

# By beating Russia, Croatia can finally shake 20-year shadow



Russia's Fyodor Smolov during training — REUTERS

**SOCHI, JUL 6 /-** Twenty years ago, Croatia made its World Cup debut with a result that happened only once previously in the tournament's history and has never been topped. Finishing in third place the first time it participated in soccer's biggest showcase set a lofty standard.

The Croatians' memorable run to the semifinals in 1998 remains a moment of pride for the country. It also created a shadow every successive Croatia team has been forced to deal with and has not come close to matching. Until now, Croatia can equal what that 1998 team did if it beats Russia on Saturday in the quarterfinals and perhaps finally rid itself of that 20-year shadow. The current squad of stars such as Luka Modric, Ivan Perisic, Mario Mandzukic and Ivan Rakitic will be held in the same esteem as the stars of '98 such as Davor Suker, Zvonimir Boban and Slaven Bilic with one more victory. Or if they can't get past the home team, they will be the latest Croatia team to fall short. "I has been talked a lot about the two teams and



Croatia's Luka Modric and Mateo Kovacic during training — REUTERS

their similarities," Perisic said. "They achieved a historic result in France. Now we've come close and hopefully we can even do it a little bit better than them. We know our quality and we believe in ourselves and we are on the right track at the moment." The current group of Croatians has become tired of hearing about what happened in 1998. It's not a matter of respect - there is great admiration for what the '98 team accomplished - but matching or exceeding what that team did has been a burden in every major tournament for the past 20 years. As Rakitic said recently, "At this point we need to forget about them, with all respect to them." Croatia's third place finish in its debut has been equaled only by Portugal in 1986 when the tournament featured just 16 teams. The 1998 team finished second in its group, beat Romania in the round of 16 and knocked off Germany 3-0 in the quarterfinals. Croatia lost to eventual champion France in the semifinals, but rebounded to beat the Netherlands and finish third. It's what Croatia has done - or hasn't - in the four World Cup since that debut which has created the shadow this team plays under. "It was different football 20 years ago," Ante Relic said. "They achieved a top fantastic result. We are now on a good way and have great support in Croatia and I believe in our team we can do something similar." Croatia was ousted in the group stage in 2002 and 2006, didn't qualify for 2010 in South Africa and was again dumped in the group stage in 2014, albeit from a very difficult group. The 2002 and 2006 tournaments were particularly frustrating because a win in the final group games would have advanced Croatia to the knockout round. Even the European Championships haven't been kind. Croatia reached the quarterfinals in its first tournament in 1996 and has advanced that far only once since. Croatia has never made the Euro semifinals. "Our goals are higher,"

defender Domagoj Vida said. "God-willing we would like to lift the World Cup trophy. That's what we are here for." Croatia is the heavy favorite in the quarterfinal matchup with the host team, and a win over the Russians would be held in the same esteem as its quarterfinal win over Germany that happened 20 years ago this week. Modric may be the favorite for the Golden Ball as the best player in the tournament thus far. Goalkeeper Danijel Subasic has become a national hero for saving three penalties to advance Croatia past Denmark in the round of 16. And Croatia is on the side of the bracket where playing in the final seems entirely possible if it can beat the Russians. That would certainly eliminate the pressure that still lingers from 20 years ago. (AP)

**TODAY'S MATCH**  
Sweden vs England  
**7:30 PM**  
Russia vs Croatia  
**11:30 PM**

## Sweden's defence meets England's attack in last Eight Showdown

**REPINO (RUSSIA), JUL 6 /-** England will take on Sweden at Samara Arena on Saturday for a spot in the last four of the FIFA World Cup 2018. Both sides will be looking to reach the semi-finals for the first time in a long while. England fans are starting to believe they can end a 52-year wait to win the World Cup. But the obdurate Scandinavians have a habit of upsetting the odds, particularly against England, having lost just one of eight previous competitive meetings. Sweden earned their place in the quarter-finals with a resolute 1-0 victory over Switzerland, courtesy of Emil Forsberg's deflected shot. Janne Andersson's side have proven themselves as somewhat of a defensive machine, conceding just two goals thus far and keeping three clean sheets in four games, with Germany being the only side to breach Robin Olsen's net. Sweden were improbable table toppers in Group F, and have continued their good form into the knockout stages, where they will be out to end the English dream.

