

Sports

'Never apologize for who I am', says Rashford after racist abuse

LONDON: England's Marcus Rashford said he will "never apologize for who I am" in an emotional statement after receiving racist abuse following the side's Euro 2020 final defeat. The Manchester United forward was one of three players, along with Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka, who were attacked by racist trolls after missing penalties in Sunday's 3-2 shoot-out defeat by Italy.

Rashford's England team-mate Tyrone Mings criticized British Home Secretary Priti Patel, saying she had "stoked the fire" by defending those who booed players taking the knee. Rashford has become a hero to many outside football by lobbying the British government to provide free school meals for underprivileged children during the coronavirus pandemic.

"I'm Marcus Rashford, 23-year-old black man from Withington and Wythenshawe, South Manchester. If I have nothing else I have that," Rashford wrote in a statement on Twitter. Rashford, who came on late in the second period of extra time, apologized for his penalty miss and said "something didn't feel quite right" when he came to take the kick.

"It's been playing in my head over and

over since I struck the ball and there's probably not a word to quite describe how it feels. Final. 55 years. 1 penalty. History. All I can say is sorry. I wish it had gone differently," he wrote.

"I can take critique of my performance all day long, my penalty was not good enough, it should have gone in but I will never apologize for who I am and where I came from," Rashford added.

'Stoke the fire'

Images on social media showed a mural honoring Rashford in his hometown of Withington had been defaced before locals covered the hateful language with messages of support. "Seeing the response in Withington had me on the verge of tears," Rashford said.

He added that he was proud to have worn the England jersey during his side's first major final appearance in 55 years, and grateful for the "brotherhood" that was created in the England camp. Mings criticism is not the first time he has disagreed with Patel.

The Aston Villa star criticized her — after the opening Euro 2020 win over Croatia — for her remarks that taking the knee was "gesture politics". She also refused to condemn the England fans

who booed the team for doing it.

Premier League teams have taken the knee since last year following the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer in the United States. Patel had said on Monday the racial abuse of the three players was "disgusting" but it did not wash with Mings.

"You don't get to stoke the fire at the beginning of the tournament by labeling our anti-racism message as 'Gesture Politics' and then pretend to be disgusted when the very thing we're campaigning against, happens," tweeted Mings.

Mings remarks received support from Patel's fellow Conservative lawmaker and former defence minister Johnny Mercer. "The painful truth is that this guy (Mings) is completely right," Mercer tweeted. "Very uncomfortable with the position we Conservatives are needlessly forcing ourselves into. Do I fight it or stay silent? Modern Conservatism was always so much more to me. We must not lose our way."

England captain Harry Kane lashed out at those who had posted the racial slurs — following England manager Gareth Southgate who had said the abuse was "unforgivable".

"Three lads who were brilliant all



LONDON: England's forward Marcus Rashford carries a note during the Euro 2020 final football match between Italy and England at the Wembley Stadium in London on Sunday. —AFP

summer had the courage to step up and take a pen (penalty) when the stakes were high," tweeted Kane. "They deserve support and backing not the vile racist abuse they've had since last night (Sunday). If you abuse anyone on social

media you're not an England fan and we don't want you." The racist attacks were strongly condemned by the English Football Association whose president, Prince William, said he was "sickened" by the abuse. —AFP

Frustrated Suns try to keep Bucks from leveling NBA Finals

MILWAUKEE: A frustrated Phoenix Suns squad, struggling to slow Milwaukee forward Giannis Antetokounmpo, risks losing its NBA Finals lead unless it can find some answers in the next two days. The 26-year-old Greek star scored 41 points and grabbed 12 rebounds to lead the host Bucks to a game three win on Sunday and Milwaukee can level the best-of-seven series at 2-2 with another home triumph tonight.

"It's on us to stop him, give him more resistance," Suns forward Cam Johnson said. It's tough to balance that physically, especially when he's coming at you so hard. "But you just got to do it. We're capable of doing it. We know that. We'll go back, look, see what we need to change and change it."

The Suns will need to adjust to boost their hopes of the first NBA title in their 53-year history. "We know we got to be better," said Johnson. "There's a lot of frustration anytime you lose. You can see it on everybody's

face. It's a terrible feeling. That feeling is going to motivate us to get back out there, get ready for the next one and go right back at them."

