

Malan's Bangladesh connection does the trick

SPORTS REPORTER

Dawid Malan's experience in Bangladesh proved crucial as England secured a hard-fought three-wicket win in the first ODI against Bangladesh in Mirpur yesterday courtesy of the left-hander's match-winning century.

Malan, who has been a regular feature in the Bangladesh Premier League since 2016 but only played his first international match against the Tigers yesterday, informed that playing in familiar conditions had helped him to adapt after England were struggling in chase of a modest 210 on a tricky surface.

The left-hander hung in and held the key for England after the visitors felt the heat from the Tigers and Malan's gritty 114-run knock ultimately proved to be the deciding factor.

"The time here in Bangladesh [during the BPL] definitely helped me. It was really tough out there. I was telling Jos [Buttler] that if they got another 30-40 runs, we'd really have a tough time. Happy to dig in there and get across the line in the end," the man of the match said during the post-match presentation ceremony yesterday.

"I think it [a tough chase] is expected on a pitch like this. We did well and had a couple of partnerships while Bangladesh bounced back well. We know how good their spin attack is. Rashid always reminds us how good his batting skills are. He handled the pressure really well."

Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal opined that the hosts were 30-35 runs short.

"I thought we could have at least gotten 30-35 runs more given the position we were in. It was a difficult wicket, especially against spin. I thought this wicket was a 250 surface. We were on track but then lost too many wickets. We bowled really well and fielded extremely well. But sometimes, you need to give it up for an innings like the one Malan played," Tamim said.

BPL performers get T20I call-up

STAR SPORT DESK

Rony Talukdar and Shamim Hossain returned to the squad while Towhid Hridoy, Rejaur Rahman Raja, and Tanvir Islam received their maiden T20I call-up for the England series.

SQUAD

Shakib Al Hasan (C), Liton Das, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Afif Hossain, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, Nasum Ahmed, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Shamim Hossain, Rony Talukdar, Towhid Hridoy, Rejaur Rahman Raja, Tanvir Islam



Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal (R) shakes hands with all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan following their three-wicket defeat against England in the first ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (Bottom) Najmul Hossain Shanto pulls one off the back-foot during his maiden ODI half-century during the game.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Batters lose the plot

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh had designed a puzzle for England in the form of the wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, but, in the end, neither team perhaps fully anticipated what the wicket had in store. Bangladesh were slightly ahead in that regard and their spin strategy showed merits, but ironically, it was their batting that let them down and ultimately caused their downfall.

Dawid Malan proved to be the difference and the application shown during his unbeaten 114 was the difference-maker in England's three-wicket win in the first ODI yesterday.

The build up to the game had all been about how much turn and slowness the surface had on offer. But far from being slow, there was extra bounce which helped England seamers like Mark Wood or Chris Woakes. It also helped the likes of Taskin Ahmed later on.

More importantly, the Bangladesh spin trio of Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Shakib Al Hasan and Taijul Islam got quite a few deliveries to just kick off the surface, uncharacteristic of Mirpur surfaces in the past, and the trio found sharp turn as well. For a long stretch of the England innings, the world champions were kept in their toes until Malan ensured victory with a gritty ton.

When Bangladesh won the toss, it looked like a very good track to bat on. There was true bounce and some of the shots, especially from Nazmul Hossain Shanto, showed the surface to be at least a 250 wicket.

English seamers such as Woakes got the ball to move early on amidst Bangladesh's breezy start with Tamim Iqbal finding the ropes on a few occasions. Woakes got



SCORES IN BRIEF

Bangladesh

209 all out in 47.2 overs (Shanto 58, Mahmudullah 31, Tamim 23; Archer 2-37, Ali 2-35, Wood 2-34)

England

212 for seven in 48.4 overs (Malan 114 not out, Jaks 26; Taijul 3-54, Mehedi 2-35)

Result

England won by three wickets

the better of Liton with one that held its line before his extra pace burst through Tamim's defences.

The England spinners came into the game thereafter, one a finger spinner and another a leggie. Mushfiqur Rahim, who saw off 34 deliveries, never looked truly comfortable and departed to a slog sweep against Adil Rashid before a rash slog-sweep from Shakib allowed Moeen Ali to rattle his stumps.

