

Australia, Nigeria surge into World Cup last 16

Co-hosts destroy Canada 4-0; Japan thrash Spain



MELBOURNE: Australia's defender #07 Stephanie Catley (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring her team's fourth goal from the penalty kick during the Australia and New Zealand 2023 Women's World Cup Group B football match between Canada and Australia on July 31, 2023. — AFP

MELBOURNE: Co-hosts Australia surged into the Women's World Cup last 16 on Monday with Hayley Raso scoring twice in a 4-0 battering of Canada as Nigeria joined them in the knockout phase. Olympic champions Canada were knocked out at the hands of a fired-up Australian team who knew they had to win in Melbourne to progress. They did it in style, their big victory putting them through as Group B winners, meaning they will probably avoid European champions England in the next round.

That is likely to fall on Nigeria, who were held 0-0 by already-eliminated Ireland in Brisbane and finished second. Tony Gustavsson's Australian team came into the clash with Canada under huge pressure following a stunning 3-2 loss to Nigeria that left their tournament hopes on a knife-edge. But rather than wilt, the Matildas thrived, to the delight of a raucous 27,706 fans who were kicking every ball.

Star striker Sam Kerr, who missed Australia's first two games with a calf injury, declared herself fit but

remained on the bench as her team-mates more than compensated for her absence. Real Madrid's Raso put them ahead in the ninth minute, then made it two half an hour later with a close-range tap-in. A shell-shocked Canada made four changes at half-time as coach Bev Priestman attempt to salvage their World Cup. But the comeback never materialized and Mary Fowler bagged Australia's third from a counter-attack before Steph Catley sealed victory with an injury-time penalty.

Japan thrash Spain

Earlier, Japan sent a World Cup warning with a clinical 4-0 thrashing of Spain. The 2011 champions Japan were 3-0 up by half-time in Wellington as they romped to a victory that allowed them to finish top of Group C and set up a last-16 tie against Norway. Hinata Miyazawa scored twice either side of a Riko Ueki goal, with Mina Tanaka wrapping up a stunning win late on. Their first victory in five attempts over

Spain was so comprehensive it suggests 11th-ranked Japan may be contenders to win the tournament. They finish the group stage with 11 goals, more than any other team, while they are yet to concede.

Miyazawa, who was substituted at half-time, is also now the tournament's leading scorer with four goals. "I never imagined it. All of the goals are because of the other players giving me the right passes. So it's everybody's goal, not just me," she said. Spain, who like Japan had already qualified for the last 16 before this game, finish as runners-up in their group and now play Switzerland in Auckland on Saturday. In the other Group C game, Zambia won a Women's World Cup match for the first time with a 3-1 victory over Costa Rica as they ended their tournament on a high.

US, England next

On Tuesday the United States and England will look to seal their last-16 spots. The Americans are

pursuing a third World Cup title in a row but have been far from their best and were held 1-1 by the Netherlands last time out. The USA may need a big win to finish on top of Group E ahead of the Netherlands, but a shock defeat would almost certainly end their tournament. "The most important thing obviously is getting in the knockout stage first and foremost and that is our main focus right now," said their coach, Vlatko Andonovski.

"We don't want to look two, three or four steps forward. If we start thinking too far ahead, our chance may never come." The Dutch face already-eliminated Vietnam in the other match in the group. Also on Tuesday, England only need a draw against China to be sure of going through but will be without key midfielder Keira Walsh due to a knee injury. Denmark, who are in pole position to get out of Group D with England, face Haiti. If England top the group they will face Nigeria while the team that comes second in Group D meets Australia. — AFP

Dortmund down sloppy Man Utd in Vegas friendly

LAS VEGAS: Borussia Dortmund punished Manchester United's defensive lapses on Sunday as the English Premier League giants wrapped up their North American tour with a 3-2 defeat to the Bundesliga side in Las Vegas. A second-half strike by Dortmund substitute Youssoufa Moukoko proved the difference in an entertaining clash at the Allegiant Stadium, home of the NFL's Las Vegas Raiders. United manager Erik ten Hag named a virtual reserve team to start, leaving the likes of Marcus Rashford, Bruno Fernandes and new signing Mason Mount on the bench.

