

‘I end here, but they continue’

AFP, Melbourne

Marta said Brazil's Women's World Cup exit at the group stage Wednesday was "not even in my worst nightmares" as the legendary attacker bid a heartbreaking farewell to the tournament.

The 37-year-old, arguably the greatest women's footballer of all time, started the game but could do nothing to help Brazil get the goals they needed as their campaign ended in a toothless 0-0 stalemate with Jamaica.

Brazil and Marta are out in the group phase, their poorest World Cup performance since being dumped out at the same stage in 1995.

"It's hard to talk at a time like this. Not even in my worst nightmares was it the World Cup I dreamed of," said Marta, who looked as shell-shocked as she was upset.

"But it is only the beginning, the Brazilian people ask for renewal, and there is renewal."



"The only old one is me, most of them (team-mates) are young girls with enormous talent, it's just the beginning for them."

"I end here, but they continue."

Marta -- nicknamed "Pele in a skirt" by the late football great -- will never win the World Cup to add to her many achievements.

Among them, she is the all-time leading goal-scorer in World Cups, men's or women's, but was unable to add to her tally of 17 in Melbourne.

"Marta ends here, there is no more World Cup for Marta," said the forward, who has been dogged by injury in the twilight of her career.

Coach Pia Sundhage said she expects Marta to carry on with her playing career "because she loves the sport".

But she pointedly added: "Whether she is good enough for the national team, let's see."

"I am going to look for good players so it will be harder for Marta. We need to be better than today."



A courageous Jamaica held Brazil to a 0-0 draw in their final Group F game in Melbourne on Wednesday to reach the knockout phase for the first time in only their second Women's World Cup while condemning the South Americans to their earliest exit since 1995. Meanwhile, South Africa registered their first-ever win in the World Cup – a 3-2 win – to reach the last 16, sending Italy home yesterday. Argentina also saw their campaign end without a single win, losing in their final group game 2-0 to Sweden, who progressed to the knockout stage with a perfect group record.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Lara says India can field 'even a third XI'

AGENCIES

A second-string India thrashed West Indies by 200 runs in the third ODI on Tuesday to seal a 2-1 series victory in a timely boost ahead of their Asia Cup campaign next month.

The mood among the young Indian cricketers was further uplifted when the West Indies legend Lara visited them in training. The 'Prince of Trinidad' met the likes of in-form openers Shubman Gill and Ishan Kishan -- who smashed his third successive fifty of the series while Gill struck 85 as they forged a 143-run opening stand to lay the foundation for a mammoth total, 351-5, at the Brian Lara Stadium in Trinidad.

Lara acknowledged a superior depth of talent in India's ranks.

"I am so happy to have these two young men Ishan Kishan and Shubman Gill at the academy or stadium in my name."

"...Just to see the talent here with this Indian team and so many different teams that they have at the moment, they can pick a second eleven and even a third eleven," Lara said.

A star-struck Gill did not miss the opportunity to let Lara know about his impact on current crop of batters.

"You [Lara] used to be one of those people who used to go and straightaway, from ball one, you would take on the bowlers and take on the challenge, and that really inspired us as a kid, to be able to... how to dominate the game in all formats," said Gill.

SPORTS REPORTER

The notion that Bangladesh have a settled ODI unit is something that has been highlighted in the build-up to the forthcoming Asia Cup and the World Cup.

While much of that argument is built on logic surrounding recent performances of the team, there are gaps in that line of thinking as there are a few delicate balancing acts that the team management would have to come up with in order to make the best possible lineup out of the players at their disposal.

A team needs a wide array of tactical setups for different opponents and, selection-wise, the Asia Cup later this month would be a big litmus test for Bangladesh. The team management would need players with a required skill set best suited for particular opponents.

In reality, other than the fine pool of pacers now that the Tigers have -- including Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman and Hasan Mahmud -- how many players are actually pushing for places in the team through performances?

"The team may be able to play with five specialist bowlers and six specialist batters. The problem is that on a given day if one of the specialist bowlers don't perform, there are no replacements. It is almost mandatory to have a sixth bowler who can bowl three to four overs in a crisis situation. He may not be a specialist bowler but he needs to have a certain standard," Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, cricket analyst, coach, and mentor to many of the national team stalwarts, told The Daily Star regarding the gaps that need to be looked into.

Inevitably, the focus turns to the number seven spot where a batter, with some skills with the ball, is preferred.

"In batting-friendly conditions, rather than having a combo of three spinners



and three pacers, playing another pacer may be more advantageous. A batting all-rounder who can bowl pace for three to four overs is good. [Mohammad] Saifuddin was the best choice but he isn't available. After that, a batter who can bowl is Soumya Sarkar. There are no other players fulfilling these criteria. Soumya's bowling is satisfactory but the strength the team is seeking with the bat isn't in Soumya yet. Thinking purely of batting strength, Mahmudullah Riyad would be ahead of Soumya. But although there

are many players, no one can fit into the position hundred percent," he summed up the dilemma.

The likes of Mosaddek Hossain and Shamim Hossain are also there but Fahim argued finding 'the fine balance' would take precedence. "We also needed to understand the importance of getting the likes of Afif [Hossain] and Shamim to bowl. If Afif could bowl he would have been an automatic choice. Even [Mehedi Hasan] Miraz may go for runs in a certain game and then who would bowl in his place?"

"I feel that this position certainly ruins the team's balance a little bit. A captain would be insecure if there isn't a sixth bowler. You need a player who balances the team with both bat and ball, for instance, what Robin Singh was for India," Fahim added.

