

Jess hits top form just in time for Rio

JESSICA ENNIS-HILL is in exceptional form less than six weeks from the start of the Rio Olympics after posting her best heptathlon score since London 2012.

She yesterday survived atrocious weather conditions in Ratingen in Germany to demonstrate that she is moving into world-class shape at just the right time of the season.

Her score of 6,733 points was the second highest of 2016, leaving her 32 points behind leader Canadian Brianne Theisen-Eaton.

To put her performance in the driving rain into some kind of context, her winning mark at the 2012 Games was 6,955 points and she became world champion last August in Beijing with 6,669.

Of the seven events, the most eye-catching was the long jump in which she leapt to a personal best of 6.63m.

Ennis-Hill, 30, who has a two-year-old Reggie, has been backed to retain her title in Rio by Denise Lewis, the 2000 heptathlon Olympic champion. "The long



ATHLETICS

By Rob Maul

jump for Jess has been so temperamental over the past few years," said Lewis. "But a 6.63m personal best is outstanding. It bodes well for the future.

"At the Olympics you have to navigate seven events and the heptathlon is not easy. But she is definitely the favourite for me now."

Ennis-Hill, below, like Super Saturday heroes Mo Farah and Greg Rutherford, was absent from the weekend's GB Olympic trials in Birmingham.

In the sprints, Dina Asher-Smith, 20, was in tears after becoming 200m national champion and booking her spot at Rio. Her time of 23.11 sec was 0.02 sec quicker than Desiree Henry.

Adam Gemili became men's 200m champion with 20.44 – more than a year after a hamstring injury almost ended his career.

Matthew Hudson-Smith won the men's 400m in a time of 44.88, while Jazmin Sawyers set a personal best of 6.75m in the long jump.

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O'NEILL'S HEARTBREAK

Irish are hit by Griezmann lightning

ANTOINE GRIEZMANN rescued France with a stunning double against the Republic of Ireland to potentially set up a mouth-watering quarter-final against England in Paris.

The Atletico Madrid striker – wanted by a string of English clubs including Arsenal, West Ham and Manchester United – was outstanding as he dragged France to victory after they went 1-0 down to a second-minute Robbie Brady penalty.

Ireland, so impressive in the first half, were left distraught as the hosts fought back in style, with Shane Duffy also sent off for a professional foul to seal the Republic's fate and leave France waiting in the last eight for the winner of England against Iceland in Nice tonight.

"We don't do things easily but I have not seen any team that does in this tournament," said a relieved France coach Didier Deschamps.

"It is a very balanced championship. I knew this match would be difficult and when Ireland took the lead it made us more uncomfortable. We had to dig deep to equalise and then take the lead. But with

	FRANCE	2
	IRELAND	1

From Chris Hatherall in Lyon

their emotion, this French team is making everyone fall in love with them."

Ireland were massive underdogs for this game so you could understand why manager Martin O'Neill, right, was so distraught afterwards, having seen his team deservedly lead at the break only to succumb to the brilliance of Griezmann.

"The players could not have put any more into the game," he said. "The tournament has been great for the players, good for some of the younger players who have come of age, and great for the supporters. But I'm disappointed given the position we got ourselves into.

"France are a really fine team and good luck to them, they are possibly the tournament favourites but we had them under severe pressure." Ireland certainly did – and they made

an incredible start. There was little more than a minute on the clock when Paul Pogba clumsily brought down Shane Long from behind and referee Nicola Rizzoli pointed to the spot.

Norwich City's Brady, who had also been the hero of Ireland's dramatic victory over Italy in the group stage, converted left-footed and the battle was on.

Daryl Murphy could have made it 2-0 if not for a fine save from Hugo Lloris while the Republic's Darren Randolph was excellent in goal at the other end as he kept Dimitri Payet and Co at bay.

After the break, however, France were transformed by a half-time talk from Deschamps and dominated the game until the final whistle with a vibrant performance, led by Griezmann and Dimitri Payet.

Griezmann said: "We didn't play well in the first half, we – coach and players – said some things in the dressing room.

"We're playing for France and we gave everything we had – and the fans helped us get over the line." The inevitable equaliser came in the 57th minute when

Bacary Sagna crossed from the right and Griezmann powered home a superb header.

