

A tradition that has defined Bangladesh cricket

MAZHAR UDDIN



Ramchand Goala, regarded as the pioneer of left-arm orthodox spin in Bangladesh, breathed his last on Friday, reminding of the rich legacy of left-arm spinners – finger spinner to be more specific -- in the country's history. There is no doubt that Bangladesh has produced some of the finest left-arm spinners over the years and that they have played leading roles for the Tigers.

Goala was a notable performer in the domestic circuit before liberation and continued to be a regular fixture for Abahani in the 12 years from 1981 to 1993, but never represented East Pakistan.

Even in his forties, Goala continued getting wickets but mostly opted to bowl his quota and return to the dressing room, with rules back then not as strict. He eventually retired from competitive cricket at the age of 53.

Nazrul Kader Lintu was another left-armed and one of the few unorthodox spinners Bangladesh have produced.

The introduction of turf wickets in the mid-eighties raised the demand for left-arm spinners and they began to flourish at the club level.

The likes of Enamul Haque Moni and, later on, Mohammad Rafique were inspired by the trend and, although they were initially pacers, the duo would go on to



MOHAMMAD RAFIQUE

become legendary left-armed in Bangladesh.

"Goala was the first notable orthodox left-arm spinner before liberation and was among very few cricketers outside Dhaka to play in the Dhaka leagues with authority. There was Lintu but he was a chinaman, which I think is still very exceptional in Bangladesh cricket. But if you talk about left-arm orthodox spinners, you also have to mention the emergence of Enamul Haque Moni and Rafique," prominent cricket writer and former coach Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

By the early nineties, having left-arm spinners in the side had become a symbol of strength among the clubs which was also courtesy of low and turning wickets in the domestic circuit.

The role of a left-arm spinner was mainly to contain runs and there were clubs who even opted for three left-arm orthodox spinners in their playing eleven, which reflected the authority that



ABDUR RAZZAK

left-armed had in Bangladesh cricket.

"Over-dependency on left-arm orthodox spinners mainly started due to the slow and low tracks during the late eighties. It was always difficult to hit away the left-arm spinners, who mainly looked to contain runs and tease batsmen," said experienced journalist Saydur Rahman Shamim, who is currently the chief of sports of a local TV channel.

Rafique would go on to raise the bar for slow left-arm orthodox spinners as he went on to become the first Bangladeshi to take 100 wickets in Tests.

That legacy was continued by the likes of Atique Khan, Mustadir Litu, Saifullah Jem and Ahsanullah, who were all among the top performers in the domestic leagues in the late nineties and early noughties but never featured for the national team.

The emergence of a sixteen-year old left-arm finger spinner in the form of Enamul Haque Jr during



SHAKIB AL HASAN

the early 2000s alongside Rafique once again highlighted the lefty dominance in the Bangladesh team. Manjarul Islam Rana also looked a prospect, but he tragically passed away in a road accident while the Tigers were in the Caribbean for the 2007 World Cup.

In the meantime, another left-arm orthodox spinner was waiting to announce himself and once Abdur Razzak emerged, Bangladesh found themselves flooded by quality left-armed.

After playing 33 Tests and 125 ODIs, Rafique handed over the baton in the late 2000s to Enamul and Razzak, who would become essential components in the Bangladesh team.

Shakib Al Hasan's introduction was perhaps the best thing to happen to Bangladesh cricket, as he raised the bar to new heights across all formats both home and away.

"Left-arm finger spin is something you don't need special talent for. Anyone can roll their arm for a finger spin. As left-arm spin has been a handy utility,



TAIJUL ISLAM

players often tend to have a go. But when it comes to wrist spinners, you won't find many leg spinners or chinaman bowlers compared to left-arm orthodox. In that regard, Shakib has set a new benchmark," Jalal said.

The latest among the successful lot of left-arm spinners is Taijul Islam, who has also set a high standard over the past few years and is only the third Bangladeshi bowler -- after Rafique and Shakib -- to take a hundred Test wickets.

"Honestly, I also started as a pacer during the under-13 trials before one of my uncles insisted that I become a left-arm spinner. I used to copy the bowling action of Rafique bhai as he was one of my role models," Taijul said.