Shanto was playing fluently as he went past 40 before the fall of those two wickets, but he then began to struggle with timing and shot selection. He trudged along to his fifty along with Mahmudullah Riyad at the other end, who looked set for an

important knock.

The fifth-wicket partnership of 53 off 80 deliveries was the most crucial stage of the Bangladesh innings as they looked to consolidate after the fall of four wickets and lay the platform for a burst after the 35th over.

That is where the complexion changed. First, Shanto was dismissed after a disastrous shot off Adil, having spent time at the crease and even completing his first ODI fifty in 16 innings. His 82-ball 58 was handy but the platform was set to get something bigger.

Mahmudullah followed him back to the hut after seven more deliveries, a tickle down the leg-side ending in the wicketkeeper's gloves to gift Wood his wicket. Afif Hossain got off another poor shot and Miraz, the hero of the India series, did not come to the rescue as Bangladesh managed just 209.

While Adil got the ball to turn quite a bit, the Bangladesh batters seemed adamant to struggle of their own accord. Shakib, Miraz and Taijul created far better circumstances for their side than England spinners but Malan stood firm. Having taken 92 deliveries to get to his fifty with wickets falling around him, he settled down and then accelerated at his own pace.

England were made to work hard for their runs and the wicket had slowed down a bit later in the evening while Bangladesh innings lost the plot in a haze.

Malan carried on with a 51-run unbroken stand with Rashid for a three-wicket win while Bangladesh were left to rue their batting performance with no one carrying on. The India series had raised concerns regarding the batting, now the first ODI against England has put spotlight firmly on batters.

Cabrera finds compatriots as reinforcements

SPORTS REPORTER

Javier Cabrera, Bangladesh national football team's Spanish head coach, is all set to get boosted by the presence of two compatriot coaches for the Tri-Nations Cup, scheduled to get underway from March 20 to 28 in Sylhet during FIFA's March window.

David Gomes -- UEFA professional license holder -- will be acting as the assistant coach of Cabrera, who will also get his compatriot Miguel Angel Iglesias Anido as the goalkeeping coach. Alongside Gomes and Anido, Yogeshwar Senthil Kumar from Australia will join as the physio and work with the men in red and green exclusively for the Tri-Nation Cup, where hosts Bangladesh, Seychelles, and Brunei will battle it out in a round-robin format before the top finishers lift the trophy.

According to the BFF, all new recruits are likely to arrive here by March 4 as the residential training camp is scheduled to get underway on Friday.

Return to top spot feels special for Djokovic

REUTERS

Novak Djokovic said his return to the top of the world rankings felt like a big achievement after a year of turmoil where he had to skip several tournaments including two Grand Slams, but the Serbian expects a see-sawing battle for the position in 2023.

Djokovic missed the 2022 Australian Open and was deported from the country due to being unvaccinated against COVID-19 before returning this year to clinch a record-extending 10th title at Melbourne Park and 22nd major to reclaim the number one spot.

He was forced out of big tournaments in the United States last year, including the U.S. Open, as he was unable to enter the country due to his refusal to take his shots.

The 35-year-old also received no points for winning the Wimbledon title due to the grasscourt Grand Slam being penalised for its decision to ban players from Russia and Belarus over Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"I think this is the least points I've had as number one. It happens," Djokovic told reporters following his win over Tomas Machac in Dubai on Tuesday.

"It's not only due to my circumstances of not playing a couple of Grand Slams and everything that happened last year, but also other players, some players missing some slams for injuries, some not having the biggest consistency."



Wounded Barca face Real in Copa del Rey semifinal

AFP, Barcelona

A wounded Barcelona face Real Madrid in the Copa del Rey semi-final first leg on Thursday hunting for a Clasico win to make coach Xavi Hernandez's gamble at a critical moment of the season pay off.

Despite missing injured duo Pedri and Ousmane Dembele, Xavi rested other important players in the 1-0 defeat by Almeria on Sunday, prioritising the Clasico cup clash and spurning the chance to stretch their league lead to 10 points on Madrid.