The second arrived within five minutes, this time Olivier Giroud knocking a perfect header down into Griezmann's path for the striker to finish left-footed.

The game was effectively over when Griezmann raced clear yet again, from a Giroud pass, and was brought down on the edge of the area by Duffy. Rizzoli had no choice but to show a red card – and Ireland's tournament was over. France substitute Andre-Pierre Gignac three times went close to extending the score.

O'Neill said: "We put heart and soul into the game, as has become a prerequisite for us, but more importantly, we played and some of the younger players have come of age. It's up to them to take it further. Reaching the last 16 is still an achievement, but it's not something they want to rest on."

FRANCE (4-3-3): Lloris; Sagna, Rami, Koscielny, Evra; Pogba, Kante (Coman 46; Sissoko 90), Matuidi; Griezmann, Giroud (Gignac 74), Payet. **Booked:** Rami, Kante. **Goals:** Griezmann 57, 61.

IRELAND (4-4-2): Randolph; Coleman, Keogh, Duffy, Ward; McCarthy (Hoolahan 72), Hendrick, Brady, McClean (O'Shea 69); Long, Murphy (Walters 65). **Booked:** Coleman, Hendrick, Long. **Sent off:** Duffy 66. **Goal:** Brady 2 pen.

Referee: N Rizzoli (Ita).

EURO 2016: ENGLAND V ICELAND, 8PM 27TH JUNE 2016

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BOATENG: Scored opener

Draxler spot-on for Germany

IF THE Germans can still win even when they are missing penalties, what hope is there for the rest here?

Mesut Ozil had a 14th-minute spot-kick saved by Matus Kozackik after a foul by Martin Skrtel on Mario Gomez, but Germany still ended up with their biggest win in the Euros in 20 years.

Jerome Boateng scored his first goal for his country and Julian Draxler grabbed his first competitive goal for

	GERMANY	3
	SLOVAKIA	0

From Paul Brown in Lille

them too as Slovakia were blown away.

Gomez, two minutes before the break, also got his second of the tournament, equalling Jurgen Klinsmann's record of five goals for Germany in European Championship finals. Boateng set the ball

rolling with a 25-yard, eighth-minute volley which took a deflection off Milan Skriniar on its way in, before Ozil fluffed from the spot.

That almost proved costly as Juraj Kucka then forced Manuel Neuer into a fingertip save with a header from a Peter Pekarik cross.

But Gomez spared Ozil's blushes with a tap-in after a magical piece of skill from man of the match Draxler, who then volleyed in the

third for Germany in the 63rd minute.

Gomez praised Wolfsburg star Draxler afterwards, saying: "He has two magic feet and I'm happy for him that this has led to an important goal.

"Now we will play Italy or Spain and they will demand a lot more from us. But it doesn't matter who we play now.

"We just have to impose our game and play with the emotions we showed today."

SPORT IN BRIEF

European Ch'ships Round of 16
FRANCE (0).....2 REP OF IRE (1)....1
 Griezmann 57, 61 Brady 3 (pen)
GERMANY (2).....3 SLOVAKIA (0).....0
 Boateng 8, Gomez 43
 Draxler 62
HUNGARY (0).....0 BELGIUM (1).....4
 Alderweireld 10
 Batshuayi 78
 Hazard 79
 Carrasco 90

COPA AMERICA – 3rd/ 4th Place Play-Off: USA 0 Colombia 1.

BOXING
IBF WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT TITLE
 (02 Arena): Anthony Joshua (Eng) bt Dominic Breazeale (USA) KO Rd 7.

CRICKET
THIRD ODI – Sri Lanka v England
 (Bristol): Sri Lanka 248-9 (50 overs; L D Chandimal 62), England 16-1 (4 overs). No result.

SPECSAVERS COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP – DIVISION ONE – Netts v Warwickshire
 (Edgbaston): Nottinghamshire 125-6 (61 overs; J D Libby 59).

Hampshire v Somerset (The Ageas Bowl): Hampshire 219 (66.4 overs; J H K Adams 61; J Overton 5-42). Somerset 66-1 (16 overs). **Lancs v Middlesex** (Lord's): Lancashire 298-3 (96 overs; A N Petersen 105/10, Haseeb Hameed 89).

