

Sports

England first into World Cup quarter finals as Japan extend dream run

Petaia, Australia's youngest ever WCup player, scores one try and made another

TOKYO: England barged past 14-man Argentina and into the Rugby World Cup quarter-finals yesterday, as Japan extended their dream run and Australian teen sensation Jordan Petaia announced himself on the big stage. Japan's Brave Blossoms sent home fans into ecstasy with their third straight win, a 38-19 victory over Samoa — including Kotaro Matsushima's last-gasp fourth try to grab the all-important bonus point.

The result primes Japan, the one-time tournament whipping boys, for a shot at reaching the quarter-finals for the first time when they face Six Nations side Scotland next week in Yokohama.

"I'm really proud of our team, especially at the end there — it was a never-say-die attitude," said Japan coach Jamie Joseph. "At the end of the day the belief in our team has grown and I guess we will need it going into next week." Japan's win came after Eddie Jones's England became the first team into the last eight with a bonus-point, 39-10 victory over Argentina, aided by Tomas Lavani's 17th-minute red card for a high tackle on Owen Farrell.

And in Oita, Petaia, 19, crowned his international debut with a dazzling try as Australia's youngest ever World Cup player helped the Wallabies overcome two yellow cards to beat Uruguay 45-10.

England's qualification shows the progress of the 2003 champions since 2015, when they suffered the embarrassment of becoming the only World Cup hosts to fail to reach the knock-outs. The game was over as a contest when Tomas Lavani saw red for a high tackle on Owen Farrell after only 17 minutes, clearing England's path to a six-tries-to-one, bonus-point win.

Jonny May, Elliot Daly and Ben Youngs ran in tries in the first half, before George Ford, Jack Nowell — cele-

brating his return from injury — and Luke Cowan-Dickie crossed in the second period.

But between the tries it was a stop-start affair as England struggled to find their rhythm against a brave but outgunned Argentina.

KICKING WOES

"(It was) scrappy at times," said England captain Owen Farrell. "I thought it was a decent rate of control from ourselves but we let the game get frantic a couple of times, forced a couple of things and let Argentina into the game at times."

Farrell, who missed all four place kicks in the first half, before slotting four from four in the second, said he would do some extra practice before next week's game against France. "I fixed it up a little bit after half-time but I'll do some work this week," he said.

Earlier Petaia, Australia's youngest ever World Cup player, scored one try and made another, while Tevita Kuridrani and Dane Haylett-Petty bagged two each in the Wallabies' haul of seven against Uruguay.

Petaia had to wait 23 minutes for his first touch of the ball, but he was on the scoresheet one minute later when he burst through two defenders and spun past another on the line. At 19 years and 204 days, it made him the second youngest try-scorer at a Rugby World Cup behind George North, who was 19 years and 165 days old when he dotted down for Wales in 2011.

Shortly afterwards, Petaia broke open the defence as he gracefully stepped and swerved inside to release man-of-the-match Tevita Kuridrani for the first of his two tries. "He (Petaia) scored a try, had a big part in another and just did little things like he ran down the edge and bounced back in from touch kept the ball



TOKYO: England's centre Manu Tuilagi (C) runs with the ball during the Japan 2019 Rugby World Cup Pool C match between England and Argentina at the Tokyo Stadium in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP

alive," said Australia coach Michael Cheika. "(He) played physical, got up and caught a few balls."

Prop James Slipper also scored his first try — in his

94th Test. But Australia were left to ponder continuing disciplinary problems as they had two players sin-binned for high tackles. —AFP

Wallabies boss concerned over indiscipline, slow starts

OITA: Wallabies coach Michael Cheika said his side's ill-discipline and slow starts were becoming a problem after two yellow cards in their 45-10 win over Uruguay yesterday. With a likely quarter-final looming against England, captain Michael Hooper also said the Wallabies were making it hard for themselves with their high infringement rate.

They spent half the first spell against Uruguay down to 14 men with Adam Coleman and Lukhan Salakaia-Loto sin-binned for head-high tackles, while Hooper and Kurtley Beale were also penalised for high shots.

In the Pool D match in Oita, which the Australians were expected to win comfortably, they gave away 12 penalties to take their total to 35 from three matches. "Discipline in general," Hooper said, when questioned about key issues facing his side as they move closer to the knock-out stages.

