



**FIFA
WORLD
CUP
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Renowned tennis coach Bollettieri dies at 91

REUTERS

Nick Bollettieri, the larger-than-life coach whose famed Florida tennis academy changed the face of the game by producing some of its greatest players, has died at the age of 91, with ex-student Tommy Haas leading tributes to the “one of a kind” American.

The son of Italian immigrant parents, Bollettieri served in the United States army and dropped out of law school to become a coach, shaping the careers of top names including Andre Agassi, Serena and Venus Williams, Monica Seles and Maria Sharapova.

A pioneering mentor who coached 10 world number ones, he was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 2014.

“Thank you for your time, knowledge, commitment, expertise, the willingness to share your skill, your personal interest in mentoring me and giving me the best opportunity to follow my dreams,” Indian Wells tournament director and Germany’s former world number two Haas wrote on Instagram.

“You were a dreamer and a doer, and a pioneer in our sport, truly one of a kind.”

Germany’s Sabine Lisicki, the 2013 Wimbledon runner-up, said that Bollettieri had “shaped the game of tennis”.

“You have given so many children a place to work for their dream. Supporting them with your knowledge and the belief that anything is possible. I was fortunate to be one of them,” Lisicki wrote on Twitter.

“You will be dearly missed!”

Bollettieri’s daughter Angelique Anne had announced on Facebook last month that her father was nearing the end. “Dad is close to transitioning to the next place. Please keep him in your thoughts for a peaceful departure and wonderful journey. We love you, Daddy,” she wrote.

Reports in the U.S. media said Bollettieri died on Sunday. One of Bollettieri’s first accomplished students was American Brian Gottfried, the world number three in 1977.

Bollettieri founded the Nick Bollettieri Tennis Academy the following year. It was bought by the International Management Group in 1987.

“RIP Nick Bollettieri. Aside from being the greatest coach ever, you were so kind to me, my parents, and my siblings ... that meant more to me than anything, you had a big heart and a zest for living,” said former women’s number one Chris Evert.



Croatia goalkeeper Dominik Livakovic became the first goalkeeper to save the first two penalties in a World Cup shootout, all but ending Japan’s hopes in their Round of 16 clash. He then saved a third penalty to send the Croatians into a frenzy and the Japanese bursting into tears.

PHOTO: REUTERS

‘It’s more instinct than analysis’

AFP, Doha

Dominik Livakovic said that he was continuing a Croatian tradition after his penalty shootout heroics against Japan on Monday put his country into the World Cup quarterfinals.

Goalkeeper Livakovic saved three of Japan’s four penalties after a 1-1 draw to end the Blue Samurai’s adventure in Qatar and set up a last-eight clash with either Brazil or South Korea.

Croatia won twice on penalties during their run to the 2018 final and prevailed again at Al Janoub Stadium.

“I continued the tradition of my predecessor. I think it is more instinct than any analysis of the takers you have in front of you,” he told reporters. “I don’t think they were difficult penalties to save, they weren’t perfect penalties, and thank God for that.”

He added: “It’s a great feeling... Thank God all ended well... This is the most cherished moment in my career.”

Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu praised Livakovic for his display, choosing to focus on the saves rather than the poor penalties taken by Takumi Minamino, Kaoru Mitoma and Maya Yoshida.

“I don’t think we succumbed to the pressure, I think the goalkeeper was great,” he said. “Japan’s players played 120 minutes bravely and the players who took penalty kicks were also courageous.”

“Of course we wanted to win and the result is very unfortunate but... it does not negate the effort of the players. They should be confident they can play on world stage. They showed how good they can play in the World Cup.”

He also welcomed the dawn of a new era.

“The players showed us the future, a new era of Japanese

football,” Moriyasu said. “We beat Germany, we beat Spain... If we take confidence in that, and if we think about overtaking these teams rather than just catching up, the future is bright.”

Meanwhile, Croatia captain Luka Modric added his team “can’t do it without a drama”.

“It seems that we can’t do it without a drama,” said Modric, whose team were beaten finalists in 2018. “We are more than happy to reach the quarterfinals. It was a very difficult game against a very tough team.”

The match in Qatar continues a pattern for Croatia. Six of their past seven knockout games at major tournaments have gone to extra time, the only exception being their final defeat by France in Russia four years ago.

Modric said Croatia had not played at their top level but had found a way to win.

“We showed character when we came back from the deficit... Livi performed a miracle today. A very tough, exhausting match.”

Coach Zlatko Dalic said reaching the last eight was a “major result”.

“Don’t ever underestimate a Croatian,” he added. “Whenever this happens, one regrets it. We are going all the way.”

Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic made the brave move of taking off Perisic and Luka Modric in extra time and it turned out they were not needed as his Livakovic’s saves sent them through.

“We had a fantastic goalkeeper today, he was great, he was insurmountable,” Dalic said. “We have 18 new players that weren’t at the Russian World Cup and I told them today – this is your chance to make history,” Dalic said.

