

THE LATERAL VIEW

Good stories continue to unfold

IRESH ZAKER

I spent most of yesterday's article worrying about the mayhem that would ensue in Bangladesh if Argentina were knocked out on Wednesday night. In hindsight, my concerns were misplaced. Not only did they qualify with aplomb, the other three teams seemed hell bent on getting themselves disqualified. In the end, of course, Poland scraped through as a tired second. Their cynical strategy provided a melancholy coda to a group that started proceedings with such vibrant promise. I have to say this though, that my neighbourhood is fairly tame by Dhaka's boisterous standards. However, the noise that I heard after the final whistle in Argentina's game leaves me concerned about the structural integrity of the buildings in my area should the Albiceleste win it all. It will surely be a glorious mayhem.

Speaking of Argentina lifting the cup, I would like to proffer what is bound to be an unpopular opinion. There are many who have been saying that Lionel Messi deserves to lift the trophy, given that this is most likely his last edition. I understand the emotion behind these protestations. Given the innumerable moments of magic that Leo has provided us throughout his historical career, it would only seem fitting that he walks away with football's biggest prize.

But where does that leave Cristiano Ronaldo – this generation's other great footballer – who, incidentally, is also playing in his last World Cup? However much we want, we cannot reward all our heroes with all the gifts. In the end, the TEAM that play the best will most likely win the trophy, and I daresay that that is how it should be.

Last night we were again faced with the prospect of two pre-tournament favorites, Belgium and Germany, making ignominiously early exits. Moreover, Germany's game against Costa Rica had a wonderful historical byline regardless of results. It was the first match in the history of World Cup football to be officiated by an all-female referee crew. Stephanie Frappart was assisted on the ground by Neuza Back and Karen Diaz, and Kathryn Nesbitt serving as the fourth official. Given the sports' long struggle with various prejudices and inequities, this is undoubtedly a welcome development. The Cinderellas may be crashing out one by one, but good stories continue to be written in Qatar 2022.



PHOTO: TWITTER

Argentina finish top of Group C with a 2-0 win over Poland on Wednesday to set a last 16 clash with Australia on Saturday. Both teams have only two full days to rest, a factor Argentine manager Lionel Scaloni called "madness". "We've almost got no time to let it all sink in, enjoy it ... it's recovery, recovery, recovery," concurred Australia's assistant coach Rene Meulensteen.

'Madness' to play again in two days, says Scaloni

REUTERS, Doha

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said it was "madness" for his team to play their World Cup last 16 game against Australia with just two rest days after their last group match.

The South Americans beat Poland 2-0 on Wednesday night to top their group and set up Saturday's knockout clash.

"I think it's absolute madness to play in nearly two days and a bit when we are top of the group. I can't understand it," Scaloni said, talking to the media after the game at Doha's 974 Stadium ended just before midnight.

"What time is it? Nearly one o'clock in the morning ... Thursday, the next day is for preparation and then we play. Those aren't good conditions but it's the same for everyone. We're first in the group. We could have had more rest."

Australia will only benefit from a few hours' more time to recuperate and prepare than Argentina, given their last group match was completed earlier on Wednesday.

But Scaloni's comments touch on the wider controversy over holding the World Cup in Qatar due to the hot conditions and more compressed timetable.

AUSTRALIA UP NEXT

Argentina have found their rhythm again in beating both Mexico and Poland comfortably in Group C after their shocking opening loss to Saudi Arabia. But Scaloni said they must be wary of Australia who fought their way to the last 16 with gritty wins over Denmark and Tunisia.

"Our fans should enjoy this. We are happy today but we don't want to be euphoric," he said.

"All the games are hard. Anyone who thinks the match against Australia will be easy is wrong. We're not favourites. If you think that just because we won today, we are going to become World Cup winners, you're wrong."

Scaloni said he took striker Angel Di Maria off in the second half to protect him. "Di Maria had some discomfort in his quadriceps and we decided to substitute him. If there's a chance that he gets injured then it's not worth it," he said.

He praised his team for neutralising Poland's counter-attacks and keeping attacker Robert Lewandowski quiet.

"We didn't really allow them to counter-attack. It was to our credit. I think that we read the match very well. My players did a great job. They played very well and I am very happy."



England break an age-old record at Rawalpindi

AFP, Rawalpindi

Four England batsmen scored hundreds Thursday as the visitors piled up a record 506-4 on the opening day of the first Test against Pakistan in Rawalpindi.

Openers Zak Crawley (122) and Ben Duckett (107) set the tone with quick-fire tons against a hapless Pakistan bowling attack before Ollie Pope (108) and Harry Brook (101 not out) compounded the hosts' misery.

Ben Stokes was also not out, on 34, when bad light stopped play, having helped England break a 112-year-old record for the most runs on the first day of a Test – beating Australia's 494-6 against South Africa at Sydney.

It was also the first time four batters scored hundreds on day one of a Test.

After winning the toss England went straight into "Bazball" mode, the brand of freewheeling, aggressive play taken from the nickname of head coach Brendon McCullum.

England's fiery batting – with 73 boundaries and three sixes – lifted the gloom over the start, which hung in the balance Wednesday after several of the tourists came down with a mystery virus.