"A bit of high-tackle stuff, it's a bit of offside line. Giving away as many penalties as we did today made it hard for ourselves, particularly having 14 men on the field for 20 minutes. "It's hard, it makes life hard, it takes a lot of energy out of the tank."

Discipline has been an ongoing concern for the Wallabies in Japan, with Cheika initially defending his side by saying he was "embarrassed" by the confusion around officiating high tackles, the subject of a new referees' framework to guide punishments.

"We don't need the framework to teach us where to tackle because they are all taught to tackle middle," he said, after Reece Hodge received a three-match suspension for a dangerous tackle in their opening match against Fiji.

But after the high shots against Uruguay, Cheika refused to discuss tackle technique. "I think it's pretty clear why not, just steer clear of it and everyone will be good," he said.

He said the bigger problem was the total penalty count, linking it to the slow starts which also troubled the Wallabies in their first two matches when they beat Fiji 39-21 and lost to Wales 29-25. "We're just giving away too many penalties, full stop, no matter what it's for," Cheika said.

"You can't be winning the game by 45 and still losing the penalty count. We've got to stop giving away penalties." He suggested a possible link between infringements and a lack of playing cohesion at the start of the game.

The Wallabies were only 19-3 ahead at half-time after spending much of the first half defending, before producing a more complete performance after the break. "The one thing we need to be mindful of is we haven't started games well, not that we haven't played well, we've just been a little less consistent in the first 20 minutes," he said. "It gets you off on the wrong foot and it's definitely something we need to address. When we get our flow going we give away less penalties."

Coleman received his yellow card for in the 14th minute and Salakaia-Loto was sent off 15 minutes later. —AFP

Djokovic eases past Goffin to set up Tokyo final with Millman

TOKYO: World number one Novak Djokovic eased past Belgian third seed David Goffin 6-3 6-4 at the Japan Open in Tokyo yesterday to book his place in today's final against John Millman. Djokovic beat Goffin in one hour and 29 minutes, extending his head-to-head

record against the 2017 champion to seven wins, and will now face Australia's Millman who beat American Reilly Opelka in the other semi-final.

Top seeded Djokovic hit seven aces and won 87% of his first-service points against Goffin in the Serb's first tournament since withdrawing from the US Open fourth round with a shoulder injury.

"I'm very satisfied with the way I've been playing the whole week," Djokovic said. "It's been a very positive week on the court, off the week as well. Hopefully I'll be able to crown it tomorrow with a trophy."

"Obviously he was in good form and

played really well against Chung yesterday in the quarters. "The conditions are playing quick here. The surface doesn't bounce that much, so you've got to be very low and quick on return as well. It definitely was not easy when both of us were serving well."

Djokovic has dominated opponents in Tokyo and is yet to drop a set in the tournament and the 16-times Grand Slam champion needed only two breaks of serve to win in straight sets and reach his fifth final of the season.

Earlier, Millman took down Opelka 6-3 7-6(4) to reach his first ever ATP 500 final. Big-serving Opelka fired 13 aces but could not convert either of his two

break points while Millman needed only one break of serve in the opening set before winning the second in the tiebreak.

"That was a pretty good match, it's always difficult playing against someone like Reilly who has got such a massive serve," Millman said. "I was really happy to take the few little chances I had and took care of my own service games pretty well."

"I get to play a final of an ATP 500 in such a special place like Tokyo. For me, that's why you play. That's why you go through the graft and some of the tougher times, to give yourself an opportunity like this. It's pretty special." —Reuters

Osaka sweeps into China Open final on just two hours' sleep

BEIJING: Naomi Osaka said that she had just two hours' sleep before crushing title-holder Caroline Wozniacki to sweep into the China Open final yesterday. The 21-year-old Japanese will play world number one Ashleigh Barty of Australia in today's championship match in Beijing — and will hope to have had a bit more rest.

The Australian Open champion said that she was so hyped up after defeating Bianca Andreescu in three thrilling sets on Friday night that she barely slept. "I went to sleep at 4:00am, I woke up at 6:00am, so solid two hours, I can't really sleep after my matches," said Osaka.

"I just feel like my adrenaline's up more during the tougher matches so it makes it harder to sleep." "It's definitely been a bit crazy time-wise," she added, having returned to the court to face Wozniacki less than 24 hours after defeating Andreescu.