DIVISION TWO – Kent v Derbyshire (Canterbury): Kent 354-7 (96 overs; S A Northeast 173/10, A J Ball 66).

TOUR MATCH – Sri Lanka A v Durham (Emirates Riverside): Sri Lanka A 273-6 (86 overs; A R S Silva 103/10, S S Pathirana 51). **Yorkshire v Pakistan A** (Headingley Carnegie): Yorkshire 243-8 (73 overs; E Callis 84).

GOLF
BMW INTERNATIONAL OPEN, (Golf Club Gut Laerchenhof, Pulheim) – **Final rd** (Gbr & Irl unless stated, par 72): 271 H Stenson (Swe) 68 65 67 71, 274 T Olesen (Den) 67 67 67 73, 0 Richardt (Rsa) 68 68 68 69, 277 R Jacquelin (Fra) 68 68 72 72, 278 K Aphibarnrat (Tha) 69 64 74 71, S Garcia (Spa) 71 68 70 69, 279 D Horsley 73 70 66 70, B Wiesberger (Aut) 68 70 70 71, 280 M Lorenzo-Vera (Fra) 69 69 67 75, R Dinwiddie 69 73 69 69, P Larrazabal (Spa) 68 69 72 71, G Storm 69 70 71 70, 281 P Durre 69 74 70 71, M Manassero (Ita) 72 67 73 69, J Slattery 74 68 71 68.

USPGA TOUR QUICKEN LOANS NATIONAL, CONGRESSIONAL CC (BLUE), (Bethesda, Maryland) – **3rd rd** (USA unless stated, par 71): 198 B Hurley III 66 65 67, 200 E Els (Rsa) 66 69 65, 201 J Rahm (Spa) 64 67 70.

(Spa) Honda 145pts. **MOTO2:** 1 T Nakagami (Jpn) Kalex 34m 33.948s. **Standings:** 1 Y Zarco (Fra) Kalex 126pts, 1 = A Rins (Spa) Kalex 126. **MOTO3:** 1 F Bagnaia (Ita) Mahindra 38m 11.535s. **Standings:** 1 B Binder (Rsa) KTM 151pts.

BRITISH SUPERBIKE CH'SHIP RD 4 (Knockhill, Dumfrieshire, Fife) **Race 1:** 1 L Haslam (Gbr) Kawasaki 25m 32.723s. **Race 2:** 1 S Byrne (Gbr) Ducati 26m 49.388s. **Standings:** 1 L Haslam (Gbr) Kawasaki 128pts, 2 S Byrne (Gbr) Ducati 115, 3 C Iddon (Gbr) BMW 94.

RUGBY LEAGUE
KINGSTONE PRESS CH'SHIP – Batley 18 Dewsbury 16, Bradford 24 Halifax 32, London Broncos 12 Leigh 38, Oldham 26 Whitehaven 18, Workington 10 Swinton 10. **LEAGUE 1** – Hemel Stags 6 Rochdale 60, Keighley 32 Barrow 34, North Wales Crusaders 14 Toulouse 32, S Wales 24 Hunslet 36, York 56 Gloucestershire All Stars 12.

RUGBY UNION
International Match
CANADA.....18 ITALY.....20

TODAY'S DIARY
European Ch'ships Round of 16
 Italy v Spain (5pm).....
 England v Iceland (8pm).....
CRICKET
Fourth Women's ODI: England v Pakistan (Taunton, 10.30am).
Speysiders County Ch'ship - Division Two – day 1 of 4: Leicestershire v Gloucs (Grace Road, 11am).
SPEEDWAY
Elite League: Leicester v Coventry.

AFTER HIS SIDE TAKE EARLY LEAD ONLY FOR HOSTS TO END DREAM

Picture: KAI PFAFFENBACH and LAURENCE GRIFFITHS



KISS-OFF: Payet says thanks to Griezmann's left foot, which has put France 2-1 up, and left, Long is left dejected

Italy need to be extraordinary



ANTONIO CONTE has warned his Italian players they will need to find something 'extraordinary' to gain revenge over champions Spain and knock them out of the tournament.

