

SPORTS
sports

Spain coach backs David De Gea

Hierro tells critics to give the Spanish goalkeeper 'time and oxygen'

Reuters | Krasnodar, Russia

Spain's under-pressure goalkeeper David de Gea has the backing of coach Fernando Hierro, who said he will stick by him for his side's next game against Iran on Wednesday despite his performance in the 3-3 draw with Portugal.

The Manchester United keeper let a tame shot from Cristiano Ronaldo through his arms for Portugal's second goal on Friday and has been criticised in Spain for his badly positioned defensive wall when Ronaldo struck the late equaliser.

"We have our full confidence in him, I know very clearly from experience that footballers need to feel confidence, not just in the good times," Spain's interim coach Hierro told reporters on Monday at the team's base in Krasnodar.

De Gea has repeatedly got his club out of jail and was voted player of the year at United last season. But he has made costly errors in three of his last four outings for Spain, also letting in



Spain's David De Gea before the match

cheap goals against Switzerland and Argentina.

"He's had difficult moments but you can get over everything with time. Goalkeepers have a special psychology, and sometimes action-reaction is not enough. De Gea needs time and oxygen," added Hierro.

"All players need confidence and I'm going to give that to them. De Gea has taken everything naturally, we have to

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FERNANDO HIERRO

get used to debate because it's part of the job. No-one has given him anything for free, and we need to be fair with him."

Midfielder Isco also gave his

backing to Spain's number one, who for now is fending off competition from Athletic Bilbao's Kepa Arrizabalaga and veteran keeper Pepe Reina.

"De Gea is one of the best in the world, he knows how to react, and we are showing him a lot of love," Isco said.

"We have to help him because he helps us a lot, and that's what this group is all about."

A former Spain defender and until last week the Spanish football federation's director of football, Hierro has been catapulted into the unexpected position of head coach after Julen Lopetegui was sensationally sacked last Wednesday for negotiating a move to Real Madrid on the eve of the tournament.

"I came here in a suit and I'm going to return in a tracksuit," added Hierro.

"I was the sporting director but things are how they are, and in football things like this happen. Due to these circumstances I have a fantastic challenge, a challenge I'm working on all day every day."

Messi's penalty miss not to blame for draw with Iceland, says Maradona

Reuters | Moscow

Diego Maradona says Lionel Messi's second-half penalty miss was not the reason Argentina failed to defeat Iceland at the World Cup on Saturday.

Messi saw his spot kick saved by goalkeeper Hannes Por Halldorsson after Alfred Finnbogason had cancelled out Sergio Aguero's 19th minute opener.

"I don't blame the players," Maradona told Venezuelan television channel Telesur.

"I could blame the lack of work rate. But I can't blame the players, much less Messi, who gave it all he had.

"I missed five penalties on



Argentina's Lionel Messi reacts after the match

24
penalties have been missed by Messi out of 103 he has taken

the spin and I was still Diego Armando Maradona. I don't think that they dropped two points because Messi missed a penalty."

Argentina take on Croatia on Thursday before their final group game against Nigeria next week.

Lions leave Windies on survival mode

ESPN Cricinfo | St Lucia

Seamers helped Sri Lanka strides toward a series-leveling victory, after Shannon Gabriel had completed an exceptional match haul of 13 for 121 early in the day. At lunch, Sri Lanka needed seven further wickets (six, if Shai Hope, who retired hurt, doesn't bat again), with 69 overs left in which to get them. West Indies required 241 more runs, having been set 296.

At the crease for the hosts, though, were Shane Dowrich - one of the form batsmen of



Roshen Silva of Sri Lanka in action

the series so far - and Kraigg Brathwaite, who can sometimes be immovable when he gets set. The outcome of this Test may hinge on their partnership.

