



'A STAR IS BORN'

AGENCIES



With Serena Williams pulling out due to fitness issues even before a ball had been hit and Naomi Osaka and Ash Barty dispatched in the third round, a loss of interest in the women's singles draw at this year's U.S. Open was palpable.

But no one could have predicted that it would be left to two teenagers -- ranked 150th and 73rd in the world -- to create the kind of frenzied hype in women's tennis as seen over the past fortnight with their fascinating journeys to Saturday's final.

Britain's Emma Raducanu and Canadian Leylah Fernandez - born two months apart in 2002 - took the U.S. Open by storm with their youthful exuberance and fearless style of play.

The appreciation of fans across the globe was reflected in the mood of the 23,000-strong crowd during Saturday's title clash in the colossal Arthur Ashe Stadium.

"I have never heard a crowd in Grand Slam tennis being this loud, this appreciative of the players and the player responding," said Mats Wilander, a seven-time major

champion and Eurosport tennis expert.

"This was an epic of the U.S. Open. It was a great comeback of the U.S. Open, it was just an amazing two weeks."

Raducanu's extraordinary US Open triumph led to an explosion of joy in Britain, with Queen Elizabeth II leading the



celebrations as the 18-year-old qualifier made tennis history in New York. "It is a remarkable achievement at such a young age, and is testament to your hard work and dedication," the Queen said.

Emma Raducanu completed the greatest underdog title run in tennis

history on Saturday, becoming the first qualifier to capture a Grand Slam crown by defeating Canada's Leylah Fernandez in the US Open women's final.

The 18-year-old was the first British woman in 44 years since Virginia Wade at Wimbledon in 1977 to win a Slam crown after beating 19-year-old left-hander

It was a stunning achievement for the unheralded 150th-ranked teen, who didn't drop a set in three qualifying matches and seven main-draw matches over two weeks in producing a stunner for the ages. Raducanu is the youngest Slam champion since Maria Sharapova at 17 in 2004 at Wimbledon.

Raducanu's win even managed to knock football superstar Cristiano Ronaldo's two-goal return to Manchester United off Sunday morning's UK newspaper front pages.

The Express called it "Absolutely Emm-ense!" while the Telegraph proclaimed: "She did it!" Social media caught fire after Raducanu sealed the win with an ace. Former England footballer Gary Lineker broke off from presenting the English Premier League highlights programme "Match of the Day" on BBC TV to post: "First time in my life I've ever tweeted whilst on air but my goodness what a performance, what a triumph, what an amazing young woman."

Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted: "What a sensational match! Huge congratulations to Emma Raducanu. You showed extraordinary skill, poise and guts and we are all hugely proud of you."

A heightened demand FOR GREATNESS

SAMAMA RAHMAN



The moment Cristiano Ronaldo took his first touch on his second debut for Manchester United on Saturday, 12 years and 118 days since making his last appearance for the club, the 'Viva Ronaldo' chants around Old Trafford broke out. They have not quite subsided since, not in the minds of fans who were left dreaming of possibilities after their golden boy found the back of the net twice to inspire a 4-1 win over Newcastle.

The players took note of the atmosphere and took every chance to get Ronaldo the ball and the Portuguese was in no mood to disappoint, scoring at both ends of the field on either side of Newcastle's only goal. But the game had not been easy. Newcastle deployed exactly the kind of low block that had frustrated Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's men time and again, especially when chief

his 101 goals in three seasons and two Serie A player of the year distinctions did not yield a Champions League trophy or fail to avert the Old Lady's capitulation in defence of a tenth straight Serie A title last season.

But there is greater resistance in England as well. European champions Chelsea and Pep Guardiola's Manchester City are favourites in the title race but United can take confidence from already finding themselves top of the table despite summer signings Jadon Sancho and Raphael Varane not quite finding their feet.

