



Aside from the thrilling events that had transpired during the action on the field in the past few weeks, this World Cup was also marked by a number of heart-warming moments -- like when Croatia skipper Luka Modric, after guiding his side to a third-place finish following a 2-1 win over Morocco in the third-place playoff on Saturday, celebrated with his daughter or when Morocco stopper Yassine Bounou celebrated with his son their incredible achievement of becoming the first African nation to the semifinal after beating Portugal in the quarters.

PHOTO: REUTERS

THE LATERAL VIEW

The Dreams of our Fathers

FRESH ZAKER

I am not even a little ashamed to admit that I was wrong about the third-place decider.

It was not some consolation fixture for heartbroken teams. The boys from Morocco and Croatia came to play, and play hard. This meant something to them.

And while there was no celebratory dancing between mothers and sons from the Maghreb, we were treated to the lovely sight of Luka Modric hugging his father, perhaps for the last time in his national colors.

Seems like the Atlas Lions don't have sole proprietorship of filial jubilee. It's beautiful, nonetheless.

I have also been wrong in the past about World Cup frenzy (in case you haven't noticed, being wrong is a self-repeating pattern for me).

Being a club football fan who spends the lion's share of my time being made whole -- but mostly broken to pieces -- by a team in red half-way across the world, I used to deride those who turn their attention to football once every four years during the world's biggest show.

Plastic fans, I called them. They don't understand football, only Brazil and Argentina, I accused. They probably think that Maradona and Pele are still playing, I scoffed.

What a self-important rotten sod I was!

Time, it seems, is the best healer of self-possessed idiocy. I have grown not only to abide Bangladeshi "World Cup" fans, I've grown to adore them. The passion, bordering on manic frenzy, is appreciable for the spectacle value alone. But there is more.

As I had written before, the World Cup experience in Bangladesh is not just about Messi,



Ronaldo, or whoever is the latest star playing for the favourite nation. It is about shared memories and shared passions. We watched the World Cup with our parents, we watch them with our friends, and will continue to watch them with our children. Other than the religious holidays, it is one of the few cultural experiences that bind us together as a society.

When Messi scores a goal, we are not just celebrating what is happening now, we are also reliving in what happened before. One part an adult today, another a child being thrown into the air by a guardian when Maradona danced past five Englishmen in 86.

I miss "teaching" my father about all the players on show with knowledge I gleaned from my obsessive engagement with club football. I miss being happy for him when Brazil won, and consoling him when the Selecao lost.

Even though my tired old Liverpool supporting heart cannot be brought to fully root for another team on the international stage, every time I see a Brazil and Argentina fan go crazy, I am reminded of what I don't have anymore. Not in a sad way but a sweet way. Not in melancholy but in rejoice. Not in morose remembrance but joyful celebration of memories made and loved ones lost.

And that is why, to me, the World Cup in Bangladesh is one of the best things ever.

Qatar World Cup DULY DELIVERS

REUTERS

A World Cup that has defied all expectations reaches its climax on Sunday when Lionel Messi could join Diego Maradona in Argentine immortality by taking the south Americans to the title or France could become the first nation to retain it since 1962.

Both scenarios would be an appropriate final act to the first World Cup staged in an Arab country.

But whatever happens, a tournament ridiculed in the build-up and which began a little awkwardly delivered an exhilarating rollercoaster ride that even the cynics leapt on board.

The marquee names of Messi, Kylian Mbappe, Neymar and Cristiano Ronaldo delivered storylines. Saudi Arabia, Japan, South Korea and Tunisia delivered shocks. New heroes emerged.

Yet the abiding memory for many will be Morocco's shake-up of football's hierarchy.

Thousands of their fans painted the desert red and turned Doha's souq into a corner of Marrakesh as the Atlas Lions roared into the semifinals.

Harnessing the energy of their followers, Walid Regragui's men scored victories over European

aristocrats Belgium, Spain and Portugal on the way to becoming the first African and first Arab country to reach the last four.

France proved a match too far as they set up a showdown with Argentina in the spectacular Lusail Stadium where nearly four weeks earlier Argentina's 2-1 defeat by Saudi Arabia lit the blue touchpaper for an extraordinary tournament.

The 48 games produced 120 goals, only two red cards, and enough head-spinning moments to garnish three tournaments. A day after Saudi Arabia's win, Japan came from a goal down to

beat Germany -- a result the four-time champions never recovered from as they went home early.

Iran, against a backdrop of widespread anti-government protests at home, were smashed 6-2 by England, then beat Wales with goals in the eighth and 11th minutes of stoppage time.

Infantino, who raised

eyebrows on the eve of the tournament with a passionate monologue defending the Qatari organisers, described the group phase as the best ever. Few would disagree.