With quicks having been penetrative with the new ball right through this Test, the first 20 overs of West Indies' innings was always going to be crucial to their hopes. But they didn't resist for long.

scorecard

West Indies 300 (Smith 61, Kumara 4-86) and 55 for 3 (Brathwaite 32*, Dowrich 0*) trail Sri Lanka 253 and 342 (Mendis 87, Dickwella 62, Gabriel 8-62) by 241 runs

North, South Korea agree to joint teams for Asian Games

Reuters | Seoul

The two Koreas agreed yesterday to march together under a unified peninsula flag and form combined teams to compete in the next Asian Games, they said in a joint statement, in the latest sign of a thaw between the old rivals.

Both sides also agreed at a round of talks on their heavily fortified border to hold a

series of basketball matches in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang on July 3-6, marking the anniversary of a July 4, 1972, inter-Korean agreement on unification, they said.

The agreement comes amid a range of talks as part of efforts to promote reconciliation, including opening military hotlines and arranging reunions for families of Koreans divided by the 1950-53 Korean War.

Wawrinka eases to opening win at Queen's

Reuters | London

Three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka made light work of Britain's Cameron Norrie in the opening round of the Queen's Club grasscourt tournament yesterday, winning 6-2 6-3.

The 33-year-old Swiss, ranked 261 in the world after two knee surgeries, served solidly throughout a one-sided contest on the slick centre court, easing past an opponent who struggled to cope with Wawrinka's power.

Wawrinka needed just shy



Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka celebrates winning first round match against Great Britain's Cameron Norrie

of half an hour to pocket the opener, breaking twice, and was hardly troubled in the second set as he set up a second round against American fifth seed Sam Querrey or young British wildcard Jay Clarke.

"In general (the knee) has been improving week after week," Wawrinka, beaten in the first round of the French Open, said on court. "Now I feel really good on court, strong physically."

"I will have ups and downs in the next months and need to be patient. You need to be ready to accept frustrating but today was

a great day."

Luxembourg's Gilles Mulder, the man who ended Rafael Nadal's run at Wimbledon last year after reaching Queen's semi-final, had earlier knocked out Canadian shot-maker Denis Shapovalov in two tiebreaks.

Top seed Marin Cilic of Croatia was in action later against Spain's Fernando Verdasco.

Double Wimbledon champion Andy Murray makes his return after nearly a year out with a hip injury on Tuesday when he will face Australian Nick Kyrgios in the first round.

Murray must overcome mental challenge after injury: Djokovic

Reuters | London

Former world number one Novak Djokovic says overcoming the mental challenge will be Andy Murray's biggest obstacle when he returns to tennis after a long-term hip injury.

Murray, who has been sidelined for almost a year since losing in the quarter-finals at Wimbledon last July, will face Australia's Nick Kyrgios in the first round at the Queen's Club tournament on Tuesday.

"... I think the biggest challenge will always be mental," Djokovic, who is trying to recapture top form after undergoing elbow surgery earlier this year, told British media.

"How to get it out of your head, understand that it's behind you, that you're fine now, that you're healthy and you can focus on your game rather than

thinking 50 percent of the time about whether or not something can happen."

The 12-time Grand Slam champion also said grass might not be the ideal surface for Murray to make his return.

"I don't know the state of his hips," said Djokovic. "But the one thing that could be a bit



From the age of 11, Murray has been learning professional tennis. He won his first award at age 12.



Andy Murray

dangerous is slipping on the grass. That's something that is very unpredictable and grass is always this kind of surface where one wrong footing can make something go wrong, especially in the hips."

Open champion Koepka rises to world No. 4

AFP | Paris

Newly-crowned 2018 US Open champion Brooks Koepka climbed to a career-high world ranking of fourth on Monday, after successfully defending his title at Shinnecock Hills with a one-shot victory.

The 28-year-old American, who has missed much of the season with a wrist injury, jumped five spots from ninth in the rankings, while also gaining valuable Ryder Cup points.

Koepka's rise saw Jordan Spieth, Rory McIlroy and Jon Rahm, who all missed the cut last week, drop a place.

England's Tommy Fleetwood moved into the top 10 after becoming only the second man in US Open history to fire a final-round 63 as he finished second on Sunday.