Italy are still smarting at the way they were beaten 4-0 by the Spanish in the final of Euro 2012 and finally have a chance to put things right when the two teams meet in Lille today in a last-16 tie.

However Italy coach Conte, above, says it will be no easy task even if many of Spain's golden generation – such as Raul, Carles Puyol, Xavi and Xabi Alonso – are no longer with them, and the 2016 version is still finding its feet.

He said: "We have great respect for Spain – for me they are one of the strongest teams in



By **Chris Hatherall**

the world and favourites for this tournament.

"So we've worked, we've prepared, and we need to provide a response on the field if we want to beat them.

"We need to pull off something extraordinary because, for this match, the ordinary is not enough. I'm sure the boys are capable of doing that."

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque is not planning big changes despite a surprise loss to Croatia, after starting the tournament on fire.

The Croatia defeat cost them top spot in their group, leaving the

team facing Italy earlier than was necessary.

But Del Bosque, who quits as international boss after the Euros – as does Chelsea-bound Conte – won't panic.

He said: "We lost our World Cup opener against Switzerland in 2010 but hardly changed anything afterwards.

"We played with the same players and in the same way, because it was the way we'd played that had got us there in the first place.

"So we kept going and we intend to do that this time round."

Del Bosque has, however, had to quell rumours Manchester United keeper David De Gea was criticised in the dressing room for his display against Croatia and could be dropped. "It's all lies," he told a Spanish radio station.



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No fast track for Liam



PLUNKETT: Impressive

LIAM PLUNKETT says he remains some way down the pecking order for a Test spot against Pakistan, despite his latest super-charged white-ball display.

The Yorkshire fast bowler, 31, was clocked at 93mph during the third Royal London Series ODI at Bristol yesterday before the match was abandoned because of rain.

His 3-46 helped restrict Sri Lanka to yet another underwhelming total at 248-9 before rain cut

CRICKET

By **Gideon Brooks**

England's reply short at 16-1. However, Plunkett is far from convinced it will be enough to get back into the Test picture, despite injury to Jimmy Anderson freeing up a spot.

Anderson is struggling with a stress fracture in his right shoulder blade. "I still want to play Test cricket – I will still want to play Test cricket when I'm 38 – but I have been around a while now

and I don't think too much about the future, just the next game," said Plunkett. "I want to cement my place in this ODI team but, with regard to the Test squad for Pakistan next month, Jake Ball is in the squad and hasn't had a chance yet and obviously Mark Wood and Ben Stokes are back fit."

England gleaned very little from yesterday's washout, although Chris Woakes (3-34) and Plunkett emerged with flying colours.

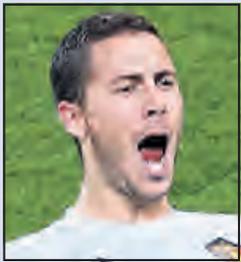
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OH BROTHER, CHRIS IS CAUSING A HEADACHE

Picture: KEVIN BARNES



HAZARD: Scored third goal

Hazard warning for Welsh

HUNGARY 0
BELGIUM 4

From **Gerry Cox** in Toulouse

EDEN HAZARD justified his selection as skipper with a world-class display and a superb solo third goal as Belgium booked a quarter-final clash with Wales.

The Chelsea man rifled in from distance in the 79th minute to seal victory, after setting up substitute Michy Batshuayi two minutes earlier for a tap-in second.

Tottenham centre-back Toby Alderweireld had headed Belgium in front in the 10th-minute and substitute Yannick Carrasco rounded off the win with a fourth in stoppage-time.

Belgium coach Marc Wilmots made Hazard his captain after Vincent Kompany was ruled out of the tournament with injury. He said: "There were a lot of people who were absolutely amazed when I gave the captain's armband to Eden, but you have to let this little man grow."

"He doesn't say a lot but his football does his talking on the pitch. I told Eden I wanted him to score a goal by cutting inside. He wasn't close enough to the goal and he needs to have fun when he's out on the pitch."

Only a stunning display by goalkeeper Gabor Kiraly kept Hungary in the game for so long at 1-0, denying Hazard, Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku and Dries Mertens, before the late flurry of Belgium goals.

THERE were plenty of headaches in Wales yesterday morning but, unlike the majority of them, the Gunter family's were of a logistical nature.

