



Southgate pays for caution as history slips from England's grasp in Euro final



LONDON: England's coach Gareth Southgate greets the fans as he walks past the trophy during the Euro 2020 final football match between Italy and England at the Wembley Stadium in London on Sunday. — AFP

LONDON: For the second time in three years, Gareth Southgate paid a painful price for his caution as Italy handed England's manager another dose of penalty heartache in Sunday's agonizing Euro 2020 final defeat. Southgate's side had made a dream start to their first major final in 55 years when Luke Shaw fired England ahead inside two minutes at Wembley.

At that point, it was easy to imagine Southgate becoming a sporting immortal with England 88 minutes away from their first major trophy since the 1966 World Cup. But England went into their shell due to Southgate's passivity as the match wore on. Leonardo Bonucci equalized in the second half and Italy held their nerve to win 3-2 on penalties after the tense 1-1 draw. It was another miserable shoot-out experience for Southgate, who missed the crucial penalty when he was an England player in their Euro 96 semi-final defeat against Germany. Since taking charge as England manager in 2016, Southgate seemed to have erased his country's wretched record on penalties as they beat Colombia in the 2018 World Cup last 16 and Switzerland in the 2019 Nations League third place play-off.

But Southgate's decision to send on Marcus

Rashford and Jadon Sancho late in extra time to take penalties against Italy backfired spectacularly as both missed, along with teenager Bukayo Saka. The raucous mood at Wembley had grown increasingly tense as Italy gradually turned the tide in their favor after England's electrifying start. With England unable to find a second goal, they were left vulnerable to Italy's patient passing and growing confidence. It was a familiar predicament for Southgate, who had watched on impotently when England blew the lead against Croatia in the 2018 World Cup semi-final.

Back then, Southgate failed to find a solution to the control imposed by Croatia midfielder Luke Modric and England crashed out with a whimper. Three years on, he said this week that he felt England were "better prepared" for high-stakes matches after the painful end to their World Cup run in Russia.

That seemed plausible when England recovered from conceding their first goal of the tournament to beat Denmark 2-1 in the Euro semi-finals on Wednesday. But four days later, England reverted to type, with the nerves and fear of 55 years without a major trophy appearing to paralyse them as Italy pressed for an equalizer. "They just sat back a little bit

in the last five or 10 minutes of that first half. Remember Croatia in 2018? They sat back and got pushed back," former England defender Gary Neville said as the hosts faded.

Hangover for the ages

While Italy boss Roberto Mancini forced the momentum in his side's favor by sending on Bryan Cristante and Domenico Berardi, Southgate kept his powder dry until it was too late. It proved a fatal mistake as Bonucci poked in Italy's 67th-minute equalizer after Marco Verratti's header was pushed out by Jordan Pickford.

Southgate could have no complaints as Italy were well on top by that point. Only after Bonucci stood triumphantly on top of an advertising board to celebrate did Southgate react. Introducing Saka and Jordan Henderson gave England a measure of control to force extra time. But, just like their agonizing loss to Croatia at the World Cup, England had run out of steam. "They need one or two more changes, more energy in the team," former Manchester United star Roy Keane said. Southgate finally brought on his maverick midfielder Jack Grealish.—AFP

Coach tells England players to bounce back

LONDON: Gareth Southgate urged England to use the pain of their Euro 2020 final defeat against Italy to fuel success in the future as the Three Lions boss accepted the blame for their heartbreaking penalty shoot-out defeat. England failed to win their first major title since the 1966 World Cup as Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka all missed penalties at Wembley on Sunday.

Southgate's side had made a dream start thanks to Luke Shaw's second-minute goal, but Italy showed their class to hit back through Leonardo Bonucci's second-half equalizer. When it came to penalties, Southgate gambled by sending on late substitutes Rashford and Sancho specifically for their prowess from the spot. The move backfired as England suffered the latest in a long line of bitter shoot-out defeats at major tournaments.

"That is my responsibility. I chose the guys to take the kicks. I told the players that nobody is on their own in that situation," Southgate said. "It is my decision to give Saka that penalty. That is totally my responsibility. It is not him or Marcus or Jadon. Marcus and Jadon

have been by far the best in the lead-in. It was a gamble (to bring them on), but if we gamble earlier we maybe lose the game in extra time."