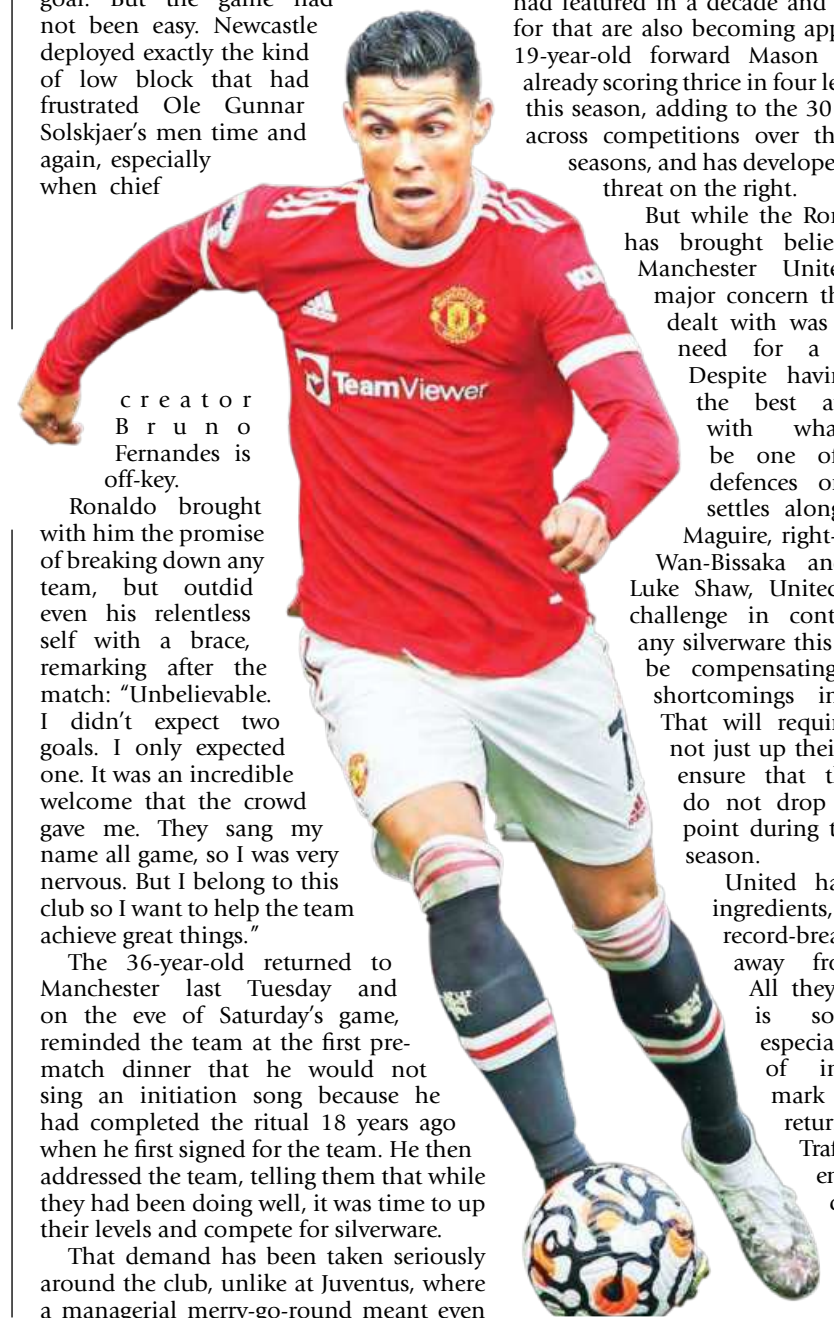
Their adaptation to the Premier League will be a welcome boost as will the return of fan-favourite Marcus Rashford, who has not featured in the squad even once this season. Solskjaer's squad for his first full season in 19/20 was the youngest United had featured in a decade and the rewards for that are also becoming apparent, with 19-year-old forward Mason Greenwood already scoring thrice in four league games this season, adding to the 30 he grabbed across competitions over the past two seasons, and has developed into a real threat on the right.

But while the Ronaldo-factor has brought belief to every Manchester United fan, a major concern that was not dealt with was the glaring need for a midfielder.

Despite having one of the best attacks and with what should be one of the best defences once Varane settles alongside Harry Maguire, right-back Aaron Wan-Bissaka and left-back Luke Shaw, United's ultimate challenge in contending for any silverware this season will be compensating for their shortcomings in midfield. That will require them to not just up their levels, but ensure that those levels do not drop off at any point during the grueling season.

United have all the ingredients, including record-breaking form away from home.

All they need now is some luck, especially in terms of injuries, to mark Ronaldo's return to Old Trafford by ending the club's seven-year wait for a 21st top division title.



creator Bruno Fernandes is off-key.

Ronaldo brought with him the promise of breaking down any team, but outdid even his relentless self with a brace, remarking after the match: "Unbelievable. I didn't expect two goals. I only expected one. It was an incredible welcome that the crowd gave me. They sang my name all game, so I was very nervous. But I belong to this club so I want to help the team achieve great things."

The 36-year-old returned to Manchester last Tuesday and on the eve of Saturday's game, reminded the team at the first pre-match dinner that he would not sing an initiation song because he had completed the ritual 18 years ago when he first signed for the team. He then addressed the team, telling them that while they had been doing well, it was time to up their levels and compete for silverware.

That demand has been taken seriously around the club, unlike at Juventus, where a managerial merry-go-round meant even



BD women's booters secure a creditable draw

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team's preparation for AFC Asian Women's Cup Qualifiers ended with a creditable goalless draw

against Nepal in their second and final FIFA friendly match at Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday.

Bangladesh, who lost the first match 1-2 on Thursday, displayed a comparatively better show against their Himalayan counterparts who remain unbeaten against the women in Red and Green.

Bangladesh will now fly out from Nepal for Uzbekistan today to compete at the AFC Asian Women's Cup Qualifiers through their group stage campaign against Jordan on October 19 before taking on Iran on October 22. Group champions will then qualify for the 12-team final in India.

Back to the game, hosts Nepal had the

overall upper hand in terms of creating chances but could not break the Bangladesh backline throughout the match. The charges of Golam Rabbani Choton also had opportunities on the break but failed to convert any.

Nepal came close to taking a lead in the 20th minute but defender Masura Parvin tackled the opponent forward at the cost of a corner while Krishna Rani Sarker danced past a Nepalese defender to narrowly drive wide of the crossbar on the half-hour mark.

Three minutes from the break, Nepal once again came tantalisingly close to scoring but defender Sheuli Azim brilliantly blocked the shot from Preeti Roy, who had struck one of the two goals in the first match.

After resumption, both teams fought on level terms and failed to break the deadlock for the remainder of the match and thus Bangladesh ended up securing their second-ever draw against Nepal.

BFF launches new academy with same old promise

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) officially inaugurated its Elite Football Academy at Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium yesterday after their first two academies in Sylhet and Dhaka could hardly produce any notable footballers.

Some 51 budding booters, picked from talent hunt programmes across the country, will receive training round the year and use the dormitory and astro-turf of the stadium which however remains busy to hold all types of football matches except the top-tier ones of Bangladesh Premier League.

The local game's governing body had previously started its first academy in Sylhet BKSP in late 2014 under the FIFA Goal project worth US\$ 5 lakhs but BFF closed the academy, citing financial constraints, after running it only eight months

from November 2018 to June 2019.

Later, ahead of the 2019 BFF elections, the BFF convinced the garment-oriented Forties Group to kick-start the new academy's activities in Badda under the supervision of foreign coaches but it didn't last long as well.

As professional football clubs are seemingly reluctant to groom their youth products in line with clubs' licensing conditions, the BFF took the latest initiative in producing quality players. However, the question of how long can the BFF run the academy has already been raised following their failure in the first two initiatives which lacked proper vision and planning.

"It's the start of a new era. We know we can't achieve anything with only one academy. We aren't financially as strong as China, who opened 300 academies last year, but I'm promising to build five to seven football academies within two

years," said BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, as he had typically told the media before, during the inauguration ceremony in which Zahid Ahsan Russel MP, the State Minister for Youth and Sports, also attended.

Compared to neighbouring nations like India, Nepal and Bhutan who run academies and get dividends from home-grown players playing in the national teams, BFF has historically been reluctant to bear such responsibility.

"The clubs of 90 percent countries across the world take responsibility for grooming players but our clubs aren't capable, and that's why we took the responsibility on our shoulders this time," added Salahuddin.

Now it remains to be seen whether BFF can effectively run its academy to produce quality players who can change the course of fate of the national team in the long run.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

NEWS IN BRIEF

U-19s eke out 3-wicket win against Afghans

Bangladesh U-19s stuttered to a three-wicket victory against their Afghan counterparts in the second Youth ODI at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. Having won the first match of the five-match series by 16 runs on Friday, Bangladesh were bolstered by an excellent bowling display after being asked to field first by the visitors. Left-arm spinner Naimur Rahman took four wickets for 14 runs as Bangladesh bundled out the Afghans for 101 runs in 42.3 overs. However, the chase proved to be a very difficult one for the hosts, who went for 37 for no loss to 95 for seven before closing out the match in 23.1 overs with three wickets in hand. Openers Mofijul Islam (31) and Prantik Nawrose Nabil (24) were the top scorers.

Messi, Neymar fit to face Brugge

Lionel Messi and Neymar will be in Paris St Germain's squad for their Champions League opening game against Club Brugge on Wednesday after missing this weekend's Ligue 1 action, coach Mauricio Pochettino said on Saturday. The duo was not involved in Saturday's 4-0 crushing of promoted Clermont at home after returning late from World Cup qualifiers with Argentina and Brazil.