potro

fluffed his lines to drop his serve. After Nadal squandered four set points in the third set tiebreak, with a double fault on one of them, Del Potro made him pay as he pounced on his first chance to raise his prospect of another astonishing upset on day nine of the championships. But the second seed stayed alive by taking the fourth set before the gripping drama continued in an electrifying deciding set in which both players were left drenched in sweat and slipping over as they chased after binding winners. Nadal ended the four hour and 48-minute thriller with a backhand volley winner past a lunging Del Potro who ended the contest lying flat on his stomach. Next up for the Spaniard is a blockbuster last four showdown with Serb Novak Djokovic.