But if the two-time Grand Slam champion was exhausted, it did not show in a 6-4, 6-2 victory in 84 minutes against the Dane. Osaka held off all seven break points she faced against Wozniacki.

The world number four showed flashes of irritation as she let Wozniacki off the hook at 3-3 in the first set, tossing her racquet on the floor. But in the ninth game, the pressure on the 19th-ranked Wozniacki told, Osaka grabbing the break of service with an arrowing forehand.

Osaka, like Wozniacki a former number one, broke her opponent at the start of the second set to underline her superiority, before racing to a thumping win.

The Japanese insisted that she was the underdog against Barty. They have played each other three times before with the 23-year-old Australian winning twice. Barty said that she has "never been happier" on and off the court after she saved match point against Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands in their semi-final.

The French Open champion committed 52 unforced



BEIJING: Ashleigh Barty of Australia hits a return during her women's singles semi-final match against Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands at the China Open tennis tournament in Beijing yesterday. —AFP

errors but still just about emerged victorious in a nail-biting 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (9/7) triumph.

Barty, who surged to the top of the rankings in June, said there had been "massive growth" in her mental fortitude when she faces crunch points.

"That's gone hand-in-hand with adding some new people to my team, trying to work with them behind the scenes," Barty, who five years ago took a break from tennis and played cricket, said.

"Not just for my tennis — it's for my life, my health and well being, as well, which has been the best thing. "I have never been happier off the court, never been happier on the court."

THEM VS TSITSIPAS

Top seed Dominic Thiem fought back from a set

down to reach the final in the men's draw — and also book his place at the season-ending ATP Finals. The Austrian will play Stefanos Tsitsipas after beating Russia's Karen Khachanov 2-6, 7-6 (7/5), 7-5 in two hours and 41 minutes.

The 21-year-old Tsitsipas triumphed 7-6 (8/6), 6-4 in a battle of the rising stars against 22-year-old Alexander Zverev. Thiem, who has now reached the ATP Finals for a fourth time in a row, said: "For me personally, it was one big goal when I started into the season, I'm very, very happy that I made it (the London Finals) again."

"But it's not because of today's win, it's because of all the season." Also already qualified for London are Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal, Roger Federer and Daniil Medvedev. —AFP

Gatland wants 'psychological boost' of topping World Cup pool

OTSU: Wales coach Warren Gatland reckons it will be "a big psychological boost" if his side finish top of their World Cup group. The Six Nations champions are currently unbeaten at Japan 2019 following wins over Georgia and Australia, albeit they had to withstand a fightback before seeing off the

Wallabies 29-25. A victory over Fiji in Oita on Wednesday would guarantee Wales a place in the quarter-finals and if they then beat Uruguay four days later they will finish the group stage on top of Pool D.

Should that happen, Wales will be up against the runners-up in a Pool C featuring England, France and Argentina in the last eight. "If you win the group, it's a big psychological boost because you are playing a quarter-final against a team who would have lost a game in their pool," Gatland told WRU (Welsh Rugby Union) TV.

"I think psychologically it's quite important for us to win this group, win the next two games, and then to start

thinking about our quarter-final opponent. "We are pretty happy with two from two. The next two matches are very important," added the New Zealander, who will stand down as Wales coach after the World Cup.

Fiji come into the match on the back of a 45-10 rout of Georgia and Gatland said: "Fiji are going to be tough for us. They had a great performance against Georgia. They are very much a confidence side, so we will have to be on top of our game and be defensively strong at the set-piece. "We've got a short turnaround of four days, so a lot of the players who haven't had any rugby will get an opportunity then," explained Gatland, looking to lead Wales to their

first World Cup title.

"They will be chomping at the bit to play against Uruguay." Fiji famously knocked Wales out of the 2007 World Cup in the group stage and assistant coach Stephen Jones, the Welsh fly-half in the side beaten 38-34 in Nantes, said: "From a personal perspective, I am fully aware of how good they are."

"We have got to make sure from an attacking element that when we have got the ball we keep the ball. "It (2007) highlighted what Fiji rugby is all about. "Give them space and time and they move the ball well, have an off-loading game and put you under pressure. "They did that day and scored some wonderful tries." —AFP