

# Where is that technical knowledge?

# Beginning of the end for Mourinho?

ANISUR RAHMAN

The Bangladesh under-15 women's team returned home yesterday morning from Thimphu but not before undertaking an unusually early morning preparation to catch the 8:30am flight from the Bhutanese capital. They had to report at the hotel lobby at 4am and then embarked on a one-hour drive to reach the airport. Sitting idly for three hours at the airport early in the morning is a certainly a form of torture unless there is a valid reason. However, it could also be treated as a punishment for the girls who failed to retain the SAFF Under-15 Women's football title. They suffered a 1-0 defeat against their Indian counterparts in the final on Saturday.

Since that defeat against India, which was unexpected considering the quality and skill of the Bangladesh girls and their performances leading up to the final, the popular notion is that they failed to perform collectively. It was one of those off days where everything went wrong. But that failure had more to do off the field, or to be precise, the inability of the coaching staff to counter India's game plan of tough marking against key Bangladesh players.

Indian coach Firmin D'Souza came into the final with a particular strategy; to not allow the Bangladesh team's architects -- midfielders Maria Manda and Monica Chakma -- to play their natural game as well as to block both flanks, a plan which his



Bangladesh under-15 Women's team members are pictured upon their arrival at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday. The girls finished runners-up in the recently concluded SAFF Under-15 Women's Championship in Thimphu.

PHOTO: STAR

charges executed perfectly.

Although BFF's technical and strategic director Paul Smalley (many questioned why he was in Bhutan) was there alongside coach Golam Rabbani Choton in the high-profile Bangladesh dugout, there was evidently no plan B for the team.

"Initially we could not understand that Indian players were marking us closely and following us everywhere we moved on the pitch," midfielder Monica Chakma told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Actually, Monica and I had been under tight marking by the

Indian players. Akhi [Khatun], who also helps build up the game from behind and scores goals from long range, was also marked. Besides, the Indian players blocked our right and left sides, thus we could not build up any attacks from the flanks," explained captain Maria while elaborating the reasons behind their below-par performance in the final against a team they have beaten four times in 2016 and 2017.

Tall defender Akhi admitted that India's approach to the game had disturbed the performance of the other players.

"Our backbone is our midfield

but Indian players just blocked Monica and Maria. They even did not allow me to take long shots. Generally, when Maria and Monica play well it help others but everything went awry when both of them failed to perform. When the defenders can't do well, the pressure is put on the goalkeeper. And that was what actually happened in the final," said Akhi, who has also been with the team for nearly four years.

Stamina and skill development are the two major aspects of football and the Bangladesh girls have made huge strides in those areas when compared to other teams in

this region. Technical knowledge is another key area, which unfortunately the Bangladesh girls are yet to develop, as evident in the final.

And if the Bangladesh girls are to emerge as a force in Asia they must learn the technical aspect of the game. The girls will now be readying themselves for September's AFC U-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers stage, which is tougher than the SAFF competition. They will resume training after the Eid vacation but the question is whether the coaching staff will be able to teach the girls those complex technical aspects of the game.

AFP, London



Jose Mourinho warned of the troubles that could lie ahead for his Manchester United side, but the Portuguese must still accept much of the responsibility from a 3-2 defeat at Brighton that has the Red Devils' season off to a bad start.

The concern for United is now whether Mourinho is capable of stemming the tide to turn things around in a way he wasn't in his third season at Real Madrid or in his second spell at Chelsea.

On those occasions his fall even came from a position of strength he isn't afforded now having won the league in the previous season.

This time round after a trophyless campaign, Mourinho clashed with the club's board over their failure to significantly strengthen his squad, particularly at centre-back.

Mourinho's point was illustrated in a disastrous defensive display at the Amex in which United conceded three times in the first-half with centre-backs Victor Lindelof and Eric Bailly at fault.

