

COUNTRY	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
USA	39	41	33	113
China	38	32	18	88
Japan	27	14	17	58
Great Britain	22	21	22	65
ROC	20	28	23	71
Australia	17	7	22	46
Netherlands	10	12	14	36
France	10	12	11	33
Germany	10	11	16	37
Italy	10	10	20	40

OLYMPICS MEDALS TABLE (TOP TEN)

Messi 'did everything he could'



PSG star Kylian Mbappe congratulates new signing Achraf Hakimi, who scored the first goal, after a comeback 2-1 win at promoted Troyes in their Ligue 1 opener on Saturday while anticipating the arrival of six-time Ballon d'Or winner Lionel Messi. French newspaper L'Equipe reported on Sunday that the Argentine will travel to the French capital either Sunday or Monday to undertake a medical and finalise his deal with the Qatar Sports Investment-owned club.

PHOTO: REUTERS

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Even amidst the most bizarre realities in football, it just does not get any more bizarre than this. With the world watching, the press conference that transpired at the Camp Nou yesterday, was about to puncture hopes -- the last shred of it anyway -- and leave Barcelona fans with a gaping vacuum with nowhere to escape.

There was however no one in that room or anywhere else in the world that moment who felt it more inwardly than the man who stepped out from just behind another room behind the stage arranged for him to explain to the world what was going on; Barcelona's talisman, the all-enduring Lionel Messi, about to leave behind a 21-year-old career at the club where he gave his all.

As he got up on that stage, the strength to be there suddenly appeared too big, even for Messi as he took his time to gather himself. And when he spoke, his voice was timid, eyes still swelling with tears. "I have given lots of thoughts to what I can say and the truth is I can't think of anything. This is really difficult for me and honestly I am not ready for this," he said.

He had wanted to move on by his own account last year, and ended up not doing so as it would have meant taking his childhood club, the love of his life to court over his contractual obligations. This time it was different. He was the one wanting to stay, while Barca are the one that had to let go.



Lionel Messi poses with all 35 trophies he won during his time at Barcelona after an emotional press conference at the Camp Nou yesterday. PHOTO: FC BARCELONA

"Last year with the nonsense with the board and everything, I was convinced of what to say [in the press conference]. This year I was convinced that me and my family were going to stay home. We thought we would be staying here in Barcelona," he added.

Signed on a piece of napkin -- an informal contract -- Messi became part of the Barcelona folklore since arriving at the Catalan club at the age of 13. If it was strange that he wanted to leave last year, stranger still was that he had to move on now. The club have had historical ruptures before. Diego Maradona was let

go of. Ronaldo Nazario too.

Neymar escaped and before that Figo's betrayal had haunted them for years. Barca did not want to share Di Stefano with Real and Pep Guardiola was so stressed, he does not want to return ever again to the coach's bench.

Having played in possibly the greatest club side of all time between 2009 till 2012, Messi endured like no other through grave defeats too, but not anymore. And having arrived as a child, the 672 goals, 778 matches and 35 titles he lived does not go anywhere close to explaining the wonder he is

leaving. Messi was lived in the moments, the matches and the magic -- the iconic number 10, best-ever in the club's storied history.

He explained clearly. "I did everything I could. I asked to reduce my contract by fifty percent and then they didn't ask me for anything else." Anything less than that would perhaps be legally implausible according to Spanish law.

When Joan Laporta came in as the new president, there was hope that Messi would be renewed. During these pandemic times, the club could not move on players. Last season they lost 478m euros and accrued a standing debt of €1.173bn. At the age of 34, Messi now has to look for a new club and in the end, not being on the pitch and without the fans was not what he wanted.

The situation was surreal and questions would be posed on whether Barca could have done more. But above all, the end just does not add up.

"I've been here so many years, my entire life since I was 13. After 21 years, I'm leaving with my wife, my three little Catalan-Argentine kids, and I can't tell you we won't come back because this is my home, and I promised my children that."

Onus on batsmen in final T20I

MAZHAR UDDIN



Prior to the start of the five-match T20I series against Australia, there were not many

who would have thought that Bangladesh could go on to win the series with two games in hand despite the fact that the visitors were without some of their top batsmen.

In fact, expectations mostly concerned whether the Tigers could snatch a first-ever win against Australia in the shortest format after losing all four T20Is between the sides in the past.

Credit must go to the Tigers think-tank for showing the urge and hunger to strive for more once after they managed to win the first T20I with a lot of authority in their first-ever five-match T20I bilateral series against Australia.

Bangladesh managed to utilise the pitch and home conditions to great effect and exploited the visitors' weakness by preparing a slow, turning surface which kept the visitors guessing most of the time.

With a scoring rate of 5.86, this series has already become the slowest T20I series of at least three matches that has ever been played.

