



Malan soaks up the moment

REUTERS

Having been convinced a few months ago that his Test career was over, Dawid Malan found a moment on Friday to stop and sniff the roses as he and captain Joe Root dragged England back from the brink on a see-sawing day three of the first Ashes test.

With England in peril early in their second innings, the pair shared in an unbeaten 159-run stand at the Gabba that was a beacon of hope for English fans after two days of being thrashed by the hosts.

Three years in the Test wilderness,

Malan was drafted in to bolster England's faltering top order during the home series against India and managed to hold on to his spot for the Ashes. On a baking hot day at the Gabba on Friday, with a belligerent pace attack launching thunderbolts, Malan felt truly grateful for his fate.

"I thought I'd never play another Test again," said the 34-year-old left-hander, who was 80 not out at stumps. "I actually said to Rooty when we were on 40 or 50, on similar scores, I said to him -- the Barmy Army were singing and what-have-you -- I said to him, 'I've really missed this'.

"I've missed ... someone trying

to blow my head off all the time and then the crowd going and your adrenaline going and then playing against the best bowlers going around. You know, test cricket is the pinnacle. "So to be able to stand out here wearing an England shirt, you know, so proud to do that.

With Root, who was 86 not out, Malan helped push England to 220 for two, already 73 runs better than the team's paltry first innings 147.

Still trailing by 58 runs after Australia put 425 on the board in the morning, Malan and Root have work ahead to help England set a target their bowlers can defend.

Malan will hope to push on to a second century, four years after

his glorious 140 in Perth during the 2017/18 Ashes, a rare highlight of England's 4-0 series defeat.

Root, dismissed for a duck in the day one horror show, will look to notch his 24th ton after breaking new ground for England on Friday with the most runs in a calendar year. Reaching 1,541 runs for 2021 at stumps, Root eclipsed former captain Michael Vaughan's mark of 1,481 set in 2002.

"Joe Root obviously speaks for himself with what he's done in his career," said Malan. "Batting with him is great. He takes the pressure off you. "It's great signs for us as a team that Joe's playing well out here and leading from the front."

Riyad hoping for another comeback

SPORTS REPORTER



Following a dismal showing in the ICC T20 World Cup in the UAE -- where Bangladesh faced a shock defeat to Scotland in the first round before losing all the Super 12 games -- the Tigers have less than a year to prepare for the next edition of the mega-event, scheduled to take place between October 16 and November 13 next year in Australia.

There was been plenty of talk about the pitches and conditions prepared at home before the Tigers headed to the UAE, where the inability of the batters was lay bare on pitches far different to the slow and low tracks prepared in Mirpur.

The Bangladesh think-tank made drastic changes to the T20 squad after the World Cup debacle, but in the three-match series against Pakistan that followed, the Tigers' performance remained unchanged as they crashed to a 3-0 series defeat at home. It will be a different challenge for Bangladesh in Australia, where conditions and pitches are expected to test batters. According to T20I captain Mahmudullah Riyad, it is important for the Tigers to work on the batting department.

"It actually depends on what type of T20 cricket we are playing as we still have

a long way to go. I personally feel that the conditions in Australia are very good because there is true bounce and pace. Now it is up to us and how we handle it. Perhaps our batting unit needs to do better but I think our bowling department has been doing well consistently," Mahmudullah told the media during the trophy unveiling ceremony of the BCB Academy Cup in Mirpur yesterday.

"There are a few small things we need to work on. If we can improve consistently in every series, we will be able to achieve something very good."

Bangladesh cricket has been going through a lean patch in recent times but Mahmudullah was willing to take positive, keep the faith and back his team.

"Obviously the plan is to play well and I always like to think about the positives. Yes, we were unable to play good cricket in the World Cup and also in the Pakistan series. But if you see the entire year, we played some good cricket in series win over Sri Lanka, Australia, and New Zealand at home. I always have faith and I am with my team. We managed to come back previously and I hope we can in the future as well," he said.

The 35-year-old termed T20s the toughest format and said that if the Tigers were able to show consistency, everyone would start to regain confidence.



'India wanted sole white-ball skipper'

REUTERS, New Delhi

Virat Kohli's decision to relinquish the 20-overs captaincy resulted in him being removed as India's one-day skipper as selectors did not want to have two different white-ball captains, India board (BCCI) chief Sourav Ganguly said.

Opener Rohit Sharma took over as one-day captain on Wednesday, a month after succeeding Kohli as T20 skipper following their disappointing World Cup



campaign.

The board, which rarely explains even routine decisions, did not even mention Kohli by name in conveying the leadership change in a single sentence at the bottom of a press release announcing the test squad for the upcoming tour of South Africa.

"The board and selectors had asked Virat to rethink his decision to quit T20 captaincy. He had declined the suggestion at the time," former captain Ganguly told Friday's Times of India newspaper.

"The selectors were uncomfortable with the idea of having two captains for white-ball cricket."

Kohli was keen to lead India in the 50-overs showpiece on home soil in 2023.

"He has done well even as an ODI captain. But it was not going to be easy to have two captains in white-ball cricket with two World Cups in two years," Ganguly said.