However, the club's executive vice-chairman Ed Woodward could point to the fact that £60 million (\$76 million) has been spent on Bailly and Lindelof in the past two seasons since Mourinho took charge as justification for not trusting his manager with more cash to splash.

"The centre backs melted and you can't do that in the Premier League," said former United captain turned TV pundit Gary Neville on Sky Sports.

"When Manchester United are so publicly in the transfer window looking for defenders, what belief does that give them?"

"They know they're on borrowed time and I have to say Bailly and Lindelof were poor. They are the ones Jose has signed."

"It has been poor recruitment. That back four aren't good enough to win the title."

Woodward hinted on the final day of the transfer window that the club had to take a more long-term view than Mourinho.

Despite signing a new contract till 2020 in January, the growing feeling is Mourinho will do well just to see out the current campaign.

## QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition. However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

### Son volleys S.Korea into last 16

Son Heung-min fired South Korea to a 1-0 victory over Kyrgyzstan to keep his side on track for the Asian Games gold he needs to avoid military service.

### Messi missing from UEFA's shortlist

There is no room for Lionel Messi among UEFA's player of the year nominees for the season 2017/18. Liverpool's Mohamed Salah along with Luka Modric and Cristiano Ronaldo finished within the top three.

### Four Japan athletes kicked out of Asian Games

Four Japanese basketball players were sent home from the Asian Games in disgrace for paying prostitutes for sex as the regional Olympics was hit by scandal.

### Sarri might temporarily give up smoking

Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri gets through approximately 80 cigarettes per day -- four to five an hour according to those close to him.

### Dzeko stunner lifts Roma

A late Edin Dzeko stunner got AS Roma off the mark in their Serie A campaign at Torino but Inter Milan made the worst possible start with a 1-0 loss at Sassuolo.

### Hazard rules out Chelsea exit

Chelsea forward Eden Hazard has said he has no plans to leave the Premier League club before the European transfer window closes at the end of the month.

## Novak achieves full Mastery

Beats Federer in Cincinnati to become first to all Masters titles

AFP, Cincinnati



Novak Djokovic ended a career-long jinx, lifting the trophy in Cincinnati at last to complete a matched set of Masters 1000 titles.

Djokovic, who came up empty in five prior Cincinnati finals, defeated seven-time winner Roger Federer 6-4, 6-4 in the final.

The former world number one became the first man to win all nine of the ATP's Masters 1000 events in the elite series' current configuration. Federer, meanwhile, lost a final in the hardcourt US Open tuneup for the first time.

"I played five finals (here) before, and most of those finals I lost to this great man, Roger ... thank you for letting me win here once in Cincinnati," Djokovic joked.

"This is a dream come true," Djokovic said. "I finally won Cincinnati after six finals, some against the greatest ever, Roger."

Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam winner, said his game wasn't sharp -- but he didn't want to take anything away from Djokovic's achievement.

"Novak is a great champion," Federer said. "This is about him making history."

Federer's streak of 100 straight unbroken service games in Cincy was

ended by Djokovic in the seventh game of the first set. The 37-year-old Swiss had been aiming for a 99th career trophy, but was unable to get over the line due in part to four double-faults at the most inopportune of times, but he said his return game was also lacking.

"It was definitely not my best day on the return - it was just awful," Federer said. "Missing every second serve on the forehand side, I don't

### THE ULTIMATE MASTER

DJOKOVIC'S MASTERS 1000 TRIUMPHS:

Canadian Open: 2007, 2011, 2012, 2016

Cincinnati Masters: 2018

Indian Wells: 2008, 2011, 2014, 2015, 2016

Italian Open: 2008, 2011, 2014, 2015

Madrid Open: 2011, 2016

Miami Open: 2007, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016

Monte-Carlo Masters: 2013, 2015

Paris Masters: 2009, 2013, 2014, 2015

Shanghai Masters: 2012, 2013, 2015

know what that was about.

"But I don't even want to look for reasons why it happened," he added. "Novak totally deserved to win today. This (effort) was not good enough."

