England ready to grasp shot at ‘history’ in Euros semi-final against the Dutch

AFP- England manager Gareth Southgate said the Three Lions are sensing their shot at history in Wednesday’s Euro 2024 semi-final against a Netherlands side hitting their stride in Dortmund.

Southgate’s men are aiming to reach the final of a major tournament on foreign soil for the first time and take a step closer to ending a 58-year wait to win a major tournament.

The winners will face Spain in Berlin on Sunday after they came from behind to beat France 2-1 on Tuesday.

England missed out in heartbreaking fashion in the final of Euro 2020, losing on penalties at Wembley to Italy.

Captain Harry Kane said reaching back-to-back finals would be an “amazing achievement” as he aims to win a first major trophy of his career.

But Kane has been singled out for criticism back home for his sluggish displays in Germany, where he now plays his club football for Bayern Munich.

The 30-year-old has scored two of England’s five goals at the tournament but has looked physically restricted after missing the end of the club season with a back injury.

Kane’s lacklustre performances have been symptomatic of England’s struggles as a team.

Twice they have stared down a humiliating early exit only to fight back against Slovakia and Switzerland thanks to individual moments of magic from Jude Bellingham and Bukayo

Saka.

England arrived in Germany as one of the favourites thanks to a richly-talented squad and an upturn in their fortunes under Southgate.

And he believes his players struggled to cope with that expectation early in the tournament.

“One of our strengths over the last eight years has been less fear, less inhibition but at the beginning the expectation weighed heavily,” said Southgate at his pre-match press conference on Tuesday.

“Now we are into that moment in the tournament where it is what is possible? What is achievable? Rather than, what could go wrong?

“That is different for a player. This is now the chance to make history, first time to make a final not held in England.”

The selection of referee Felix Zwayer has raised eyebrows after Bellingham was fined during his time at Borussia Dortmund for bringing up a historic charge of match fixing against the German.

Zwayer was handed a six-month ban in 2006 after he was investigated for taking a bribe from another official.

Bellingham was fined 40,000 euros ($43,000) for his outburst after Bayern Munich beat Dortmund in December 2021.

– Dutch face travel chaos –

The Netherlands also had their troubles in the group stages as a 3-2 defeat to Austria saw them sneak through as one of the best third-placed sides.

Ronald Koeman’s men have since found their groove in a 3-0 win over Romania in the last 16 before battling back to beat

Turkey 2-1 in the last eight.

The Dutch boast one of the form attacking players in the tournament in Cody Gakpo, who is looking to move out in front in the race for the Golden Boot by adding to his three goals so far.

They have had to wait 36 years since their own sole major tournament triumph – which came the last time the Euros were held in Germany.

But their preparations for the game were disrupted by issues with the German train system, which has caused chaos for fans throughout the tournament.

The Netherlands had planned to go from their base in Wolfsburg by rail to Dortmund.

However, a blockage on the line meant a last-minute change of plans as they instead had to fly and missed their pre-match media duties as a result.

“We don’t play until 9 pm (1900GMT) tomorrow. I’m sure they will still get dinner when they arrive,” added Southgate.

“They’ve got plenty of time. I don’t see it having any impact on the game.”

AFP