'Need to set realistic goals for NZ series'

SPORTS REPORTER

An 18-member Bangladesh squad reached Christchurch in the early hours of yesterday morning to play a two-match Test series against the Kiwis, which is slated to begin from January 1. The team began a mandatory seven-day quarantine at the Managed Isolation facility in Christchurch and can partake in practice sessions upon returning a negative Covid-19 test.

The Tigers, flattened by Pakistan in both home Tests, will be looking to regain some of their lost confidence but touring New Zealand has historically been a steep challenge for Bangladesh.

With a few key senior players missing from the Test line-up, there is sense of apprehension in the air about how much more demoralising performances may become.

What could the Tigers expect? The Daily Star spoke to Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a mentor to many national team stalwarts, and queried how the team could salvage something from the upcoming series. Bangladesh have lost all nine Tests in New Zealand. In fact, the Tigers have lost 32 matches across formats, winning none, on Kiwi soil.

During Bangladesh's last tour in March this year, they lost the ODI series and T20I series by 3-0 margins, although they managed to put up a fight in the second ODI.

"We have put up bad results and there is cause for apprehension," Nazmul dictated.

"But this is a game and a mental game at that. So there is an opportunity for being motivated. It will be difficult

to not lose there. But you can play well even when you lose. Not saying New Zealand will definitely win but it's a possibility. The thing now is the margin of defeat," he added.

Along with a creaky top-order, there are a number of fresh faces in the squad. Bangladesh will also not be able to bank on the experience of Shakib Al Hasan, who opted to sit out the series, while Tamim Iqbal is missing through injury.

"We are in the process of rebuilding and we don't yet know who can make it to the side for the long term. We are experimenting and after some time we will be able to understand where we are. When such a process is going on, one usually doesn't expect results. We have to accept these facts. However, we have a few new players and if they can get motivated through self-belief, and the team management can facilitate it, we will be able to fight. We have to set realistic goals," he reiterated. "The challenge is very big and the fact that we have decided to build a new team already, begs the question how rational thought processes were.

"They will have to fight it out and if they can do that, there will be opportunity. If we don't have a positive mindset, it will be difficult. We can start from there and keep our heads down, take blows to the body if you have to. Test cricket is difficult and acceptance of that will help us prove something to our own selves in order to stick to the wicket for a long time. Doing that can help build confidence. A positive mindset and specific preparation for the challenges can go a long way in doing that."

Hamilton, Verstappen brace for thrilling finale

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Lewis Hamilton applied his 'poker face' on Thursday ahead of the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix when he will attempt to claim an unprecedented eighth world title.

Title rival Max Verstappen, meanwhile, said he hoped that the championship would not be settled by "controversial decisions" by the stewards. Hamilton heads into Sunday's season finale after three successive Grand Prix victories put him level on points with Red Bull's Verstappen.

A sixth win in 12 years at the Yas Marina Circuit would give the Briton the title. "Obviously with the year that we've had, I am sure many people would have ruled us out being this close right at the end," said Hamilton, 36, during Thursday's pre-race press conference. "It's been an incredible group effort from everyone back at the factory and at the track.

"No one has ever done eight before but I feel grateful," Hamilton, who was 23 when he won his first title in 2008 empathised with the 24-year-old Verstappen who is bidding for his first title. "I remember what it's like going

for your first, so I know. I had those experiences and the rollercoaster of emotions that you go through," he said. The young Dutchman won comfortably in Abu Dhabi a year ago although Hamilton had already wrapped up the title by then.

"I wasn't 100 per cent that weekend," said Hamilton. "But, still, they (Red Bull) were very strong here last year and they will be strong here again this weekend."

Verstappen was cautious about his hopes of repeating that success and taking the crown on Sunday. "After last year, I didn't have a lot of hope that we would be sitting here at the end of the season fighting for a title," he said. "But I think from the start, we were very competitive. We had good results, a bit of bad luck as well. But overall we can be really proud of the whole team effort."

Changes to make the Yas Marina circuit faster and wider could reduce lap time by up to 15 seconds and that could favour Mercedes and their new 'spicy' engine. "I think the places where we were particularly weak are no longer there, so that's positive," said Hamilton

"But they (Red Bull) will still be

strong in the new places."

With more space to pass, the race should not suffer as many safety car interventions or red flags as last week's chaotic contest in Jeddah, which also brought the latest in a catalogue of incidents between the two leaders this season.

At Silverstone, Verstappen ended up in the crash barriers. At Monza his Red Bull went airborne and landed on top of Hamilton's Mercedes. In Saudi Arabia, Verstappen was ordered to give up the lead to Hamilton for an illegal manoeuvre and handed a five-second penalty.

That prompted suggestions, not least from former F1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone, that the stewards were favouring Mercedes.

Both drivers played down the possibility that the title might be decided by the stewards.

"I think already, throughout the year, there have been a few things which were maybe a bit controversial," said Verstappen.

"It is what it is. You can't really do anything about it. I think we just have to focus on the positive for this weekend. We just want action on the track."