One can

"I guess the strategy worked for us last night (Saturday). Ashton Turner was able to bowl his four overs, that meant we've got 12 overs of spin. This is something that gave us success in the last match, which we could've done earlier. Also, different types of scenarios can bring different results. Like I said, it's high time to think what the results could've been if we played the extra spinners, it did the work for us last night and potentially that could work looking forward."

MITCHELL SWEPSON, AUSTRALIA SPINNER

ask questions about whether playing on such pitches at home can help Bangladesh become a better opposition in the shortest format when they play in different conditions -- keeping the upcoming World T20 in mind -- where batsmen mostly dominate proceedings.

Aside from that, it was also important for Bangladesh to gain in confidence, which happens through wins, whether they come against Zimbabwe on seam-friendly tracks or at slow pitches at home against Australia. Bangladesh will definitely take this series win with both hands.

There is no scope to undermine the historic series win and interestingly none of the Australian cricketers have complained about the surface's unusual behavior. Instead, the Aussies took this as a great learning experience ahead of their World Cup campaign.

But despite the Tigers sealing the series, the team management opted to make no changes to the winning combination in the fourth T20I, which came as a surprise for many, who would have hoped Bangladesh team management would test their depth in the last two games.

Bangladesh's bowlers also deserve tremendous credit for being able to execute their plans, with the Tigers making and breaking records of successfully

defending their lowest total twice in four games.

With the fifth and final game of the series coming up, the focus will now shift to the Tigers batting department, which desperately needs to gain some confidence.

It is pretty obvious that the pitches have not offered runs freely. Mahmudullah Riyad's fifty in the third game was actually the only time a Bangladesh batsman was able to reach that mark in four matches.

Wins always provide confidence to Bangladesh as a unit, but it will be important to see how they use that confidence in taking up challenges over the coming days and that will also be an area to ponder for the team management.

WHAT TO WATCH

BTV, T SPORTS & GTV

Bangladesh vs Australia
Fifth T20I

Live from 6:00 pm

T SPORTS

Bangladesh Premier League

Bashundhara Kings

vs Sheikh Jamal

Live from 4:00 pm

The Hundred Men's

Birmingham vs Welsh

Live from 12:00 am (Tuesday)



Despite the five-match T20I series being already under the Bangladesh's belt, skipper Mahmudullah Riyad is still likely to continue to galvanise his troops, especially the top-order, for a convincing outing with the bat in the final game against Australia. [Inset] Mustafizur Rahman, who was so far outstanding with the ball, is seen to be having a relaxing time in the pool yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR FILE/FACEBOOK



TOKYO GAMES

had 'soul' despite virus

About 30 kilometres into the men's marathon in Sapporo on Sunday, Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge pulled away from the pack and began running his own race, chasing immortality. Kipchoge looked like a man determined to run towards his legacy of greatness. He took a peek behind him at one point and there was no one there. He was all alone - the greatest marathon runner in history and one of the greatest Olympians.



PHOTO: AFP

AGENCIES



Eliud Kipchoge produced a marathon masterclass and the USA edged China at the top of the Tokyo Olympics medals table as the curtain fell on the biggest sports event since the pandemic

on Sunday.

Tokyo handed its Olympic flag to the mayor of Paris, setting the stage for the next Games in 2024 at a closing ceremony that featured park scenes of both cities, emphasising human contact even as the pandemic continues.

After Kipchoge's marathon win for Kenya, the United States scored victories in volleyball, track cycling and basketball to top the tally with 39 gold medals, just one ahead of China.

The 339th and final gold medal went to Serbia's men's water polo team, capping a Games that were in serious danger of cancellation after they became the first postponed Olympics last year. Thirty-three sports have been contested across 16 days in largely empty stadiums, with fans barred over coronavirus risks and athletes living in strict biosecure conditions.

"Some were already speaking of 'Ghost Games'," Olympics chief Thomas Bach told an International Olympic Committee session ahead of the closing ceremony on Sunday. "What we have seen here is that on the contrary the athletes have brought soul to the Olympic Games."

The Olympics were plagued by low Japanese support over fears they would become a super-spreader event but officials maintained that a record haul of 27 gold medals, putting Japan third on the table, has won hearts.

"We believe our athletes' earnest spirit and all-out performance moved people," said Tsuyoshi Fukui, chef de mission for the Japanese team.

Two incredible 400m hurdles races, a women's sprint clean sweep, a stunning 100m shock and a shared high jump gold medal will be the indelible athletics memories from the Tokyo Olympics as the sport showed there is life after Usain Bolt.

"We are thrilled by the performance of Team USA at the Tokyo Games -- and couldn't be more proud of the way they carried themselves," said Susanne Lyons, chair of the USOPC. "These Games are one for the history books."