England had actually won their last two penalty shoot-outs against Colombia at the 2018 World Cup and against Switzerland in the 2019 Nations League. But even those successes weren't enough to keep Southgate's players from losing their nerve when the stakes were highest. With over 60,000 fans roaring them on and millions more watching at home, sporting immortality beckoned for England if they had won the shoot-out.

'Incredible memories'

Jordan Pickford did his part with two saves and Southgate insisted he had no regrets about his picks for the penalty takers. "We've tracked them, what they've done with their clubs over a long period of time and what they've shown in training as well," Southgate said. "That's the process that worked for us in Russia and in the Nations League. Tonight it didn't quite work."

Southgate admitted his side's lack of composure on the ball proved fatal as they allowed Italy to regain their composure following Shaw's opener. "We did start well. They were bound to have a spell where they came into the game," Southgate said. "We didn't keep the ball well enough in that initial period in the second half. It was our lack of composure in possession that turned the game. The way they used the ball was better than us."—AFP



LONDON: Italy players applaud as England's forward Harry Kane (center) walks between them after Italy won the Euro 2020 final football match between Italy and England at the Wembley Stadium in London on Sunday. — AFP

'Worst feeling in the world': Kane

LONDON: England captain Harry Kane admitted his side's penalty shoot-out defeat in the Euro 2020 final against Italy on Sunday was "the worst feeling in the world". Along with Harry Maguire, Kane was one of only two England players to score from the spot as Italy won the shoot-out 3-2 after a 1-1 draw following extra time at Wembley. Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka all missed their penalties, leaving England to rue a wasted opportunity to win their first major trophy since the 1966 World Cup. "Penalties is the worst feeling in the world when you lose," Kane told ITV. "Anyone can miss a penalty. Penalties is penalties. We went through a process. The boys did everything they could, it just wasn't our night."

Luke Shaw had given England a dream start when he scored in the second minute. But the fastest goal in

Euro final history couldn't inspire England to victory as they gradually allowed Italy back into the match. Leonardo Bonucci equalized in the second half, setting the stage for England's latest penalty horror after decades of past shoot-out defeats.

Tottenham striker Kane conceded England had played into Italy's hands by adopting a cautious approach in a failed bid to preserve their lead. "We were playing against a very good side. We got off to the perfect start. Maybe dropped a little too deep sometimes. They had a lot of the ball," Kane said. "We looked fairly in control, they didn't create too many chances. They got their breakthrough from the set-piece and after that was 50-50."

After reaching their first European Championship final in an uplifting run to their first major title match since the 1966 World Cup, Kane insisted England would bounce back from the agonizing loss. "We win together, we lose together. We'll learn and grow from it. Those boys will grow from it and it will give us more motivation for the World Cup next year," he said. "You've got to hold your heads high. It's been a fantastic tournament." — AFP



LONDON: England's players react to their defeat in the Euro 2020 final football match against Italy at the Wembley Stadium in London on Sunday. — AFP

English fan frenzy turns to misery after Euro 2020 final

LONDON: England descended into despair late Sunday, as the football-mad country lost after reaching its first major tournament final in over half a century — once again falling short of glory in a penalty shootout. Fans inside London's Wembley Stadium and in packed out venues across the country were left in misery after England's hunt for its first top trophy since 1966 ended in bitter disappointment.

"I'm feeling pretty gutted," Louis Adams, 22, told AFP from an east London pub as the victorious Italians celebrated on-screen. "It was the first chance we had in ages. But it's sport, even if it's disappointing, the players didn't disappoint me at all, they were great," he said, before adding: "I'm gonna get drunk and go home."

Raucous supporters had roared the team on from inside Wembley and at fan zones, pubs, restaurants and living rooms nationwide following a day of frenzied anticipation. However, the country's hosting of the Euro 2020 final was marred by scenes of violence in the British capital, after hundreds of fans tried to storm into the stadium and "a small number" managed to gain entry.