While Reading full-back Chris, 26, gears up for a quarter-final with Wales on Friday, brother Marc will be jetting off to Cancun as he prepares to marry fiancée Danielle.

Their wedding will take place on July 7 and Chris, who just happens to be the best man, is in danger of not being present thanks to Wales' progress in France.

Marc has been following the team and he is desperate to fly back from Mexico to catch the game in Lille, before making a swift return to Cancun.

Should Wales reach the semi-finals, Gunter will definitely miss the ceremony but knows there will be no recriminations from his family.

"Marc has a problem already because 20-odd people fly to Mexico on Tuesday even though the wedding is July 7," he said.

"I know my brother is talking about leaving Cancun on Thursday and flying straight in and straight out after - but I'm not sure that will go down well with the rest who are flying out with him."

"Many months ago he booked the wedding before we qualified. Then we knew it would only clash if we got to the later stages. To be stood here now even talking about it is unbelievable."

"I'm sure the wedding will still go ahead. By hook or by crook everyone will get to the games and get to the wedding - I think it will be the first best man's speech on Skype ever."

Wales were far from impressive in seeing off Northern Ireland at the Parc des Princes, with Michael O'Neill's men doing a terrific job of stymieing Gareth Bale and Aaron Ramsey. But it was one moment of quality from

From **Andrew Gwilym** in Paris

Bale that won it, as his cross left Gareth McAuley unable to do anything other than send the ball into his own net.

It sparked wild celebrations in France, as well as back in Wales, and Gunter hopes there are similar scenes to come.

"To see what it means to everybody is unbelievable. To be here in our first tournament and be in the quarter-finals is something I don't think will sink in for a while," he said.

"We are just happy we are making everyone extremely proud and happy and probably denting a few bank balances. We are on top of the world."

The only downside for Wales was a shoulder injury to captain Ashley Williams, who has had a scan after leaving Paris in a sling.

And Bale and Ramsey could be handed the chance to skipper the side in Lille if the Swansea man does not recover in time.

"I think we have options if Ash is not fit," said manager Chris Coleman, left. "When we gave the captaincy to Ash it was really to try to get the best out of Aaron and take some responsibility off his shoulders."

"We must not forget what happened with Gary Speed and Rambo was affected by that as he had a real good relationship with Gary, so we tried to take some pressure off Rambo."

"Aaron has been the vice-captain since. I believe he will be the captain of Wales one day when it is not Ashley Williams."

"You also have Gareth Bale, Joe Allen and Chris Gunter. They have the experience to do it, but whoever it will be I will tell them personally."



Gunter is wedded to cause

MEXICAN WAVE: Chris Gunter could miss brother Marc's wedding in Cancun



MICHAEL O'NEILL has been backed to land a Premier League job after leading Northern Ireland to the last 16.

With Northern Ireland's tournament over following their 1-0 loss to Wales, the £750,000 release clause in the contract O'Neill signed this year can be activated. And skipper Steven Davis would not be surprised to see big clubs come calling, including his own side Southampton, who are currently managerless.

"Stranger things have happened haven't they? So who knows," said Davis when asked if O'Neill could end up at St Mary's. "As a player or a manager, everyone needs an opportunity. There is going to be people looking at him. He has done a hell of a job here with us. I'm sure at some point he will go on to manage a big club."



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WHILE ICELAND'S DANGERMEN GIVES CREDIT TO COLEMAN

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

 Picture: SHAUN BOTTEILL



THROWBACK:
 Gunnarsson's
 long throw is
 back in fashion

Aron's throw-in weapon armed by Wales boss

ARON GUNNARSSON says the weapon Roy Hodgson most fears from Iceland tonight was unleashed by none other than Wales manager Chris Coleman.

England have been preparing for the onslaught of the Iceland midfielder's long throws all week, a tactic Gunnarsson honed following a very deliberate request from Coleman when he was manager at Coventry eight years ago.

"My agent told Chris Coleman that I could take long throws before he signed me," said Gunnarsson. "I used to play handball when I was younger, that is where the technique and strength comes from.

"People can have arms twice the size of mine but it won't matter because it's all about the way you throw it and not how hard you throw it.

"I only decided to go down the football line and focus on that when I was 15. It was a hard decision because my father is a big handballer and my brother plays professionally for Hamburg in Germany. I come from a big handball family.

"But it is a weapon especially for us because we have the kind of players who can head the ball. And we managed to score from it against Austria."

That goal effectively ensured Iceland qualified for the knockout stages, Arnor Ingvi Traustason's winner merely sending the country deliriously into a quarter-final with England instead of Croatia.

Hodgson was watching Portugal instead, of course, but had a five-man delegation at the game in the Stade de France and even a quick flick through the DVD would have been enough to identify Iceland's true dangerman.

"You'd have to be a bit blind not to realise that Gunnarsson is a real weapon for them," he said. "They have already scored from a long throw-in, so

From **Matthew Dunn** in Nice

that's a warning to us that if we don't do our homework and get our positional play correct and make the right challenges it will give them a chance to score again."

Since the infamous days of Stoke's Rory Delap, the long throw has gone a bit out of fashion in England, although Gunnarsson continued to use it sporadically, even in the Premier League, following his 2011 move to Cardiff.

"It has not been so common recently but if anybody has got it you should obviously still try to use it," said Gunnarsson. "From every set-piece, throw a big ball over - simple as!

"We have to use every strength we have and hopefully that will work to our advantage against England.

"You just have to look at our record in the qualifiers to see we score a lot of goals from set-pieces. We don't really practise them that much but we have Gylfi Sigurdsson, who can pinpoint a ball wherever you want it to be."

Iceland have scored four goals to get to this stage, one more than England, despite UEFA recording them as having the lowest tally of just 21 attempts on goal. England have had three times that number.

Co-manager Lars Lagerback, formerly Sweden coach, has faced England six times and never lost, and felt bold enough to poke fun at his old friend Roy Hodgson's assertion earlier in the tournament that the lack of goals for England was not a concern because the team were playing well.

"They've had really tight games and not the best results but the performances have been rather good," he smiled. "But football is about scoring goals. I hope they go on and play the same way and we can close them down even more than others have done."

Beware the Hand of Cod

ICELAND coach Heimur Hallgrímsson is drawing on battles over fishing rights to inspire his players in Nice tonight.

The Cod Wars were a series of three conflicts fought between Iceland and the United Kingdom between 1958 and 1976 over who could fish the waters around the volcanic island.

Britain sent warships to escort trawlersmen in contested waters to protect them from having their nets cut and getting rammed.



Shots were fired sporadically but there was only one casualty throughout.

"This was the only time Iceland went to war," said co-manager Hallgrímsson, left. "We are too small to have an army and lack manpower, so would be easily beaten rather quickly."

He said of his team: "So these guys are the Icelandic army. They've already won the hearts of all Icelandic people."

MATTHEW DUNN

head & shoulders

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ENGLAND BOSS KNOWS HE IS ON THIN ICE

Lallana to make way for Sterling



FROM BACK PAGE

Allianz Riviera stadium, tonight. "Players win matches, not managers and coaches," said Hodgson yesterday.

"You hand the game over to the people who matter: the players."

Hodgson accepts that defeat against Iceland – the smallest nation ever to reach a major finals – would almost certainly mean the end of his England tenure.

At the very least, he is expected to take England as far as the quarter-finals, where France will be waiting at the Stade de France after they came from behind to beat Ireland 2-1 yesterday.

However, Sterling's inclusion means there is no room for Adam Lallana, above, one of England's better performers so far at the

tournament – and Premier League champion Jamie Vardy will once again be on the bench.

Captain Wayne Rooney, who is restored to midfield alongside Dele Alli and Eric Dier, said Sterling has the mental strength to take the game to Iceland in a three-pronged attack with Daniel Sturridge and Harry Kane.

"For me, from what I've seen, his state of mind is fine," said Rooney. "He has been normal around the camp. What we've seen on the training pitch of Raheem Sterling, he's been fantastic – sharp, taking players on, scoring goals."

"There is no issue with Raheem at all. His attitude isn't questioned. He stays behind after training

doing what he does normally.

"He's a huge asset to us as a team, a fantastic player and one who can turn the game in a split-second.

"If anyone is questioning his attitude or state of mind, they would be mistaken in having that judgment."