The likes of Arifat Sunny, Nabil Samad, Elias Sunny, Sunjamul Islam, Sohrawardi Shuvo, Nazmul Islam Apu, Saqlain Sajib, Mosharraf Hossain and many more left-arm spinners were also part of that proud tradition in Bangladesh, which looks set to continue in the coming days.

Pique gives up but Setien still positive

AFP, MADRID



Gerard Pique said La Liga's title race is Real Madrid's to lose after Barcelona were held to a goalless draw against Sevilla on Friday. Barca's first slip-up since returning from the three-month hiatus hands Madrid the chance to regain top spot this weekend.

"Seeing what we've done in the last two rounds, it's going to be very difficult to win this league," said a despondent Pique afterwards. "From what I've seen, it's very hard to see Real Madrid dropping points."

Sevilla, in third, and Valencia, in eighth, always looked capable of shifting the dynamic at the top of the table, with Madrid capitalising to climb back to the summit for the first time since they beat Barcelona on March 1.

Asked about Pique's analysis, Barcelona coach Quique Setien said: "I think it comes from frustration. I am optimistic. I think it will be tough for anyone to take maximum points."



Alex Zanardi fighting for life

REUTERS, ROME

Former Formula One driver and twice Champ Car champion Alex Zanardi remained in serious condition in intensive care on Saturday after suffering severe head injuries in a road accident while racing his handbike in Italy.

The 53-year-old Italian, who lost both legs and nearly his life in a 2001 Champ Car crash in Germany, was in a drug-induced coma, said Giuseppe Oliveri, neurosurgeon at the Santa Maria alle Scotte hospital in Siena where Zanardi was taken after the accident on Friday.

His condition was described as serious but stable. He had been competing in the "Obiettivo Tricolore" road race for Italian paralympic athletes at the time.

Zanardi is an inspirational figure in the worlds of motorsport and paralympic endeavour, a hugely popular and positive competitor who returned from life-changing injuries with a smile.

Klopp ready for title push

AFP, LONDON



Liverpool can move within touching distance of the Premier League title when the runaway leaders face Everton tonight, while the relegation battle will be in the spotlight in the first full weekend of top-flight action since the coronavirus outbreak.

Jürgen Klopp's side will play for the first time since the Premier League was suspended in March over the COVID-19 pandemic as the title chasers make the short trip to Merseyside rivals Everton on Sunday.

Liverpool, 22 points clear of second-placed Manchester City, need two wins from their remaining nine games to end their 30-year wait to be crowned English champions.

If the Reds beat Everton, they can wrap up the title with another victory against Crystal Palace at Anfield on Wednesday.

Klopp's men have not been in action for 106 days and the Liverpool boss is relieved to return after talk the season might be declared null and void, which would have deprived his team of the title their superb season deserves.

Liverpool had been on course to



Things at Liverpool were relaxed ahead of their trip to Goodison Park for the Merseyside derby today. Mohamed Salah and James Milner share a light moment, knowing the champions-elect need just two wins to wrap up their first Premier League title in three decades.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

become the first English champions to be crowned in March after recording 27 wins from 29 matches.

However, Liverpool's inevitable title will now come with an asterisk according to some pundits, who claim the Premier League's new

normal of matches behind closed doors with more substitutes allowed has taken the shine off the leaders' achievements.

Klopp doesn't care about those critics and, on the eve of Liverpool's return, the German hit back.

"Now I have had a lot of time to read. I had to Google the word 'asterisk'. I only knew the word from a comic!" Klopp said. "This is the most difficult year and season to become champions, 100 percent. It is an interrupted season, like has never

happened before. "Whoever will be champions, it will be historic because it is a year that we will never forget.

"Give us an asterisk, yes. We cannot do a lot of things that we usually can do but in this specific case at least we can say this is really special. That's why we enjoy the little asterisk there."

Liverpool's derby clash comes at the conclusion of a busy weekend that confirms the Premier League is back in full swing.

Following midweek matches on Wednesday and Friday, this is the first Saturday since March 7 that top-flight games have been played in England.

