

In trying to avoid fate, did Pep make it more likely?

AGENCIES, Lisbon

It was another eyebrow-raising call from Pep Guardiola. Perhaps that was the appropriate way to end the night given the self-defeating way he had started it. In his post-match press conference, the Manchester City manager was asked when exactly he told his players about the 3-5-2 formation they set out against Lyon on Saturday night.

Guardiola did not reveal that, but did say the following: "In this competition, tactics are not the most important thing."

important to Lyon and they stuck with what they knew best.

"With Pep, you can expect anything. We knew Pep could concoct something to cause us problems. But in the end I think we won the tactical battle in the sense that we've mastered our tactical system, even if I changed it [during the match]," Garcia said after.

Perhaps Guardiola was thinking of the team that has dominated Europe for the past decade, and how Zinedine Zidane drew match-winning performances out of Real Madrid without doing anything special in terms of tactical ideology.

Maybe he meant that mental character is the most important.

One significant difference is that the Frenchman had a lot of hardened senior players. City do not. They have a squad that look absolutely brilliant when everything is on song, but don't seem to know how to react when it goes wrong. And it now goes wrong every single season in the Champions League, and always before the semifinals.

Kevin De Bruyne's comments after the game made it all the more conspicuous. In a post-match interview that went down a few tangents, and had a few

spiky comments, the Belgian still summed it up. "It feels like the same old story for me, to be honest."

It certainly had all the same details. There were bad misses, bad decisions, questionable calls and a below-par performance. There was chaos. But all of that seemed to stem from the manager's needless adjustments, which resulted in yet another early exit.

There is almost a Greek tragedy element to it. In trying to avoid the fate he fears most, he just makes it more likely. Tactics actually become by far the most important thing in that regard.



Manchester City forward Raheem Sterling shocked the world when, in the 86th minute of their Champions League quarterfinal with his side 2-1 down, he ballooned the ball over an empty net from all of eight yards. Fifty-nine seconds later, Lyon scored and put the game to bed.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Cruelty of football!

REUTERS, Lisbon



The unforgiving nature of football was exemplified by a jaw-dropping miss from Raheem Sterling against Olympique Lyonnais as Manchester City's saw their Champions League dreams disintegrate inside 59 crazy seconds in Saturday's quarter-final.

Sterling was City's leading goalscorer this season with 31 goals and the chance that fell his way late in the game to make the score 2-2 was so simple that he could be expected to bury it with his eyes closed.

But the England forward somehow sent the shot flying over the bar with the goal gaping in front of him, sending a seemingly perfect chance to equalise begging.

The madness continued down the other end as City's defence was sliced open by Lyon and a pedestrian shot from Houssem Aouar was somehow spilled by their ever-reliable goalkeeper Ederson to the feet of Moussa Dembele, who made no mistake to make it 3-1.

From a nailed-on equaliser practically handed to them and a chance to take the game to extra-time, City had suddenly conceded again and were out of the competition they covet most and which their Abu Dhabi owners have spent billions



of pounds to win since buying the club in 2008 but failed to do so.

"That moment sums up this competition," said a distraught Pep Guardiola, a two-times winner of the Champions League with Barcelona who was hired by City precisely due to his track record in the competition.

"In this situation you have to equalise to take it to extra time, but then we concede the third and it's over."

The moment will rank alongside Sterling's late strike against Tottenham Hotspur in last year's competition which was agonisingly ruled out by a VAR review as yet another cruel moment for City in a competition they seem to be finding new ways to not win.

SEMIFINALS

August 18: RB Leipzig vs Paris Saint-Germain
August 19: Lyon vs Bayern.

That is a convenient comment for a manager whose perplexing formation and line-up seemed to level the gap between a squad worth over £900m, his, and one worth around a third of that.

Guardiola, for some reason, decided to play five defenders against a side that had got 40 points from 28 games in Ligue 1, while leaving out four of his most creative players. That seemed very important given it took away so many of City's attacking strengths, while only serving to make them more defensively vulnerable.

On the other side, there was the impressive focus of Rudi Garcia's approach, which ultimately tilted the game in Lyon's favour. They did a number on City, taking advantage of the flaws we have seen time and again. Tactics were certainly



Lyon players celebrate their stunning victory over Manchester City in the Champions League quarterfinals on Saturday night. This season's giant-killers, having slain Juventus as well in the round of 16, are gearing up to take on the ruthless Bayern Munich in the semis.

PHOTO: REUTERS



BACK IN BUSINESS

Tamim Iqbal and Mustafizur Rahman yesterday trained at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur for the first time since the coronavirus-induced break. Although many players had started individual training sessions at BCB facilities across the country more than three weeks ago, Tamim missed those sessions as he was in England. The southpaw was satisfied with the day's work, saying: "I didn't feel uncomfortable for a first day after such a big break. Our target is the Sri Lanka tour and we have sufficient time to prepare ourselves for that tour."

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



An under-19 player gets tested for Covid-19 at the BCB Academy yesterday as a prerequisite for joining a residential camp in BKSP. Around 27 players and support staff got their samples collected on the first day of testing.

PHOTO: BCB

A limited-edition original

MAZHAR UDDIN



Mahendra Singh Dhoni will long be celebrated as the most successful limited-overs Indian captain, and the plaudits have only begun as the cricketer announced his retirement from international cricket on Saturday.