England are heavy favourites to reach the last eight. Iceland's population is 165 times smaller and their FIFA ranking 23 places lower, but Rooney would not downplay the task.

"We're not going into this game showing a lack of respect for Iceland," he said.

"The size of the country is just a number. They put the same number of players on the pitch as us, so it's a fair contest in that respect."

No hiding



PAUL JOYCE
in Nice

ROY HODGSON dislikes so much about the knee-jerk nature of the modern game, the 'time to deliver' and 'now or never' culture, but even he could not hide from it this time.

There are no grey areas. The 'win or bust' headlines cannot be dismissed as hyperbole.

If the unthinkable happens and England are embarrassed by Iceland tonight – for that is what defeat would be – then, by the criteria laid down by the Football Association, his reign as national coach ends on the French Riviera.

Victory and match No57, a date with Euro 2016 hosts France in Paris next Sunday, awaits. The scenario is as simple as it is stark and naturally it weighs on Hodgson's mind.

"The day you stop concerning yourself, worrying about it, thinking about it, that's the day when you've lost the interest in the work," he said. "I suppose the simple answer to the question is, 'No, I can't divorce myself in that way'."

"But as you get older with more experience, you do force yourself to only worry about the things you can change."

"The things you can do to make certain that, when you look in the mirror, as the players go out on to the field, you can say: 'What else could I have done? Did we prepare well enough, was the training right, have I chosen the right team?'"

"That has to be the right team, in your opinion, which can win

FACING THE FACTS: Roy Hodgson and his team must find more imaginative ways to create chances when they meet Iceland in the last 16 tonight



starting line-up along with Raheem Sterling,

the game. If you think you've done that, then that gives you not only comfort but it means you don't agonise anymore because you've handed the game over to the people who matter: the players. Players win matches, not managers and coaches."

The debate over whether Hodgson has picked the right team during these finals has been the central theme since England arrived.

Here in Nice's Allianz Riviera, there will be more changes with Harry Kane set to return to the

whose reintroduction would represent a bold move given the difficulties he has so far endured on French soil.

Despite what is at stake for Hodgson and an England side trying to add credibility to the idea this is a new era, there are more daunting tightropes to tread than one against a small island ranked 34th in the world.

Wayne Rooney, inevitably, holds the key to a first victory at the knockout stage of a tournament since Ecuador were vanquished a decade ago at the World Cup in

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Lion who lost way



FACING FEAR: Sterling

ONE of the first things that endeared Raheem Sterling to Roy Hodgson was his fearlessness and ability, no matter how many times he had suffered setbacks, to go again.

The England coach waxed lyrical to one confidant about the

winger in the build-up to the World Cup in Brazil in 2014 and finished off with the assessment that the youngster had "b*****".

Here in Nice, Hodgson will hope his gut instinct rings true and that when Sterling returns to the starting line-up he flourishes under scrutiny. His

indecision in the final third marred his performance against Russia in Marseilles, after which Sterling anointed himself "TheHatedOne" on Instagram in apparent response to a torrent of abuse he had received on social media.

A glaring early miss against Wales was the catalyst for a crescendo



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Picture: DAN MULLAN

AS HE SEARCHES FOR CUTTING EDGE FOR MUST-WIN GAME

place for Hodgson



it is a point he has made forcefully behind closed doors.

"We need to be as ruthless as we can possibly be because we know there are no prizes, unfortunately, for playing what some people might think is good football," he said.

"It's all about winning or losing and staying in or going out and we have been very brutal with ourselves in that respect.

"This is the ultimate test because, if we don't win, that's the end for us.

"All our focus is on getting through that game and then we will see where it takes us because if we do get through the game then, who knows? Maybe it will give us a bit of a boost."

Iceland coach Lagerback has never lost in six meetings with England, while his co-manager Helmir Hallgrimsson declared the game as "win-win" for the minnows because it is an opportunity to change the face of football in their country.

Hodgson will hope his chance is still to come. England have practised penalties. Surely, it will not come to that?

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Germany. Iceland will happily cede possession as their three group games illustrate (28 per cent against Portugal, 29 per cent versus Hungary and 31 per cent against Austria) and retreat into a defensive shell.