Fans of the Three Lions plunged into euphoria when their side overcame Colombia 4-0 on penalties in the round of 16, after the scores were locked at one apiece after regulation and extra time. Gareth Southgate has his team playing some of the best football an England team has produced on the world stage in some time, and confidence and belief is high in the camp that they can continue on in the tournament. The "It's Coming Home" frenzy continues to be fuelled on social media and in the streets of England, and Harry Kane and Co. are within touching distance of making it a reality. Confidence in England is soaring after the team ended a long wait to win a World Cup penalty shootout, squeaking past Colombia in a tense and bad-tempered last-16 tie in Moscow. "We'd like to bring it home," said England defender John Stones on Thursday. "I'd love to win a World Cup, England would love to win a World Cup. It's been a long time since we last won it. We want to make people

proud back home." England, World Cup winners in 1966, have already won over a public disaffected by an early exit in Brazil four years ago and an embarrassing defeat to Iceland at Euro 2016. Gareth Southgate's men have been drawing more viewers for their matches in Russia than May's royal wedding, with 23.6 million tuning in for the shootout against Colombia. "It's great to see the support back home. Everyone's getting behind us in their thousands," added the Manchester City player. "I'm getting videos and pictures from my friends back home watching the game, in the pubs, wherever they are in the country. With just a four-day turnaround to facing Sweden in Samara, though, England have little time to replenish their energy. And while some are already making plans for a potential semi-final against hosts Russia or Croatia, Stones warned of complacency against Sweden. "I think if you say it's an easy game in a quarter-final of a World Cup then you are pretty stupid to say that." "Sometimes they can throw you, these teams. They can go kind of under the radar, but there is no question they are a good team. They wouldn't be where they are if they weren't." Sweden have arguably faced a much tougher path to get to the last eight, eliminating the Netherlands and Italy in qualifying just to get to Russia and then emerging as winners of Group F as holders Germany crashed out. Shorn of star names since Zlatan Ibrahimovic's retirement from international football, Sweden have thrived off a collective team spirit. Happy to sacrifice possession, defend deep and wait for their opportunity on the counter-attack, they will let England have most of the ball. But other than in a 6-1 thrashing of Panama in the group stages, England have struggled to create chances from open play, with seven of their nine goals so far coming from set-pieces and penalties. "Normally the other teams have better players on paper and we let them have the ball in the places we want them to have the ball," said Sweden captain Andreas Granqvist.



(Top to Bottom) England's Kane during training. Sweden's Jimmy Durmaz and Martin Olsson during training — REUTERS

## Maradona apologises over Colombia-England Referee Slur

**MOSCOW, JUL 6 /-** Diego Maradona has apologised for questioning the impartiality of the referee in charge of England's last-16 penalty shootout win over Colombia. The Argentina legend had landed himself in hot water with FIFA over his outburst at US official Mark Geiger when he described England's win over Colombia as a "monumental robbery". But after a firm rebuke by football's governing body the 1986 World Cup winner issued a mea culpa on Instagram. "Caught up by the excitement and support for Colombia the other day I said some things that, I admit, are unacceptable. My apologies to FIFA and its president (Gianni Infantino), even if sometimes my opinions are different to those of the referees I have total respect for their work." Headminded that "although

I sometimes have opinions contrary to those of referees, I have absolute respect for the work - not easy - which (FIFA) and the referees do." Maradona, who had come out in support of Colombia following Argentina's premature elimination, blamed Geiger for the South American side's loss in an ill-tempered affair. He had told Venezuelan TV channel Telesur: "I apologise to all the Colombian people, but the players are not to blame. There is a gentleman (FIFA referees boss Pierluigi Collina) who decides to choose a referee who, if he had Googled him, (he would know) can be used for a match of this magnitude." Geiger was suspended from international football for six months after several controversial decisions during a 2015 Gold Cup semi-final between Panama and Mexico.



# Results of "Publish your Painting" Contest



**Winner of the Week**  
Name: Sharif  
Name of the School: Ravindra. Bangla. Vidyalaya, VIP Road  
Class-III

The Echo of India team congratulates all contributing budding artists. The winner may contact on phone- 230269, 230230 to collect the winner's gift hamper from our office.

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T. Upasana Rao, VKV, Lamba Line Class-II C



Rehan, Govt. MES School Ograbranj, Class-V C



Rachita Lall, Carmel. Sr. Sec. School, Class-III A



T. Sravan Kumar, Govt. Sr. Sec. School, Prothrapur, Class-II B



T. Deva Venkat, Govt. Sr. Sec. School, Prothrapur, Class-IV B



Abou Imran, VKZPV School, Port Mourr Class-III B



Esafuli Mondal, G.M.S. Dollygunj, Class-VII



Mikaili Mondal, G.M.S. Dollygunj, Class-VII