“We will rest, and I think we have the right to believe and to hope, to nurture hope for great results. We have great quality and a great team, but this World Cup is full of great teams and great peers” he said.



THE LATERAL VIEW

Bangladesh, Argentina fans rejoice in unison

IRESH ZAKER

Cometh the hour, cometh the man! When all hope was fading, a diminutive hero from a small third-world town stepped up to save the day. His name starts with ‘M’ and it was not Lionel Messi with a ball at his feet. Instead, it was Mehedi Hasan Miraz with a bat in his hand.

I know that it is World Cup time and I am supposed to write about football but Miraz’s deeds on Sunday night were just too miraculous to ignore. Bangladeshi cricket fans have long suffered from our team’s inability to close the deal, especially against India.

We went from a comfortable yet nervy 128 for four to a 136 for nine, all in the space of just 26 deliveries. Another nauseating defeat seemed etched on the cards on Sunday until, that is, Miraz and Mustafiz declared their unexpected intentions.

In less than an hour, the country was bathing



in the glory of the most improbable of one-wicket wins. Our tired hearts once again made optimistic, that maybe we have finally turned a psychological corner.

I found myself being envious of Argentina fans, who had two glorious moments in less than twenty-four hours; who had two small heroes, whose names start with M, to celebrate. What a day to support Bangladesh and the Albiceleste!

As all this was unfolding on the field, another wonderful tale was developing off it. Having learned about the Bangladeshi support for the Argentine football team, a group of Argentinians have started a Facebook fan page for the Bangladeshi cricket team: “Fans argentines de la seleccion de cricket de Bangladesh” it is called.

At the time of writing, the group had sixty-three thousand members (up from seven thousand when this paper reported the story for the first time twelve hours prior). Bangladeshis are enthusiastically educating the Argentines about cricket, and the Argentines are responding with characteristic verve. It is beautiful to witness.

Far be it from me to put my head in the Selecaos’ mouth, and I usually do not have any preference when it comes to Brazil and Argentina. But two countries, literally on opposite sides of the globe, coming together in symbiotic prayer for minor miracles is a tale too beautiful to not root for.

Regardless of how the teams end up performing on their respective quests, we can safely say that, in this one small instance, we have seen the best of what both sports and the human spirit can achieve.

Miraz’s success stems from his roots

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Mehedi Hasan Miraz was hoisted in the air by teammates with none other than Shakib Al Hasan amongst those lending a shoulder. He had done the seemingly impossible.

Miraz took along Mustafizur Rahman as the last batter to stage an immense fightback under dire circumstances, prevailing where others did not.

But for anyone wondering whether Miraz had set a precedent for that immense knock, it had come during the days of his forays as a young star, who was ready to take it all and leave nothing behind until the last ball.

Miraz became one of the youngest bowlers to bag 10 wickets in a Test, having achieved the feat just three days past his 19th birthday. This year, he and Afif Hossain put on a 174-run stand to bring Bangladesh back from the dead against Afghanistan after the Tigers had slumped to 45 for six in chase of 216 in Chattogram.

Sohel Islam, the country’s leading spin coach, has seen Miraz during his formative years, having worked on both domestic and international assignments.

The seminal ability to thrive under pressure was apparent even during his younger days.

“A player’s approach during his youth and the roles he played are very



important to their development. I have seen Miraz in U-15, U-17 and U-19 stages. During his journey across those six years, he was captaining the side and used to play the lead role,” said Sohel.

“His approach was such that he would

always say ‘hand me the ball sir and I will be able to do this’. I remember once that we were playing in Pietermaritzburg in seriously cold conditions. It was probably two degrees but he was saying the cold was nothing. Then he played a really good

innings with the ball moving around against their numerous pacers. He has been leading teams and that develops character and when one comes to the national team, that is reflected. That played a crucial role in his growth but, more crucially, that approach

remains,” Sohel said of his student.

In South Africa this year, Miraz was hit for runs during the first ODI but yet he asked for the ball during a critical stage from skipper Tamim Iqbal, picking up four wickets and playing a match-winning hand. But despite his initial impact with the ball in the national team, there were always signs that Miraz was a proper all-rounder, according to his mentor.

“There is a gap in Bangladesh’s domestic and international scene when it comes to batting so it takes time to cope. But as time goes by, his batting abilities are growing. He bats really well and is a proper all-rounder. When he played the World Cup in 2016, he was the highest run-getter. When you see Shakib, you can’t decide whether he has more of an impact with bat or ball. Miraz is very close to that,” Sohel said.

Watching Miraz’s innings on Sunday was something special for his mentor. “I talked to him and said: ‘Miraz, I have seen many innings but it’s not like I get very excited. But this innings made me really excited’.

“He always shows bravado, but the thing he said to the press that he believed, that was completely true,” he concluded.

From being captain in youth cricket to his forays with the national team, Miraz has come up leaps and bounds. The Tigers would like to believe this is just the beginning.