There are four ways in which England can beat the block. Pass through

Iceland, go over the top, go around their rearguard using width - which is where Sterling comes in - or use set pieces.

Rooney's passing range and ability to switch the play quickly and precisely will be crucial in exposing Lars Lagerback's side. "We have to move the ball and make them run," said the England captain.

England must be more imaginative in their build-up play and hope their forwards have put their shooting boots on and that Kane can rediscover the verve and panache in front of goal upon which his reputation is forged.

In fairness to Hodgson,

must find courage again

of boos from England supporters later in the half and it was no surprise when he failed to reappear after the interval.

The days since have been spent rebuilding his confidence.

Hodgson's assistant, Ray Lewington, publicly called for the boo-boys to lay off and Daniel Sturridge has described

Sterling as "one of the most talented players in the world".

"Raheem is one of the strongest; he has got thick skin," said his former Liverpool teammate. "He doesn't worry too much about what people say."

New Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola reassured Sterling over his future at club level

and the England psychiatrist Dr Steve Peters has also spent time with the player.

How successful it has all been will become clear at the Allianz Riviera stadium, where Sterling will be asked to penetrate in behind Iceland's backline and provide England with the creativity they have been missing to smooth

their passage into the quarter-finals.

He is in line to make his 26th appearance and has scored just twice. He will offer raw pace, however, and directness.

"It is just a matter of time before you see him take his game to the next level and I am sure that will be very soon," said Sturridge.

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FURY LEFT 'BAFFLED' BY DOPING CLAIMS

TYSON FURY has denied he is a drugs cheat after allegations suggesting he took the banned anabolic steroid nandrolone.

High levels of nandrolone were allegedly found in a urine sample taken last year before he beat Wladimir Klitschko to be crowned

By Declan Taylor

world heavyweight champion. But Fury's team released a statement yesterday denying any wrongdoing.

"We are baffled by the story," read the statement. "Tyson Fury absolutely denies any allegation of doping. He looks forward to recovering from his injury and defending his titles against Wladimir Klitschko in October."

Nandrolone is a naturally occurring substance in the body which aids muscle growth. Fury postponed his

July 9 rematch with Klitschko on Friday citing an ankle injury and posted pictures to prove it.

UK Anti-Doping yesterday refused to confirm or deny that Fury is under investigation. "UK Anti-Doping does not discuss or disclose

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REMATCH: Fury pulled out of the Klitschko fight citing injury

Jurgen gets his Mane for £30m

By Paul Joyce

SADIO MANE is due to have a medical at Liverpool today after a £30million deal was agreed with Southampton for the Senegal striker.

Manager Jurgen Klopp has driven the interest in Mane, who he believes provides a different option to those forwards he already has at Anfield, and plans to use him in a wide role.

Personal terms will be discussed and the medical tests are likely to be completed in the next 24 hours. Liverpool had originally targeted Mario

Klopp in for Mane as Gotze stays put

FIRST: Our exclusive

Gotze, who was nurtured at Borussia Dortmund by Klopp, but the German striker chose to remain at Bayern Munich.

Klopp has followed Mane, 24, since his spell at Red Bull Salzburg and saw him score three goals in two matches against Liverpool last season.

Express Sport revealed on May 27 that Mane was the preferred back-up plan and he will be the fifth player to be recruited from St Mary's in the past two years.

HODGSON GAMBLIES ALL ON STERLING

Raheem in from cold for Iceland showdown

RAHEEM STERLING will be told to put his difficulties behind him as Roy Hodgson makes what could be his final gamble as England manager tonight.

Just 11 days ago Sterling was booed by England fans in Lens

From **Matthew Dunn** and **Paul Joyce** in Nice

and replaced at half-time in the 2-1 win against Wales.

The abuse on social media that followed was said to have dented his confidence, sparking a phone call from club manager Pep Guardiola, promising to

"fight for" the Manchester City winger if he "kept his head up".

Sterling subsequently played no part in the goalless draw against Slovakia in Saint-Etienne but Hodgson is convinced he holds the key to unlocking what is likely to be a packed Iceland defence in the

TURN TO PAGE 54, COLUMN 1

GIVE ME SOME RUNNING: Boss Hodgson needs Sterling to pay back his faith

7/1
ALL 4 TEAMS TO SCORE

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