"Good week, but I'm happy it's over and I need to rest," added Federer, his eye on the US Open starting in New York in eight days.

Djokovic claimed the opening set in 37 minutes and came back from

an early break in the second to overhaul his longtime rival as they played for the 46th time.

The Serb now leads Federer 24-22 and has won their last three encounters.

The pair had not played since the 2016 Australian Open semi-finals more than two and a half years ago.

Wimbledon champion Djokovic claimed his Masters record on his first match point and now heads to the US Open as a title favorite after a string of sub-par seasons and an elbow injury which required surgery.

"It's a wonderful feeling. It's been a couple of tough months for me with an injury and then winning Wimbledon and Cincinnati," Djokovic said.

Federer started the match with three aces in the opening game, then added a pair of love games for a 3-2 lead.

But it began to unravel as the Swiss double-faulted to yield a break point, dropping serve as Djokovic moved ahead 4-3.

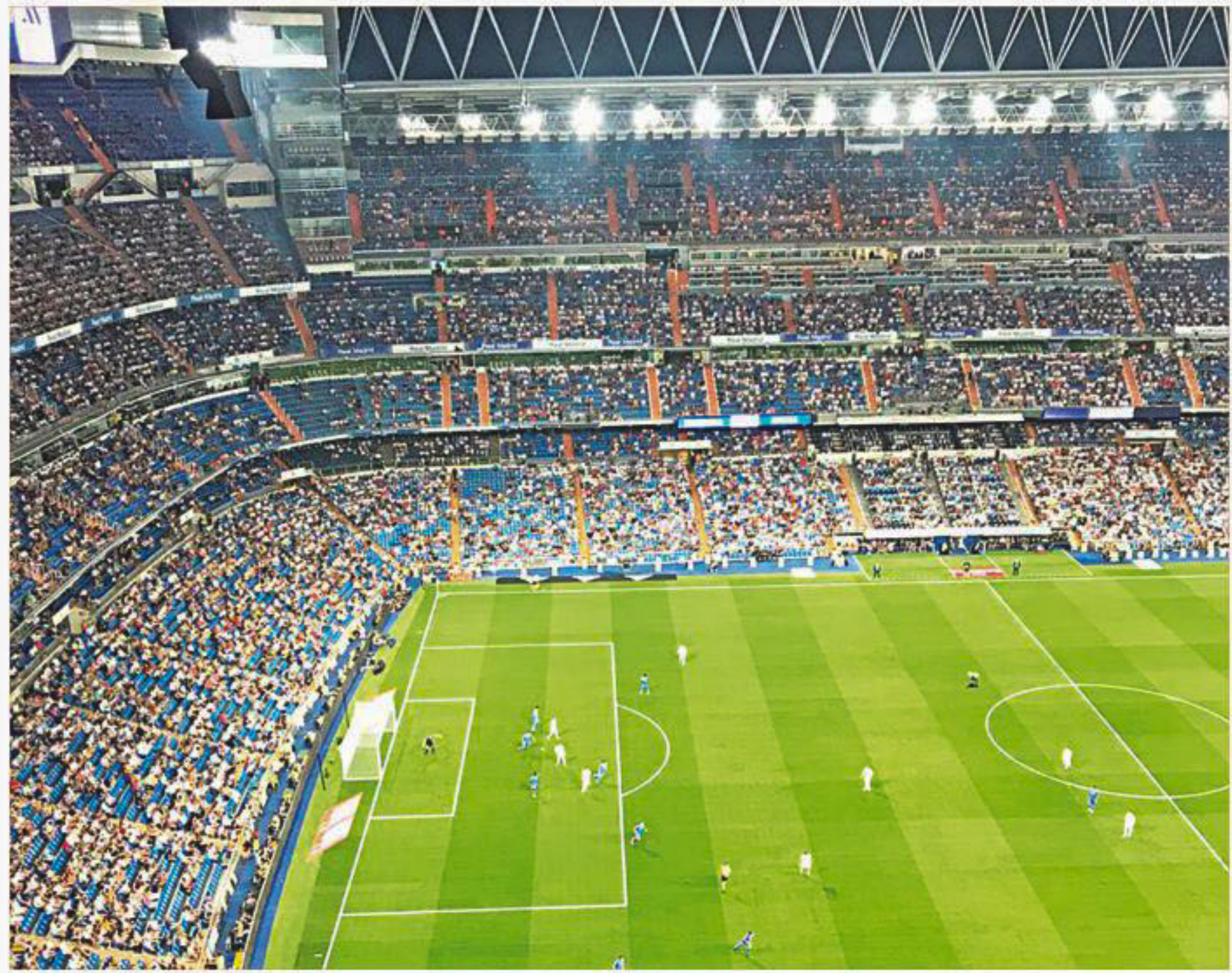
Djokovic took advantage for a 5-3 lead and closed out the set after 37 minutes. Federer broke for a 2-0 lead in the second set but gave the break back immediately as he double faulted to give Djokovic a break point which the Serb promptly converted.

Djokovic broke again to lead 4-3, and after Federer held to close the gap to 4-5 Djokovic ended the afternoon in the next game on his first match point.



Novak Djokovic further cemented his status as one of the greatest players to pick up a racket by defeating fellow all-timer Roger Federer in the Cincinnati Masters final on Sunday and becoming the first man to win all nine Masters 1000 titles.

PHOTO: REUTERS



The Bernabeu with a capacity of 81,044 was almost half empty as seen in the picture with vacant blue seats during Real Madrid's La Liga match against Getafe on Sunday. Only 48,446 fans turned up for the game, the lowest since 2009.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Real record lowest turnout since 2009

Lopetegui praises Bale's performance

AGENCIES, Madrid



Real Madrid's 2-0 win over Getafe on Sunday night was watched by 48,446 -- the lowest turnout since their last match before Cristiano Ronaldo's arrival in 2009.

La Liga's decision to play the game at 10:15 p.m. local time is likely to have affected the attendance, meaning the game did not end until after midnight, and there has been speculation over what effect Ronaldo's departure would have on the club.

The game saw the lowest Bernabeu attendance since May 2009, when Real Madrid were beaten 3-1 by Mallorca during a run of five defeats in a row to end the season under former Tottenham manager Juande Ramos.

New Real Madrid coach Julen Lopetegui hailed the performance of Gareth Bale after the Welshman scored one goal and created another in his team's 2-0 win.

Bale's cross was headed in by Dani Carvajal for Real's opening goal in their first match of the new campaign in La Liga, and he later scored his side's second at the Santiago Bernabeu.

"I was pleased with the team in general and Gareth put in a great performance," said Lopetegui, who also saw Bale head against the crossbar early on.

"Bale offers us solutions. He played well,

like many of his teammates."

With Cristiano Ronaldo having left for Juventus, and with no big signings made to replace the Portuguese superstar, Bale played in a front three along with Karim Benzema and Marco Asensio.

Lopetegui added: "In the structure that we are trying to create, there are players with different characteristics and Gareth has his own."

"He gives us something different and we need to take advantage of that. We are delighted with how it's going."

Lopetegui has replaced Zinedine Zidane on the Real bench and faces a big job to carry on from the Frenchman, who stood down after leading the team to a third consecutive Champions League triumph.

The former Spain coach's first competitive game at the helm ended in a 4-2 defeat after extra-time against Atletico Madrid in the UEFA Super Cup in Tallinn last Wednesday.

But Sunday's match against a modest Getafe side allowed Lopetegui to get off to the perfect start in La Liga.

"We still have a lot of room for improvement, like all teams at this time of year, but we showed intensity, good team spirit and we managed to win and score goals against a team who are well organised defensively."

Real's next outing is away at Girona next Sunday evening.