Adding to Barca's unease ahead of the Clasico, top scorer Robert Lewandowski has suffered a hamstring strain and is set to miss out, although Ansu Fati is poised to return.

Delivering what Xavi described as the "worst performance of the season" at Almeria, Barcelona suffered their second consecutive defeat after they were knocked out of the Europa League by Manchester United at Old Trafford.

A third defeat at the Santiago Bernabeu could send the team into a spiral, with their seven-point La Liga lead strong but not unassailable.

The Catalans visit the Santiago Bernabeu a day after Osasuna welcome Athletic Bilbao to El

Sadar in the other Copa del Rey semi-final first leg.

"We have to change our mindset if we want to win the league and the cup," warned Xavi after El Bilal Toure's goal inflicted only their second Liga defeat of the season.

"We have no excuse, we didn't show the desire to play, intensity, that is what worries me the most."

"You can slip up, but you have to show passion and desire and in the first half we lacked that."

Anything other than a good result in the capital will raise further questions about the coach's decision to rest Ronald Araujo, Jules Kounde, Raphinha and Alejandro Balde against Almeria.

Xavi has said if his team win La Liga but not the Copa del Rey it would still count as a good season, with the Spanish Super Cup already in the bag.

Real Madrid saw their disappointing derby draw against Atletico on Saturday transformed into a better result by Barcelona's stumble.

With one foot in the Champions League quarter-finals after an emphatic 5-2 win over Liverpool at Anfield, Carlo Ancelotti's side can turn their attention to getting revenge after their Spanish Super Cup humbling.



Just Fontaine, the record breaker

AFP, Paris

Just Fontaine, the legendary France striker who died on Wednesday at the age of 89, will forever be remembered for scoring 13 goals at the 1958 World Cup, a remarkable feat that seems unlikely ever to be matched.

To this day, only three players have scored more World Cup goals than Fontaine, even though the Reims player appeared at just one tournament and played only six matches.

Lionel Messi matched his tally on Argentina's recent run to glory in Qatar, but it took him five World Cups to get there.

That 1958 World Cup in Sweden is best remembered as the coming of age of a 17-year-old Pele, who inspired Brazil to victory after netting a hat-trick in their 5-2 semi-final win over France.

However, it was a personal triumph for Fontaine, whose four-goal haul in the third-place play-off win over West Germany ensured he had scored in every game.

Part of a wonderful attacking trident alongside Roger Piantoni and Raymond Kopa, Fontaine might never have gone to Sweden at all.

Only injuries to Thadee Cisowski and

his Reims teammate Rene Bliard saw him make the squad and then the starting line-up.

Only Germany's Miroslav Klose (16), Brazil's Ronaldo (15) and Gerd Mueller, the West German hero of the 1970s who scored 14 times, have netted more World Cup finals goals.

Born in Marrakech in August 1933



to a French father and Spanish mother at the time of the French Protectorate in Morocco, Fontaine went to school in Casablanca, and began his football career there.

In 1953 the stocky penalty-box poacher moved to France, joining Nice.

His three years there were spent combining football with military service, but Fontaine still won the French Cup in his first season and a league title in 1956.

He then moved to Reims, the great French side of the 1950s who had just been beaten by Real Madrid in the first European Cup final and that summer lost Kopa to the Spanish giants.

Fontaine won three league titles at Reims and another French Cup, and appeared in the 1959 European Cup final, when they again lost to Madrid, this time going down 2-0 in Stuttgart.

He scored 10 goals in that European campaign, but 1958 was his crowning glory -- in his second season with Reims, they won a league and cup double and he was the league's top scorer with 34 goals.

However, his career ended in 1962 aged just 28. He had hardly played for two years after suffering a double leg fracture. In all he won 21 caps for France, scoring 30 goals.

Fontaine went into coaching and in 1967 took charge of France. However, he lasted just two games, both defeats in friendlies.

A spell with Paris Saint-Germain was more successful, as "Justo" took the side from the capital into the top flight in 1974.

His career in football ended back where it began, in Morocco, as he led the national team to third place at the 1980 Africa Cup of Nations. He then retired to Toulouse, in the south-west of France.