

Like a distant memory, brought back in ‘colour’

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Growing up, Diego Maradona seemed like a ghost from the past for someone who had little experience of watching live football during the 90s. For those of us born after the infamous 1986 World Cup in Mexico -- a tournament which people to this day claim the Argentine won singlehandedly -- Maradona was already fading from memory following the scandals of 1994.

But there in lay Diego's



magnifique, his charm. For he had achieved the unfathomable and staked his claim to the hearts of people all over the world and Bangladesh never really let go of this footballing deity.

Two goals, as if separated by eons, but only scored in the space of four minutes, further laid siege to the madness that is Diego Maradona in Bangladesh as the Argentine produced perhaps the two most talked-about moments in footballing history in the same game against England during the 1986 quarterfinal in Mexico.

Chattogram demolish Dhaka

SPORTS REPORTER

Gazi Group Chattogram began the Bangabandhu T20 Cup on a high as they registered a comprehensive nine-wicket win over Beximco Dhaka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Chasing a meagre target of 89, Chattogram cruised through on a brisk 79-run opening stand between Soumya Sarkar and Liton Das.

Liton was dismissed after making 34 off 33 balls and smashing three fours and a six while Soumya remained unbeaten on 44 off 29 with two sixes and four boundaries.

Mushfiqur Rahim's Dhaka were asked to bat first and kept losing wickets at regular intervals.

Naim Sheikh hit a 23-ball 40 with the help of three fours and three sixes, but none of the others were able to make an impact.

Chattogram skipper Mohammad Mithun rotated his bowlers well and Shoriful Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Mosaddek Hossain and Taijul Islam shared two wickets each and bundled out the opponent for a very low total.

It will be important for Dhaka to return with a better approach after losing a second consecutive game and skipper Mushfiqur will have to shoulder more responsibility and guide the rather young side.

SCORES IN BRIEF:

Dhaka: 88 all out (Akbar 15; Shoriful 2-10, Mustafizur 2-13, Mosaddek 2-9, Taijul 2-32)
Chattogram: 90 for 1 (Liton 34, Soumya 44 not out)
Result: Chattogram won by 9 wickets.



Within those four minutes, he had pulled off something so cheeky with the infamous 'Hand of God', that it would earn him the tag of 'cheat' for years to come. But as was often the case with Maradona, he went and did something even more inexplicable, taking on the entire English defence -- which appeared to be in a trance and clutching at straws -- escaping tackles and earth itself with his mazy run and scoring what would later be known as the 'Goal of the Century'.

Light and darkness, Maradona in his true essence. This was in fact a recurring pattern as he lived his life unapologetically, like a troubled artist whose genius continued to draw people in even long after his descent into darkness.

My earliest recollections of Maradona involved colour posters at home strewn across the study

table wall, glued in by family members. As a young person, this was a man I did not know but yet he was always familiar, living in the words of those around me.

The posters told tales of intense tough tackling on the Argentine playmaker, who would get up and go about his business -- his character just as mesmerizing as his football. For many, Maradona was a real-life superhero out of some Greek mythology slaying nine-headed Hydra. In many ways, he was the living embodiment of a rebel who spoke truth to power and a close personal friendship with Fidel Castro raised his profile as a player and icon even in the remotest of territories.

My only recollection of Maradona playing live came during the 1994 World Cup. It was past midnight and I only remember

my father trying to wake me up to watch Maradona; I could barely keep my eyes open.

In later years, Brazil's Ronaldo, Zinedine Zidane and Ronaldinho would become part of our collective footballing identities and with the arrival of the internet, finally Maradona's feats became more accessible. I remember being mesmerized, unable to connect to the dream that was Maradona, to the football I was used to seeing. He would grow into a hero for many who missed out on watching him during his playing days, his legend brought back to us in colour.

"There was stupefaction and scandal, a blast of moral condemnation that left the whole world deaf. But somehow a few voices of support for the fallen idol managed to squeak through, not only in his wounded and dumbfounded Argentina, but in places as far away as Bangladesh, where a sizable demonstration repudiating FIFA and demanding Maradona's return shook the streets," Eduardo Galeano, the eminent Uruguayan journalist, wrote in his famous book Football in Sun and Shadow, portraying the humane connection that Diego had with the world.