The Suns have been resilient in the playoffs, winning nine playoff games in a row after back-to-back losses to the Los Angeles Lakers in the opening round. "We got to be the desperate team next game. We got to bring the fight to them," Johnson said. "We've got to come back and execute better and play with more physicality. We've shown we can do it. It takes poise. We knew this one wasn't going to be easy. (Milwaukee) is a team that's desperate, that wants to fight."

Antetokounmpo has consecutive 40-point games, aided in game two by foul trouble on Suns center Deandre Ayton, whistled for five violations for the first time in the playoffs. "It affected us obviously, but we have to weather the storm," Suns forward Jae Crowder said. "We have to adjust."

"We had to throw a lot of different things at them and it led to us scrambling.



MILWAUKEE: Devin Booker (right) and Chris Paul of the Phoenix Suns talk to the media after Game Three of the 2021 NBA Finals against the Milwaukee Bucks on Sunday at the Fiserv Forum Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. —AFP

and then adjust to that." Suns guard Devin Booker, who sized in game two, went 3-of-14 from the floor and scored only 10 points in Sunday's loss. "I can get better (shots). We'll make that happen," Booker said. "We're going to get back right and be ready Wednesday. We have to come in with the energy and effort. The 50/50 balls, offensive rebounds, protect the paint. That's why it's a series. We have some room for improvement. We have to bring that same effort we had in the first two games and I think we'll be in good shape." —AFP

bling. We have enough bodies to get that job done. We just got to do it collectively and be better individually. We got to man up and do what we've been doing all year, respond to a defeat, to things not going our way." Suns coach Monty Williams expects 22-year-old Bahamas big man Ayton to bounce back for game four. "He had a good game going, but the foul trouble didn't allow for him to continue it," Williams said. "We expect him to play that way again. He'll grow from this. I promise you he will. We have to understand how the refs are calling the game

Bahamas big man Ayton powers Suns into NBA title hunt

MILWAUKEE: Three years after being the top pick in the NBA Draft, 22-year-old Bahamian big man Deandre Ayton has fine-tuned his talents and made the Phoenix Suns a championship contender. Ayton scored 22 points and grabbed 19 rebounds in the Suns' game-one NBA Finals win but struggled with foul trouble for the first time in the playoffs in a game three loss as Phoenix carries a 2-1 lead into Wednesday's fourth game of the best-of-seven series at Milwaukee.

The Suns, who hadn't reached the finals since 1993, could win their first title since joining the league in 1968. Ayton shakes off pre-game goose bumps with a routine that locks him in upon the on-court challenges. "I really just take three deep breaths, close my eyes and after that, the whole arena is really empty," he said. "I just see my teammates and my coaches. There's a task at hand after that."

Ayton's focus is on having an impact in a game, whether it means points and rebounds or defensive domination. "Just being relentless, doing what I do best. Just being a presence on both ends," Ayton

said of his style. "Defense is what gets me going."

When 16-year veteran guard Chris Paul joined the club, he showed Ayton key details that have enabled him to elevate his game. "Really just approaching the game the right way — always being alert, little things that matter in long stretches of the game, knowing my matchup tendencies and just being a presence on both ends of the floor," Ayton said. "Just putting pressure on the rim and also protecting the rim. I'm having a lot of fun because my guys in there they keep me level and they keep me intent with it."

Ayton learned how to deliver pick-and-roll plays just how Paul wants them and use positioning to enhance his physical skills. "First thing he taught me that I'm going to need in my career for a while is learning angles, how to get people open and learn how to get open and set the screen," Ayton said.

Paul has seen the work ethic and growth in Ayton since his arrival in November. "Just seeing the maturity in him not only as basketball player but as a person," Paul said. "He has the biggest heart, one of the best guys you'll ever meet. The success and the recognition that he's getting is well deserved and I couldn't be happier."

Ayton has learned how to better maximize his body and mind. "I definitely feel every game, body hurting and all that," Ayton said. "I feel every part of this, the physicality throughout the games and just the mental stamina you have to have in between games."



MILWAUKEE: Deandre Ayton of the Phoenix Suns reacts during Game Three of the 2021 NBA Finals on Sunday at Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. —AFP

Suns coach Monty Williams was glad Ayton accepted the challenge. "I'm thankful he has allowed the staff to push him the way they needed to push him," Williams said. "I'm happy he has an effect on the game in different ways. It's not just offense. There are games where defensively he impacts the game and covers up a lot of mistakes we make. He's a talented player. His ability to rebound, finish around the basket and then step up and make free throws is something we don't take for granted." —AFP

Team Australia hands US their second-straight loss

LAS VEGAS: The United States men's team suffered its second straight shocking loss on Monday, losing 91-83 to Australia in a pre-Olympic friendly tournament in Las Vegas. The Americans, whose roster includes a host of NBA all-stars, also lost 90-87 to unheralded Nigeria on Saturday and have now lost four of their last five games dating back to the 2019 FIBA World Cup, where they finished an embarrassing seventh.