The options for the opening slot are also now under observation with Tamim's Asia Cup participation still in doubt.

"I was very impressed with Tanzid Tamim, the young opener from the U-19 World Cup winning team. He has a pattern of play and has a different mental setup as a U-19 World Cup winner. Mohammad [Naim] has to overcome a barrier and find his way of scoring runs with his own approach. It's important he plays his own game and backs himself," Fahim said.

Already without a leg-spinner, Bangladesh now need to gauge the strength of their balance in the Asia Cup in order to really make the case for a settled unit.

PCB agrees to revised WC schedule

AGENCIES



Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has reportedly agreed with International Cricket Council (ICC) and Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on proposed change of dates of two of its matches in the upcoming ODI World Cup.

The marquee India-Pakistan clash will now be played on October 14 rather than the scheduled date of October 15 as released in the original ICC schedule, according to ESPNcricinfo report, though the ICC is yet to release a revised schedule.

The match will still be played in Ahmedabad. The India-Pakistan match had to be rescheduled due to issues with regards to deployment of security on the first day of Navratri festival in Ahmedabad.

Pakistan will also play Sri Lanka on October 10 instead of October 12 in Hyderabad, facilitating a three-day gap before the India game.

The change of the India-Pakistan date will almost certainly have an impact on other games and teams. October 14 is already a double-header, featuring games between Bangladesh and New Zealand in Chennai and Afghanistan and England in Delhi. The latter game is likely to be affected, potentially played a day earlier (October 13).

The changes to the schedule, two months away from the ODI World Cup, come after the original schedule was already extremely delayed.

‘That’s all folks!’

AFP, Milan

Gianluigi Buffon announced his retirement from football on Wednesday, bringing down the curtain on a glorious career as one of the world's greatest ever goalkeepers.

"That's all folks! You gave me everything. I gave you everything. We did it together," he posted in English on social media.

Buffon, 45, hangs up his gloves after two final years at Parma, the club where it all began nearly three decades ago when Italian football was Europe's gold standard.

He had a contract which ran until next summer with Parma but he will no longer be a part of the Serie B club's bid to return to the top flight after two years away.

Buffon is a symbol of a halcyon age when the best footballers went to play in Serie A and Italy developed dozens of world class players.

The former Italy captain has a record



history.

He also won Ligue 1 with Paris Saint-Germain in 2019 before returning to Juve, but he will be most fondly remembered for Italy's victory at the 2006 World Cup.

Buffon was one of the stars as an

Azzurri team battered by the 'Calciopoli' match-fixing scandal -- which would cost him as Juve keeper two league titles -- beat France on penalties after knocking out hosts Germany in the semi-finals.

That was the last hurrah for a generation which had made Italy one of the world's dominant football nations, and as their fortunes slowly declined he suffered the ignominy of two straight group stage exits before bowing out not long after failure to qualify for the 2018 tournament.

Buffon won his last trophy in his final season with Juve two years ago, lifting the Italian Cup alongside Federico Chiesa, 22 years after he triumphed with Parma alongside his teammate's father Enrico.

However, Buffon's career has also been plagued by scandal, not least consistent rumours that is, or at least once was, a sympathiser of the far-right.

He drew fierce criticism for choosing the number 88, a neo-Nazi code for 'Heil Hitler', on his jersey for the 2000-01 season.

Not long after winning the World Cup he was cleared of illegally betting on Serie A matches, allegations which reared their head at the height of the 'Calciopoli' scandal.

City agree £77m deal for Gvardiol

AGENCIES

English and European champions Manchester City have reportedly agreed a £77m deal for RB Leipzig centre-back Josko Gvardiol, the BBC reported yesterday.

The deal does not include add-ons which means that Manchester United's Harry Maguire remains the most expensive defender in football history. United swooped in for the centre-back with an £80m fee in 2019.

It is expected Gvardiol will fly to England for a medical later this week.

The 21-year-old played 87 matches for the German club since joining from Dynamo Zagreb in 2021 and was pivotal in Croatia finishing third in the 2022 FIFA World Cup. He has 21 caps for Croatia and netted two goals.

Leipzig were knocked out of the Champions League twice in the last two seasons by Manchester City. They finished third in a group topped by City in the 2021-22 and lost 8-1 over two legs in the round of 16 last season, including a 7-0 defeat at the Etihad.

Slow over-rate in Tests has Ponting concerned

AGENCIES

England and Australia have been penalised 19 and 10 World Test Championship (WTC) points, respectively, and fined a percent of their match fees after they were found guilty of maintaining slow over-rate during the Ashes, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday.

Australia were fined 50% of their match fee for 10 overs in the fourth Test in Manchester, while England received a "10% for the first Test, 45% for the second, 15% for the fourth and 25% for the fifth."

Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting voiced his concern when asked about ways to rectify slow over-rate in Test cricket.

"I know the cricket's been ultra entertaining. Crowds are not going to be whinging about what they have seen as far as the cricket's concerned, but when you go to a day's play and you expect 90 overs, but you see 80, you have got to be a little bit disappointed."

Ponting recalled how Australia missed out on playing the World Test Championship Final in the inaugural edition as a result. Australia were fined four WTC points from their Test match in Melbourne against India, which saw them miss out on the Final berth to New Zealand.

As a strict solution to curb slow over rate, former England captain Nasser Hussain advocated for teams to bowl their full quota of overs in a session, even if it leads to longer and more tiring sessions of play.

"You don't get your lunch, you don't get your cup of tea until you bowl your 30 overs."