As if the punishment from the top three wasn't enough, Brook – playing only his second Test – cracked six consecutive

boundaries off one over from debutant spinner Saud Shakeel.

He is only the fourth batsman to score six consecutive boundaries in a Test, following West Indians Chris Gayle and Ramnaresh Sarwan, and Sri Lanka's Sanath Jayasuriya.

Brook reached his maiden century off just 80 balls, capping a highly entertaining day for a crowd of 6,000 that included around 150 "Barmy Army" fans.

He added 176 for the fourth wicket with Pope, who fell to pacer Mohammad Ali.

Pakistan fought back briefly in the second session when they dismissed Duckett, Crawley and Joe Root (23) in the space of 53 runs, but that was shortlived.

England have set their sights on even more runs.

"It was obviously a very good wicket to bat on," said Crawley.

"Hopefully, we can go on tomorrow and get more runs."

Debutant leg spinner Zahid Mahmood was the most successful Pakistan bowler with 2-160 on an unresponsive wicket.

"The pitch was similar to the one we had against Australia, but it should have been a bit more supportive," said Pakistan head coach Saqlain Mushtaq, referring to the Test played earlier this year that yielded 1,187 runs for the loss of just 14 wickets over five days.

'First love' Ronaldo, 'calm' Silva: Sanjida, Masura root for their heroes

NAZIBA BASHER

The FIFA World Cup 2022 has reached its peak with the showpiece event heading towards the business end – the knockouts.

As the last 16 are set to be lined up with the final group stage matches scheduled for tonight, fans can relish some major and shocking upsets already. However, many of the top dogs of the tournament are still in the competition and fans all across the country have their fingers crossed.

Two such ardent fans are our very own reigning champions – Bangladesh women's national team defender Masura Parvin and winger Sanjida Akhter – who are both supporters of the five-time world champions Brazil.

The Daily Star caught up with the two girls in the middle of a practice session on Thursday at the Bashundhara Kings Arena, and discussed their hopes and expectations from 'the greatest show on earth', along with what we can expect from them in the future.

Sanjida, despite her shyness and quiet demeanour, has proved to be an absolute force on the field. After Bangladesh's victory in the SAFF Championship 2022, she has been busy honing her skills with the Bashundhara Kings, the club that the forward plies her trade for.

Though she is rooting for Brazil, Sanjida revealed that her "first love" is none other than one of the greatest footballers of this generation – Cristiano Ronaldo.

"Though it is his final World Cup, he is always my player to watch. Yes, new players will come to the next World Cup. But how can one forget their first love?" she smiled.

On the other hand, while almost all Brazil fans have Neymar on the tip of their tongue, the player that fascinates the ever-spunky Masura the most is defender Thiago Silva.



"What I like most about him is how calm he can remain in the toughest of situations. I am a defender myself and I have no idea how to remain this calm. It's something I try to learn from him."

They both revealed that they have supporters of Argentina in their team as well.

Asked whether they get into the common Argentina vs Brazil argument, Masura said, "Arguments, not really. We do banter with each other sometimes. But see, what we have to remember is that it's a game and there will be wins and losses. There is no reason to fight over these things." On the other hand, Sanjida, responding to another question, said, "But I remember, I could not get out of the dressing room when Brazil conceded seven goals against Germany! I was heavily teased by all my teammates. No one can ever forget the '7-up', can they?"

About who they expect to see in the semis, both said this World Cup has been unpredictable.

The chat concluded with their expression of hope of someday making it to the world stage themselves.

The full video interview can be found on The Daily Star's Facebook page and Youtube Channel.

Tigers brace for India challenge sans Tamim

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh faced a major blow ahead of their ODI series against India as skipper Tamim Iqbal was ruled out of the series, starting Sunday, owing to a groin injury. According to a source close to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), it may take the ODI captain two weeks to recover, which would also see him ruled out of the first of the two-match Test series as well.

However, the BCB's medical team is yet to make an official announcement about Tamim's condition, but it is all but certain that the Tigers skipper is set to miss the ODI series.

"We still haven't received anything officially from the medical department. I've heard that they have some issues but we have to know how many days he will be out," BCB president Nazmul Hassan told the media yesterday.

Tamim suffered the injury while playing a warm-up match on Wednesday.

The hosts will also miss Taskin Ahmed for the first ODI as the pacer is suffering from a back injury sustained during the Bangladesh Cricket League match on November 20.

Left-arm seamer Shoriful Islam has been included as Taskin's replacement.

Meanwhile, India landed in Bangladesh yesterday seven years since their last tour back, when the hosts won the three-match ODI series 2-1 after the revelation of pacer Mustafizur Rahman.

A full-strength India, led by Rohit Sharma, will begin their tour with the first ODI on December 4. The second game is scheduled for December 7 at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The teams will then move to Chattogram for the third and final ODI of the series on December 10 before the first of the two-match Test series begins at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium from December 16.

The action will return to Dhaka for the second and final Test between Bangladesh and India from December 22 in Mirpur.

Despite the Fifa World Cup football being in full swing, Tigers supporters will be eager to watch a home series after nearly six months.

Tickets for the ODI series will be available from December 3, with spectators needing to spend between Tk 200-1,500 for a ticket.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED