

Iranian archer Esmail Ebadi won the men's compound silver medal at the 2018 Asia Cup-World Ranking Tournament, Stage III in Chinese Taipei.

France peaking perfectly, heads into World Cup final



France's Olivier Giroud (L) kisses Samuel Umtiti on the head celebrating the winner against Belgium at the 2018 World Cup semifinal in Saint Petersburg Stadium in Saint Petersburg, Russia, on July 10, 2018.

Should France go on to win the World Cup on Sunday, it would have peaked perfectly after starting the tournament in Russia slowly but gaining momentum when it mattered most.

Tournament experience has been key for both the players and coach Didier Deschamps, who has learnt lessons from the last World Cup in Brazil, where France lost to Germany in the quarterfinal, and the disappointment of missing out on home soil in the European Championship two years ago, Reuters reported.

No more so than on Tuesday as the Frenchmen edged Belgium in the semifinal to put themselves within one game of a second World Cup win, 20 years after their first.

While there were questions asked after a far-from-inspiring start, which included a controversial win over Australia and narrowly beating Peru, France still expectedly secured a knockout round spot early from a first round group where Les Bleus were heavy favorites. They have looked better in each game.

There were, however, no easy rides in the knockout stages where the French had to show its full capability

in beating Argentina, Uruguay and then Belgium 1-0 in Tuesday's semifinal at Saint Petersburg.

"We have prepared well, I can brag a little about that," laughed Deschamps after securing a place in Sunday's final in Moscow.

"The older players all played their role as leaders and the youngsters brought their energy. I have a squad with a good blend. They have cohabited happily together.

"No one complains and they all realize the importance of the competition. When there was an opportunity to be seized, they took it."

There have been many positive aspects to their game. A lack of panic when they were 2-1 down against Argentina in the last-16 before coming back to win a thriller 4-3, and patience in breaking down stubborn Uruguay in the quarterfinals.

Against Belgium on Tuesday, France was watchful and disciplined.

"We have to give a lot of credit to the way France defended, even having certain attacking players depending very deep and giving us a lot of respect in that way," said opposing coach Roberto Martinez.

Deschamps, who captained France's

only World Cup winning side in 1998, said the march to Sunday's final has been underpinned by a steely determination.

"There is a spirit in the squad that can move mountains," he said.

"They are young and they will be even stronger in two and four years' time."

'At gates of paradise'

France's march into the World Cup final dominated the nation's headlines on Wednesday, with many already predicting a second title for "Les Bleus" in Moscow, AFP reported.

"The Blue Dream Continues" wrote Le Figaro after a night of celebrations by fans who poured into the streets after the win over Belgium, watched by 19 million according to French broadcaster TF1.

"Didier Deschamps is still on track to join Brazilian legend Mario Zagallo and Germany's Franz Beckenbauer, the only two heroes who have reigned over planet football as both player and coach," the broadsheet wrote.

"Les Bleus grabbed the Devils by the tail in a spectacular match," wrote Le Parisien, confident the team is already

"at the gates of paradise".

"There's no Zinedine Zidane but a bunch of great players surrounded by good players. It's more of a team, a collective instead of a group gathered around a genius."

Sports daily L'Equipe, hailing the team's "spectacular mastery of the ball and strategy, also said a second "star" was in reach.

"A second star which would propel them into another galaxy, that of repeat world champions, alongside Italy, Uruguay, Brazil, Germany and Argentina," it said.

Papers also lavished praise on Samuel Umtiti, a player more used to blocking goals than scoring the one that knocked Belgium out of the running on Tuesday.

"It's a player who's injured, getting treatment every day since he landed in Russia, who has opened the doors to the finals," wrote Liberation.

President Emmanuel Macron, who attended Tuesday's match, plans to return to Russia for the final with his wife Brigitte on Sunday, his office told AFP on Wednesday.

"We're in the final. Rendez-vous Sunday to bring it home," the president, a football lover, tweeted.



Ronaldo steals headlines, seals Juve move

Real Madrid confirmed Cristiano Ronaldo will leave the club to join Juventus.

The Serie A champion swooped to sign the Portugal captain after he indicated that he was considering leaving Madrid after the Champions League final win in May, goal.com reported.

On Tuesday, Juventus president Andrea Agnelli flew from Pisa to Greece to meet Ronaldo, who is on holiday in Kalamata, and his agent Jorge Mendes arrived from England later on to join them.

Ronaldo is said to have agreed a four-year contract that will see him pocket €30 million (£26.5m/\$35m) per season and Madrid has since confirmed that it have allowed him to make the move to Turin in a transfer that will cost €100 million (\$88m/\$117m) plus €2million (£1.5/\$14m) in additional charges.