Brooklyn Nets star Kevin Durant was held to 17 points for the second consecutive game, and Damian Lillard of the Portland Trail Blazers finished with a team-high 22. Patty Mills, of Canberra, scored 22 points, and Adelaide's Joe Ingles scored 17 for the

Aussies, who shot 53 percent from the floor as a team in the tuneup event for the Tokyo Olympics.

Australia outscored the US 6-0 in the final 30 seconds. Boston Celtics player Jayson Tatum threw up an airball in the final minute, and Durant missed a three-pointer in the waning seconds. Australia, one of the favorites to reach the podium in Japan, has never beaten the US in the men's Olympic basketball tournament in eight tries dating back to 1964. Monday's exhibition win comes 33 years after the US defeated the Boomers 78-49 to win the bronze medal in Seoul, South Korea.

The United States were without three players still active in the NBA



LAS VEGAS: Kevin Durant #7 of the USA Men's National Team plays defense on Patty Mills #5 of the Australia Men's National Team during the game on Monday at Michelob ULTRA Arena in Las Vegas, Nevada. —AFP

finals. The United States, who have won three Olympic men's basketball titles since earning bronze in 2004,

are looking to regain global dominance after finishing in seventh at the 2019 World Cup. —AFP

News in brief

Giroud close to Milan

ROME: French center-forward Olivier Giroud, currently at Chelsea, is close to signing a two-year contract with AC Milan, Italian media reported yesterday. "Giroud is expected to be in Italy on Thursday to undergo medicals and sign the contract," wrote Sky Sport on its website. The daily, La Gazzetta dello Sport, reported that the deal will be worth three million euros per season to Giroud while Chelsea will receive a one-million-euro transfer fee. It wrote that AC Milan coach Stefano Pioli is "eagerly awaiting his arrival" of the 34-year-old, as the team's star striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic, who is 39 and underwent knee surgery in Rome in June, "is still uncertain" for the coming season. —AFP

Jabeur auctions racquet

TUNIS: Ons Jabeur, who became the first Arab woman to reach the quarter-finals at Wimbledon last week, announced on Monday that she is auctioning one of her racquets to help hospitals in her native Tunisia fight COVID-19. Jabeur, who will add a personal donation to the amount collected during the sale, said the money raised would be used to buy "drugs and medical equipment". The racquet, which Jabeur used in her Wimbledon victories over Venus Williams, Garbine Muguruza and Iga Swiatek, went on sale Monday for 2,000 dinars (\$720). —AFP

Galatasaray denied entry

ATHENS: Turkish side Galatasaray had a wasted trip to Greece for a friendly on Monday when they were denied entry by Athens airport authorities because of unacceptable coronavirus tests. The visitors, who were due to play against Greek champions Olympiakos yesterday, were refused entry despite providing negative PCR test results from within 72 hours. Greek authorities said that the entry protocol from Turkey to Greece requires a molecular test from the previous 24 hours — not 72 hours. Galatasaray allegedly refused to undergo a further COVID-19 test and, after two hours at the airport, flew back to Istanbul, airport authorities said. —AFP

Bordeaux avoid relegation

BORDEAUX: Bordeaux and Angers will both play in Ligue 1 next season after their appeals against relegation imposed by France's financial watchdog DNCG were successful, the clubs announced separately on Monday. Bordeaux were spared after the presentation of a recovery plan put together by businessman Gerard Lopez, who is set to take over the club. Bordeaux, who have won six league titles and are one of the biggest clubs in the country, saw former owners American financial group King Street appoint an administrator in April saying they wanted out after investing 46 million euros (55 million dollars) since buying the outfit in 2018 for 100 million euros. —AFP

Ohtani makes history

LOS ANGELES: Japanese sensation Shohei Ohtani made history yesterday after being named as both the starting pitcher and leadoff hitter for the American League team in Major League Baseball's All-Star game in Denver. Ohtani, who has electrified baseball this season with a league-leading 33 home runs, is the first player in the history of the All-Star game to be selected as a position player and pitcher. Ohtani took part in the Home Run Derby on Monday, just losing a close showdown with Washington Nationals slugger Juan Soto in the first round. —AFP