South Korea conjured a stoppage-time goal to beat Portugal and make it out of Group H to the heartbreak of Uruguay while Mexico's manic attempt to score enough goals against the Saudis to pip Poland to second spot in Group C ended in failure.

Every continent was represented in the last 16 for the first time but after such a riotous group phase would it fall flat?

No chance. Australia gave Argentina a mighty late scare, Mbappe dazzled for France against Poland and a free-scoring England ended the Senegalese party.

Brazil danced their way to a 4-1 thrashing of South Korea while Portugal did the unthinkable and left out Ronaldo only to find a new hero as Goncalo Ramos bagged a hat-trick in a 6-1 rout

of Switzerland. Morocco went toe-to-toe with Spain in an absorbing 0-0 draw, then knocked out the 2010 champions on penalties.

Unpredictable as the tournament was, the usual suspects assembled for the quarter-finals.

Some Neymar magic gave Brazil an extra-time lead against Croatia, only for Bruno Petkovic to level in the 117th minute with Croatia's first effort on target. Almost inevitably, Brazil slumped out on penalties.

Argentina squandered a 2-0 lead against the Netherlands only to edge out a penalty shootout to decide a fractious contest.

Ronaldo became the first man to score in five World Cups but his last appearance, again as a substitute, ended in tears as Portugal went down 1-0 to a history-making Morocco.

England's penalty curse then returned as Harry Kane's botched effort condemned them to a 2-1 defeat by France.

Messi, channelling his inner-Maradona, inspired Argentina to beat Croatia and few would begrudge the diminutive number 10's record-breaking 26th World Cup appearance ending with him holding aloft the gleaming trophy.



Shakib has little room for excuses after Ctg Test loss

SPORTS REPORTER

Just 49 minutes was how long Bangladesh batters lasted on the fifth and final day before being bundled out for 324 runs in their second innings.

The Tigers thus suffered a big-margin defeat, however expected, of 188 runs against India to go 1-0 down in the two-match Test series at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

After the loss, Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan came out with no excuses and gave credit to the Indian side.

"He (Zakir) has been scoring a lot of runs in domestic cricket, that's why the selectors picked him. Hopefully, he scores a lot more centuries for Bangladesh,"

SHAKIB

"It was a really good wicket to bat on but we didn't bat well (in the first innings). Playing after five-six months wasn't ideal for us but there shouldn't be any excuse.

"We identified our mistakes and tried our best in the second innings. Lot of credit to



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

India because of the way they bowled. They bowled in partnerships and created a lot of pressure," said Shakib during the post-match presentation ceremony yesterday.

The result was pretty much anticipated

since Bangladesh were bundled out for a mere 150 runs in their first innings in reply to India's first innings total of 404.

Despite the India skipper, KL Rahul, deciding not to enforce the follow-on, the

hosts displayed a better performance with the bat in the second innings, courtesy of Zakir Hasan's maiden ton on debut.

Resuming the fifth day on 272 for six while chasing a mammoth target of 513 runs, skipper Shakib Al Hasan's entertaining 84-run knock could only minimise the defeat margin as the Tigers were bundled out for 324.

Indian spinner Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav shared seven wickets among themselves to keep India's hope alive for a place in the final of the ICC World Test Championship.

The Bangladesh skipper also pointed out the fact that the Tigers would have to be competitive throughout the five days of a Test match to win against teams like India.

"We have to play good cricket in all five days if we want to win a Test match. We have to play four good innings to be able to get a result, especially against India," Shakib said.

Probably among the very few positives for Bangladesh was Zakir's century as the left-hander proved his worth following a prolific run in the domestic circuit. The innings caught the eye of Shakib and he seemed optimistic that the 24-year-old can establish himself as a big asset for the Tigers in the coming days.

"He (Zakir) has been scoring a lot of runs

in domestic cricket, that's why the selectors picked him. Hopefully, he scores a lot more centuries for Bangladesh," Shakib said.

With both the teams making a return to Dhaka for the second and final Test, the Bangladesh selectors have already announced the squad for the Mirpur Test.

Uncapped left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed was included in the Dhaka Test after a run of good performances in white-ball cricket in recent times. But the Tigers will be without the services of Tamim Iqbal, who still hasn't recovered from a groin injury.

The hosts will have to come up with a better approach in Dhaka where the pitch is expected to provide added assistance to the spinners.

Batting, however, will remain the biggest area of concern for the Tigers with Yasir Ali, who batted at the crucial number three position and managed to churn out just four and five runs in the two innings in Chattogram, might be dropped for the Dhaka Test.

The Tigers think tank would also hope for a better performance from the likes of Liton Das and the experienced Mushfiqur Rahim as both batters were unable to convert their starts into a big knock in both innings in Chattogram.