There will be four games stretched across Saturday and a further three on Sunday, with relegation and Champions League qualification on the agenda in the eerily empty stadiums while fans watch from home.

Watford, out of the relegation zone only on goal difference, host third-placed Leicester in desperate need of points to boost their survival bid.

Brighton were one of the most vocal critics of plans to play at neutral venues, which was initially suggested to keep fans away.



Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer welcomed Paul Pogba back to his side after months out with injury in their Premier League encounter with Tottenham and the Frenchman did not disappoint, showing some incredible skill to win the penalty that led to the equalizer in their 1-1 draw.

PHOTO: REUTERS

From nightmare to new dawn

AFP, BERGAMO



Bergamo's Atalanta return to action on Sunday, hoping that a resumption of their incredible football success will signal the historic Italian city's return to normality after being devastated by coronavirus.

"These have been extremely difficult months," said Mayor Giorgio Gori, remembering the dozens of coffins lined up for burial and the macabre images of the military convoys that carried them which were beamed around the world. "March was a series of mournings, each bit of news more sad than the last. Now there's relief, we've returned to a relatively normal situation," he told journalists.

The province suffered 6,000 more deaths than usual during the COVID-19 outbreak, including 670 in Bergamo city which has a population of around 122,000. Almost everyone there has lost a relative, friend, colleague or neighbour.

It is now known that the Champions League match between Atalanta and Valencia on February 19 played a significant role in spreading the deadly virus.

Around 46,000 spectators gathered at Milan's San Siro to watch Atalanta crush the Spanish team 4-1. With every goal, local fans fell into each other's arms, at the stadium and in bars.

The coronavirus was already known in China

but seemed far away from northern Italy.

But that soon changed, and from March 4 the number of cases in Bergamo rose sharply, leading some doctors to label the football match a "biological bomb" which had exploded.

After the second leg was played and also won, 4-3, on March 10 in Valencia, Atalanta coach Gian Piero Gasperini called for a big party



to be held "later" as the team made it to the Champions League quarter-finals.

There followed over two months of lockdown in Italy, and tourists are yet to return to this pretty UNESCO World Heritage Site city. On Sunday, Atalanta take on Sassuolo in their first post-virus Italian Serie A match, to be held without fans present, but with the team known as "La Dea" resuming what was far and away their

best season ever. "This match represents a small return to normality," said Atalanta supporter Andrea Sigorini, 36. "But as the staff and players have said, our thoughts will be with those who have been through such difficult times," he said.

"We're in a hurry to see Atalanta play again, given the level they're playing at," he told AFP. "Counting friends and others I know, I lost 40 people. Football helps us, not to forget, because we don't forget, but to enjoy ourselves," said the 71-year-old Marino Lazzarini, who has been going to the stadium since he was four.

Atalanta's captain, Argentine Alejandro "Papu" Gomez, has also called for football to resume, despite the opposition of some hardcore "Ultra" fans. "If you asked me two months ago I would have been against," he told sports newspaper Corriere dello Sport.

"But now it's safer. Bergamo lives for football, breathes football. But Bergamo won't forget."

Those who are rejoicing at the resumption of football, even behind closed doors, are desperate to know how their so-far incredible season ends.

Atalanta occupy the fourth and final Champions League qualifying spot in Serie A and sit three points clear of fifth-placed Roma with a game in hand. "We hope that the dream can resume," said Lazzarini.

After their historic victory in Valencia, players showed off a T-shirt written in the local dialect: "Bergamo, Mola MiFra" or "Never Give Up, Bergamo".

WHAT TO WATCH

FACEBOOK LA LIGA

Celta Vigo v Alaves
Live from 6:00pm
Valencia v Osasuna
Live from 11:30pm
Real Sociedad v Real Madrid
Live from 2:00am (Monday)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE

Star Sports Select 1
Newcastle v Sheffield Utd
Live from 7:00pm
Aston Villa v Chelsea
Live from 9:15pm
Everton v Liverpool
Live from 12:00am (Monday)

SERIE A Ten 2

Atalanta v Sassuolo
Live from 11:30pm
Inter Milan v Sampdoria
Live from 1:45am (Monday)