"Beyond the conquered titles, the trophies achieved and the triumphs achieved in the playing fields during these 9 years, Cristiano Ronaldo has been an example of dedication, work responsibility, talent and improvement... For Real Madrid, Cristiano Ronaldo will always be one of the great symbols and a unique reference for the next generations.

"Real Madrid will always be your home."

Ronaldo, a five-time Ballon d'Or winner, will now have the chance to win a European league title with a third club after completing a shock move to Turin.

Madrid, meanwhile, has already denied making bids for Paris Saint-Germain duo Neymar and Kylian Mbappe as the Spaniards prepare for the 2018-19 season under new coach Julen Lopetegui.

The former Spain coach takes



Juventus supporters with newly purchased Cristiano Ronaldo shirts in Turin, Italy, on July 10, 2018.

"Real Madrid CF communicates that, in response to the will and request expressed by the player Cristiano Ronaldo, he has agreed to transfer to Juventus FC."

The announcement was followed by an open letter from Ronaldo, in which he thanked fans for their "love and affection" during his time there.

Ronaldo, 33, reached global superstar status after becoming the world's most expensive player when he joined Madrid from Manchester United in 2009.

During his nine-year spell at the Santiago Bernabeu, Ronaldo won 15 trophies, including two La Liga titles and two Copa del Rey crowns.

He helped Madrid to La Decima in the Champions League final with Atletico Madrid in 2014 and played a crucial role in Los Blancos winning the competition in each of the last three seasons.

And the Santiago Bernabeu club thanked the star for all he had done during his time there, adding to its statement, "Real Madrid wants to express its gratitude to a player who has proved to be the best in the world and who has marked one of the brightest times in the history of our club and world football.

over from Zinedine Zidane after the Frenchman surprisingly decided to resign after Madrid beat Liverpool in Kiev.

'Ciao Cristiano'

Spain's Marca produced one of the most striking pages, documenting each one of Ronaldo's goals for Madrid with the club badges of who scored against, and labeling him "the legend of 451 goals", the FourFourTwo magazine reported.

AS were similarly effusive in their praise of Ronaldo and went with, "Ciao, Cristiano. It was great while it lasted."

Perhaps the mood was best summed up by Sport, who had the headline "Shock Cristiano".

Mundo Deportivo mocked up an image of Ronaldo in a Juventus shirt, merely writing "CR Seven" with a description of the move.

In Italy, La Gazzetta dello Sport succinctly wrapped up the excitement in the Italian media over Ronaldo's arrival with their "Arrivo!" headline.

And Tuttosport also went for a simple, yet elegantly excitable, header merely writing, "Here!"

Serena Williams battles back for Wimbledon semi spot

Serena Williams survived a scare to reach the Wimbledon semifinals with a comeback victory over hard-hitting Italian Camila Giorgi.

The 23-time Grand Slam champion dropped her first set of the championships but came through 3-6, 6-3, 6-4, BBC Sport reported.

Giorgi, the world number 52, produced the type of power normally associated with her opponent – but the American then found an extra gear.

Williams faces German 13th seed Julia Gorges in today's semifinals. Before the match, Giorgi had raised eyebrows when, asked about her impression of Williams over the years, she said, "I don't follow women's tennis."

And she certainly played as if undaunted by the reputation and titles of her opponent.

Giorgi's serve was straight out of the Williams book of power. She delivered three aces to the American's one in the first set and won 84 percent of points on her first serve.

It is not often you see Williams scrambling to return a serve or nearly knocked off her feet by the force of a



Serena Williams celebrates her quarterfinals victory over Italy's Camila Giorgi at Wimbledon in London, Britain, on July 10, 2018.

near 120mph delivery – it is more often her dishing that up – but she was given a taste of her own medicine by the fearless Giorgi.

The Italian's average serve speed in each set was higher than Williams', although the American recorded the fast-

est of the match at 122mph.

With the top 10 seeds making early exits, she has yet to face a player ranked in the top 50. Against Giorgi, she answered any lingering doubts about what might happen if she faced a stiff test – showing she still has the stamina, spirit

and shots to carry on collecting Grand Slam titles.

"I feel good, I feel like I did better today, I had to," she told BBC Sport.

"This is only my fourth tournament back so I don't feel pressure, I don't feel I have to win this. I still have a long way to go to be where I was."

The American could become the fourth mum to win a major, after Belgium's Kim Clijsters and Australians Evonne Goolagong Cawley and Margaret Court.

Victory would draw her level with Court's record of 24 Grand Slam crowns.

She will go into the record books as the lowest ranked player – at 181st – to reach a women's semifinal at Wimbledon; yet having dominated the game for so long, she is carrying on where she left off before her maternity break.

Also through to the last four are German 11th seed Angelique Kerber, who beat Russian Daria Kasatkina 6-3, 7-5 and Latvian 12th seed Jelena Ostapenko, who overcame Slovak Dominika Cibulkova 7-5, 6-4.