And why not? He is the only Indian captain to have won three ICC trophies -- the 2007 T20 World Cup, the 50-over World Cup in 2011 and the 2013 ICC Champions Trophy -- and he did it with his immense leadership qualities and a calm approach that transformed the side into a formidable force.

But apart from his successful captaincy, Dhoni the cricketer has also set a new benchmark for wicketkeeper-batsmen around the world. Whether it was his unorthodox batting style or unique wicketkeeping skills, Dhoni was highly successful and inspired a lot of wicketkeeper-batsmen.

His astounding numbers in international cricket -- 17,266 runs, 16 centuries, 108 fifties, 359 sixes and 829 dismissals -- reflect his impact on the game.

Since making his international debut in 2004 against Bangladesh, Dhoni consistently caught the eyes for his great presence of mind, ability to read the situation and adapt quickly but calmly both as a batsman and a wicketkeeper.

Dhoni's style of cricket has encouraged many in the Bangladesh team, who learned and adapted such swift techniques.

According to Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Mithun, it was Dhoni who changed the style of wicketkeeping and has taken the craft to a different level.

"Dhoni is one of my favourite players and his ability to handle pressure and remain cool is outstanding. I like his captaincy a lot, his ability to take decisions and be spontaneous. I have never seen him panic and his ability to finish the game is something I try to follow in my game."

"But it's his wicketkeeping,

which I think he has taken to the next level in world cricket. He completely changed it. Previously wicketkeepers used to take more time in collecting the ball and then drag it to the stumps, which is basic, but Dhoni changed it. His flexibility and reflex actually make everything quicker compared to what we used to follow previously," Mithun told The Daily Star.

Another wicketkeeper-batsman, Liton Das, said Dhoni's special technique and ability to remain calm is something the cricketer

would want to learn and embody.

"His keeping technique is quite special and the way he does stumpings is extraordinary. Dhoni has actually changed the way of thinking as a wicketkeeper in his own way, which most keepers are not taught at a young age. But he backed his own technique and he is also a great batsman," said Liton.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan Sohan was fortunate to have a discussion with Dhoni in 2017.

"I had a chat with him two-three times and every time Dhoni told me that it's important to know your own strengths and focus on your strength. It was in 2017 when I asked him for some time and he spoke with me for around 15 minutes. Previously, us wicketkeepers used to follow Australian or English wicketkeepers and their basics but since Dhoni arrived he actually changed the entire way of thinking in keeping. If I talk about his footwork or ball collecting techniques those are actually very practical and handy. As a batsman or as a leader he was no doubt outstanding and we will miss him in international cricket," Nurul said.

Whether it was his ability to outfox batsmen while waiting for the return throw from fielders or removing the glove from one hand while keeping during the last stage of the innings so that he could more easily throw down the stumps to stop a stolen run, Dhoni had his own style and technique which sets him apart and encourages others to say, 'It's okay to be yourself.'



Millions of cricket fans will miss 'Captain Cool' as MS Dhoni logged out from international cricket with a 16-word post on Instagram on Saturday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

'Dhoni arguably greatest white-ball captain'

AGENCIES



Mahendra Singh Dhoni is arguably the greatest white-ball skipper in the history of the game, former England captains Michael Vaughan and Nasser Hussain said in a tribute to the Indian who quit international cricket on Saturday.

Known for his unflappable demeanour, 'Captain Cool' Dhoni led India to World Cup titles in 2007 (Twenty20) and 2011 (ODI), besides overseeing their 2013 Champions Trophy triumph.

Hoisting the inaugural World T20 trophy in Johannesburg, in a half-sleeved India vest in 2007 and hitting that six in the 2011

World Cup final against Sri Lanka at Mumbai's Wankhede stadium, which instantly became an iconic moment in cricket and established the man who started out as a railway ticket collector as one of the game's greats, will forever remain etched amongst memorable moments.

Hard-hitting, unruffled no matter the pressure, the record of India's most successful captain will be virtually impossible to beat.

India also became the top-ranked Test team under Dhoni..

"What an incredible international career. You could argue the greatest ever white ball captain & finisher," tweeted Vaughan.

Hussain also praised Dhoni's ability to finish a game in style, best

illustrated in the final of the 2011 World Cup when Dhoni sealed India's victory with a six.

"A great captain, probably the best white-ball captain there has ever been," Hussain told Sky Sports.

"And also a cool, calm customer under pressure; a great finisher of a game, the game wasn't won until you got Dhoni out."

Dhoni aggregated 17,000 runs across formats and claimed more than 800 victims as wicketkeeper.

Shane Warne was another admirer of Dhoni's phlegmatic brand of leadership. "He had a calmness about him that was fantastic and he always got the best out of his team..." Warne told Sky Sports.

Many will remember him as an

accumulator of runs after being appointed India's one-day captain in 2007, but it was his style which set Dhoni apart.

Cricketers from across the globe and Indian media paid tribute to the glittering career of Dhoni, who was fondly called 'Mahi' by his teammates.

Players and fans Sunday urged India's cricket board to retire Mahendra Singh Dhoni's number seven jersey in a tribute to the two-time World Cup winning captain.

There is no provision to retire jerseys in cricket, unlike in football. But the BCCI unofficially retired batting great Sachin Tendulkar's number 10 shirt a few years after his retirement.