A legend, there was never a dull moment with King Diego. He belongs to the world. A true people's champion.



A one-minute silence was observed in memory of football legend Diego Maradona during yesterday's Bangabandhu T20 Cup matches at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Rajshahi cruise after Nazmul fifty

SPORTS REPORTER



Skipper Hossain Nazmul's crisp fifty guided Minister Rajshahi to their second consecutive win, this time by a comfortable

four-wicket margin over mighty Gemcon Khulna in yesterday's first Bangabandhu T20 Cup fixture at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Chasing a modest 147-run target on a good batting wicket, Nazmul gave the momentum right at the top with 55 off 34 balls, which included three sixes and six fours.

Adjudged player of the match, Nazmul made it look easy as the left-hander played some delightful strokes and provided a steady start.

Later, twenties from Rony Talukdar, Fazle Mahmud and Mohammad Ashrafui, who was unbeaten on 25, took them to an easy win.

Earlier, Khulna skipper

Mahmudullah Riyad elected to bat and, much like in their first game on Tuesday, Khulna's top order once again failed to provide the start they needed.

It was a mixture of disciplined bowling from the Rajshahi bowlers and some poor shot selection from the batsmen that prevented Khulna from posting a fighting total.



The experienced Imrul Kayes departed for his second consecutive duck while Anamul Haque, as has become the norm, looked promising at the start but he too failed to convert the start and was dismissed for 26.

Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was one again unable to make an impact with the bat. After striking two boundaries, he fell for just 12 in pretty similar fashion to his dismissal in the first game-- pulling a short ball straight to square leg.

Mahmudullah also departed early and it was the hero of the first game, Ariful Haque, who once again helped his side stave off humiliation. His unbeaten 31-ball 41, which included three sixes and two fours, and young Shamim Hossain's 35 helped Khulna post 146 for six.

Pacer Mukidul Islam picked up two wickets while Ebadot Hossain, Mahedi Hasan, and Arafat Sunny took a wicket each for Rajshahi.

SCORES IN BRIEF:

Khulna: 146 for 6 (Ariful 41 not out, Sham-im 35; Mukidul 2-44)
Rajshahi: 147 for 4 (Nazmul 55, Rony 26, Ashrafui 25 not out)
Result: Rajshahi won by 6 wickets.



'If you love football, you love Maradona'

ANISUR RAHMAN

When news of Diego Armando Maradona's passing filtered through on the night of November 25 in Bangladesh, the grief that took hold in the country was as if a mischievous, magnetic boy next door died and not a footballing genius who lived 10,000 miles away and imbued everything he touched with the brightest colours.

Born and raised in the darkness of Villa Fiorito, a poor area on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, it was not just Argentina that Maradona lit up with his exploits; he ignited the world. People here found immense joy in his genius, his impossible talent and defiance of established expectations. In Bangladeshis' eyes, he was the boy next door -- the rare one that through his joie de vivre, impossible talent and penchant for triumphing against all odds gave others like him the gift of aspiration.

"After waking up, I heard Maradona passed away and I really felt that I lost something valuable because he is not only an iconic footballer but also a great human, who was so popular locally and globally," said Mohammad Kamrul Islam Mamun, a service holder in a private company.

A banker named Partha Ghosh said,

"Maradona for me is the greatest thing that happened to me in life. I love him as much as my father and it's like my old man died," Cristian Montelli, 22, a fan of the star's former club Boca Juniors said with tears in his eyes. Argentines lined up in the streets of Buenos Aires on Thursday to say goodbye to football great Diego Maradona.

"Maradona was very popular among people of all walks of life. Everyone looked sad at work and it seemed they were struggling to pay attention today [Thursday]."

Architect Maruf Hossain believes Maradona's loss is a deep one for the world as he took football to a different level not only in terms of technical ability but also popularity in parts of the world that in the 1980s and early '90s were not considered mainstream, like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and some African countries.

"He was very much like a boy next

door because his background is very similar to ours. He reached this stage by rising from a poor area and showed us that it is possible to reach the top through football, which also inspires less developed countries like us," said the former BUET student. "He was a really courageous person who used to protest boldly against irregularities, even against FIFA."