Security officials reportedly tackled some intruders to the ground inside the venue, while footage shared on social media showed supporters fighting each other on concourses within the ground. Earlier, drunken fans outside had thrown projectiles — including rucksacks, flares, cans and traffic cones — through the air and chanted aggressively at rival supporters.

London's Metropolitan Police said officers made 45 arrests while managing the final. "A number of officers remain on duty, helping fans leaving #Wembley or central London. We are there to look out for your safety," the force said on Twitter.

Not to be missed

Long before the heartbreak, tens of thousands of supporters — many draped in red and white English flags — had packed the famous approach to Wembley,

singing songs, drinking beer and savoring the momentous occasion. Mark Bennett, 40, who owns a restaurant in southwest England, was there with his son after forking out £2,700 (\$3,800, 3,120 euros) on two tickets for the historic game. "I want my son to experience the atmosphere... it was not something I wanted to miss," he told AFP, confiding his son would be missing school yesterday.

The team — nicknamed the Three Lions — have not won a major competition since the 1966 World Cup, and ending the 55-year wait would have represented a cathartic moment for the nation. In a sign of the enormity of the occasion for expectant England fans, many began converging on their chosen venues to watch the game in towns and cities across the country from early Sunday morning. Pictures posted on social media showed long lines of people queuing to get into pubs from south London to Northern England. Drunken supporters gathered en masse in Leicester Square and at several major railway stations, but as the day dragged on there were chaotic scenes there too.

Police reported "multiple cases" of flares being set off

inside London stations and people "jumping off street lamps and hoardings", risking injury. Around 1,500 people who won tickets via a ballot watched the game on a big screen in Trafalgar Square, where the atmosphere soon soured after full-time. Disgruntled fans could be seen smashing bottles and overturning bins in the street, kicking and smashing fencing while some swore and acted aggressively towards one another.

'Put the game to bed'

At the Howl to the Moon pub in east London, 24-year-old Francesca was among those left crest-fallen. "Before the penalties, it was looking like football was coming home but well, England is not good at penalties," she said. "We need to celebrate something after this horrible year of COVID."

Fellow despondent drinker Loren Heer, 32, felt the best team did not necessarily prevail after more than 120 minutes of the final. "Italy didn't deserve it," she told AFP. "It was a very equal game for two hours, but England had the opportunity to put the game to bed, but they didn't put the game to bed." — AFP



LONDON: England fans watch the match on a phone outside Wembley Stadium during the Euro 2020 final football match between England and Italy in northwest London on Sunday. — AFP

Euro 2020 experiment proves a hit on the pitch, less so off it

LONDON: It began with Italian celebrations in Rome and ended with Italian celebrations at Wembley. This European Championship finally concluded with Italy's penalty shoot-out win over England, a year after the tournament was postponed due to the health crisis.

The incidents when ticketless fans tried to break through ticket barriers at Wembley, leading to violent scenes, may have tarnished Sunday's final in London. But overall Euro 2020 was an uplifting tournament for the football on the pitch and it marked the return of spectators on a large scale for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic. The intervening 12 months since the tournament was postponed saw football played almost entirely behind closed doors — contrast that with the official crowd of 67,173 at the final, and more without tickets who stormed their way into the stadium. Organizers will have questions to answer about why more was not done to control the crowds, especially with virus cases in the United Kingdom surging.

Euro 2020 was an experiment, a major tournament held for the first time all across Europe, with 11 host cities as far apart as Seville and Baku. That led to enormous variations on the number of spectators at games, from the crowds in London and the full houses in Budapest to sparse attendances elsewhere, in Azerbaijan and Glasgow, as supporters found it almost impossible to travel to certain countries.

The different travel demands on teams was similarly unequal. While England played all but one game at home, Wales played twice in Azerbaijan and were deprived of supporters for their last-16 defeat by Denmark in Amsterdam due to restrictions imposed by the Dutch government. "Written off before a bag of air was kicked, 3,000 miles from home," Wales defender Chris Gunter said, criticizing the "joke set-up of a tournament". The idea for a pan-European tournament was the brainchild of ex-UEFA president Michel Platini and will not be repeated, with Germany alone hosting the next edition in 2024. —AFP