Yet United's makeshift starting XI were more than a match for Dortmund in the first half, dominating for long periods before Diogo Dalot handed the Red Devils the lead on 24 minutes with a long-range strike. But Dortmund turned the game on its head in the closing minutes of the first half, with two goals in a minute from Netherlands international forward Donyell Malen. The first came when United's defense failed to close down Karim Adeyemi's burst down the right.

Despite the attention of a cluster of United defenders, Adeyemi was able to square for Malen, who hooked in from close range. Malen grabbed his second a minute later, this time seizing on a United howler when Victor Lindelof lost possession inside the area trying to pass out from the back. United were lucky not to go 3-1 down in the opening minutes of the second half, when another defensive slip, this time by Harry Maguire, allowed Sebastien Haller a shot on goal.

United goalkeeper Andre Onana saved and then

watched in relief as Adeyemi blasted the follow-up wide with the goal gaping. United did get back on level terms in the 52nd minute, when Brazilian forward Antony swept home a low shot from inside the area after a botched clearance by Dortmund veteran Mats Hummels. Ten Hag rang in the changes with 30 minutes remaining, with Rashford instantly providing more of an attacking threat. But it was Dortmund who scored the decisive goal, with veteran Marco Reus working a clever opening to set up Moukoko for the winner. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Salih Ozcan #6 of Borussia Dortmund and Marcus Rashford #10 of Manchester United battle for the ball during the pre-season friendly match at Allegiant Stadium on July 30, 2023. — AFP

Australian swim stars, Marchand lay down Olympic marker

FUKUOKA: Leon Marchand's performances at swimming's world championships gave a tantalizing glimpse of what he could achieve at next year's Paris Olympics, while Australia's stars will also be confident after an impressive display. French sensation Marchand was irresistible in Fukuoka, winning three gold medals and breaking Michael Phelps' long-standing 400m individual medley world record. The 21-year-old cut a relaxed figure in and out of the pool, rarely looking flustered. The Paris Olympics will be a different matter, with the expectations of the host nation cranked up to potentially overwhelming levels.

Marchand said he was "super-happy" with what he achieved in Japan, where he was named the competition's top men's swimmer. "It's not perfect, there are always things to improve," he said. "But I'm super-satisfied with what I've done this year." Australia's Kaylee McKeown took the women's MVP award after sweeping all three backstroke events. She was one of several outstanding performers in an Australian team that tied their best world championships tally of 13 golds to top the medal table for the first time since 2001.

McKeown said the prize was a reward for "how well we've done as a collective as an Australian team". "For me, as proud as I am, I feel like I should have shared that with my teammates," she said. Australia's Mollie O'Callaghan became the first woman ever to complete a 100m-200m freestyle world double, and won five gold medals overall. The 19-year-old also played a part in four world records both individually and as a team, including setting a new mark in the women's 200m freestyle.



FUKUOKA: France's Leon Marchand competes in the final of the men's 4x100m medley relay swimming event during the World Aquatics Championships. — AFP

Another Australian, Ariarne Titmus, won an epic women's 400m freestyle final, outduelling American Katie Ledecky and Canadian Summer McIntosh in a world-record time. Ledecky dusted herself down and went on to claim gold in both the 800m and 1500m freestyle, cementing her status as the most decorated woman in world championships history. The 26-year-old has said she wants to compete at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics and she is likely to be a force at the Paris Games before then.

Ledecky's performances helped lift an American team that only really came alive late in the competition. Ledecky believes young Americans like men's 50m and 100m freestyle silver medallist Jack Alexy will learn from the experience. "It's a really young team - the things I'm hearing at the lunch table, dinner table, people are learning a lot," said Ledecky. "We want to be better next year in Paris so I think we'll continue to encourage each other." China enjoyed a more successful world championships than last year in Budapest, where they won only one individual gold. — AFP