Kazi Shamim Al Momin Rupok, a businessman, said, "During my childhood, I started loving Argentina due to Maradona, whose image was on notebooks, T-shirts, cards and posters ahead of the 1990 World Cup. I stopped supporting Argentina after their defeat to Cameroon but I have been a big fan of Maradona."

"The triumph of the 1986 World Cup made him so popular among



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Boca Juniors turned off all the lights and lit up Diego Maradona's box.

Bangladeshi fans who never lost their love for him despite some infamous off-field incidents. Bangladeshis fans also had a lot of sympathy for Maradona because he was never allowed to play freely on the ground."

National striker Nabib Newaj Jibon said, "If you love football, you should love Maradona. I became his fan after watching his videos. He was best in his time although he had to face a lot of fouls from opponents, which are now bookable offences." Former national footballer and coach Julfikar Mahmud Mintu believes Maradona was an unbelievable player who won the hearts of Bangladeshi fans with his brilliant performance, nothing else.

"To be honest, I am as shocked by the demise of Maradona as I was by [the death of] Badal Roy. Maradona has been a golden boy of Fiorito and he was also the same to me because I started to follow him in 1986 as a footballer in the Pioneer League."

"Maradona for me is the greatest thing that happened to me in life. I love him as much as my father and it's like my old man died," Cristian Montelli, 22, a fan of the star's former club Boca Juniors said with tears in his eyes. Argentines lined up in the streets of Buenos Aires on Thursday to say goodbye to soccer great Diego Maradona.

India tour gets underway today

REUTERS, SYDNEY



The plans for India's tour of Australia have been ripped up and redrawn dozens of times over the last eight months but the action finally gets underway with the first one-day international at the Sydney Cricket Ground on today.

It was at the same venerable ground on March 13 that Australia last hosted international men's cricket, with the hosts beating New Zealand by 71 runs to snap a five-match losing streak in one-dayers.

The 48,000 seats were empty that day as the Covid-19 pandemic began to bite but Australia's relative success at containing the virus means up to half of them will be occupied on Friday.

India's squad will be raring to go after coming out of two weeks of quarantine, while Australia's players will be reunited after preparing in two separate groups to satisfy biosecurity protocols.

Virat Kohli's tourists are the second ranked ODI side in the world and will be looking to get into their groove in the three 50-over and three Twenty20 matches that precede the four-match test series around the new year.

"It's important to start well in the white-ball series," India vice-captain KL Rahul said. "We are playing for the country after a while. We enjoy coming here and playing hard cricket."

Skipper Kohli will return home after the first Test to attend the birth of his first child.

Finch said he thought the unusual preparations would not have an impact on the Australian players, who will stand in a circle barefoot to recognise the country's indigenous people

before the match.

"I think everyone's on the same page in terms of how we want to play one-day cricket and build up some really good momentum," he told reporters on Thursday.



Bayern, City through to round of 16



Atalanta celebrate their 2-0 win against Liverpool at Anfield. The visitors scored twice in four minutes to deliver a surprise victory and blew qualification from Champions League Group D wide open.

PHOTO: TWITTER

AGENCIES



Bayern Munich and Manchester City qualified for the Champions League round of 16 on Wednesday, while Real Madrid beat Inter Milan in a group nevertheless still topped by Borussia Mönchengladbach and Liverpool lost at home to Atalanta. Holders Bayern Munich failed to hit top form but did enough for a 3-1 win over visitors Salzburg to book their spot in the knockout stage with two games to spare. Manchester City booked their place in the knockout stage following a display far more dominant than the final scoreline suggests but manager Pep Guardiola has backed his attacking players to hit top gear after sealing qualification to the last 16 with a 1-0 victory at Olympiakos Piraeus. Real Madrid claimed a first-ever win at San Siro, beating Inter 2-0 while Atalanta scored quickfire second-half goals to earn a comfortable 2-0 win over a toothless Liverpool. Though Liverpool still lead the group on nine points, both Atalanta and Ajax Amsterdam, who beat bottom side Midtjylland 3-1, are now two points behind with two games left to play. Atletico Madrid huffed and puffed against Lokomotiv Moscow but had to settle for a disappointing 0-0 home draw which left them with plenty to do if they are to reach the knockout stages. Porto comfortably beat Olympique de Marseille 2-0 away to move to the brink of qualifying.