

'Humble' Butler delighted with united display

SPORTS REPORTER

Peter Butler, Bangladesh women's football team's head coach, emerged a different man from what he was three days earlier following a frustrating 1-1 draw in the first match of SAFF Women's Championship against Pakistan in Kathmandu.

The former West Ham midfielder was firing on all cylinders after that Pakistan result, taking a swipe at whoever questioned his team selection or pointed to the listless performance of the players.

Following criticism from his own players, the 58-year-old coach had dared his team to show their worth, and disclosed to media that he might play more senior players to fulfil the team's wish.

He did just that, replacing young Kohati Kisku and Sapna Rani with experienced Masura Parvin and Maria Manda. And that



seemed to have made a massive difference as Bangladesh roared to a 3-1 win against five-time champions India last night.

Butler praised his players including those he had not regarded in the starting eleven for the first match. He admitted that those decisions paid off as both Masura and Maria played important roles in their specific positions.

"I'm delighted, really really delighted. I thought we played against a strong, direct team. I thought we outplayed them for long long periods," Butler said at the post-match press conference.

"I'm really proud of the players who came in, such as Masura (Parvin), Maria (Manda) and Sabina (Khatun). I thought they did extremely well," Butler said,

adding that players like Masura and Maria, when at top of their game, help the team perform to their full potential.

Contrary to his first-day countenance, the Englishman was much calmer and more self-reflective during yesterday's press conference. However, he didn't let the opportunity pass without having a sly dig at, perhaps Monika Chakma, who had accused the coach of driving a wedge between senior and junior players.

"Sometimes less said, less mended. Best (is) sometimes keeping your mouth shut, saying nothing and things will calm down," Butler said, before going on to add: "All credit to the girls tonight. I'm just a coach, I'm just a humble coach who picks the team and puts on the training session and picks the theme of training."

The Bangladesh coach hinted that he tried to instill unity in the team following the criticism and the fallout from what Monika had said.

"The message to the players tonight was to go out express yourselves. Let's play attacking football, play for your family, play for your shirt, but most important thing is, stick together as a unit. I think they did just that."

Spinners likely to weave web in Pune, Pindi

AGENCIES

Two matches of the World Test Championship starting in the sub-continent today are expected to see spinners rule the roost.

While England captain Ben Stokes believes the series-deciding third Test against Pakistan will boil down to a spin battle on a Rawalpindi pitch likely to favour slow bowlers, New Zealand captain Tom Latham said Wednesday that his team would need to adapt fast to a likely turning track in Pune for their second Test against host India.

England piled up 823-7 to thrash Pakistan by an innings on a lifeless Multan pitch in the first Test, before the hosts bounced back with a 152-run win on a recycled and turning Multan track.

For the deciding match, Pakistan have kept the same combination of three frontline spinners in Sajid Khan, Noman Ali, and Zahid Mahmood, with just one fast bowler in Aamer Jamal.

Pakistan have used industrial fans and heaters to dry the Rawalpindi pitch, hoping to replicate their spin-led success in Multan which ended a drought of home wins stretching back to 2021.

Stokes said his three spinners in Jack Leach, Shoaib Bashir and the recalled Rehan Ahmed were equal to the challenge.

"I'll be backing the three spinners that we've picked," Stokes told reporters after a training session on the eve of the third and final Test.

"We think the longer the game goes, the more spin will come into play."

NZ READY FOR INDIA SPIN CHALLENGE

New Zealand won the opener on a seaming pitch in Bengaluru for their first Test triumph in India since 1988 but face a different challenge in the second match starting Thursday.

"Whatever we are presented with, for us, it's about trying to adapt as quick as we can," said captain Latham, whose men are trying to seal New Zealand's first-ever series win in India.

"If it is going to be a wicket that turns a bit more, we have obviously got four spinners in our line-up, so fingers crossed that will play into their hands."

In the first Test at Bengaluru, New Zealand bowled out India for 46 and went on to win the match by eight wickets.

The victory has injected the Black Caps with confidence, Latham said.

"That's probably the most important thing, that we can come over here, we can compete and we can do well," he said.

But he cautioned: "Both teams start on zero."

Kiwis will be without Kane Williamson for a second straight match with the star batter recovering from a groin injury back home.



Miraz blossoming into BIG-ROLE PLAYER

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The focus had already been shifting to Mehedi Hasan Miraz, and with Shakib Al Hasan unable to play the first Test against the Proteas in Mirpur -- what would have been his final bow from Tests -- the discussion largely centred on how Bangladesh could replace their best all-rounder. Miraz, already with a role in the side, is continuing to show the broad shoulders needed for bigger tasks.

When Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Mushfiqur Rahim, and Liton Das fell in quick succession on the third day yesterday, with the Tigers' second innings total reading 112 for six, it looked like an innings defeat seemed imminent. From there, Miraz took Jaker Ali along to forge a 138-run stand.

Miraz, unlike Shakib, was not known for his batting exploits. Of late, however, his reputation as a batter has gained prominence following a few crucial white-ball knocks. On the bowling front, Miraz's role is invaluable. His performances with the ball in Pakistan showed he had the gift of winning games

with big contributions. Thus, he had been touted as one to take on the decisive roles.

With Shakib absent, that future was already here in the ongoing Test.

"So those who bat at number seven will hold an important role, and at this moment there is no one exactly to replace Shakib bhai. But I feel Miraz can be a very good option," skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto had said ahead of the series opener.

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Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto

"He's doing really well in Test cricket with both ball and bat, but there is room for improvement, and Miraz is ready to take that responsibility. I feel that in a few years, Miraz will be able to take that position," he added.

Miraz has been involved in all three latest fightbacks with the bat in Tests after a top-order collapse. In the first Test in Rawalpindi this August, he had a 200-run

plus partnership with Mushfiqur. In the second Test, he paved the way by guiding Liton during an epic counterattack, leading to a historic 2-0 series win in Pakistan.

That his position is vital was laid bare again yesterday, as Miraz also showed Jaker how to nullify the spinners without going out of his way to try something extra. Asked how encouraging the Miraz and Jaker partnership was, Bangladesh spin coach Mushtaq Ahmed said: "Always good [witnessing such a fightback]. The reason behind this is the way you actually have to believe. If you see in the Pakistan series, we were 26 for six and then we came back from there; so those are the good, positive things."

After the early loss of wickets yesterday, Miraz bided his time to attack, playing well within himself. He blocked when there was opportunity and made bowlers such as Kagiso Rabada bowl to his strong zones. The pull shot in front of square is testament to this. He mocked the spinners with drives and sweeps but played with an authority that saw him take the least risks.

Shedding further light on Miraz and Jaker's approach, Mushtaq said: "Tajjul Islam bowled brilliantly [on day one], but because they kept sweeping him, kept reverse-sweeping him, it put a little bit more pressure on the spinners. I think we are very happy with the way our guys actually have that attacking option against spinners."

Miraz was leading the way. He may not be quite Shakib, but pound for pound, he is everything Bangladesh needed in recent Tests.



“ Vinicius is going to win (the Ballon d’Or), not for what he did tonight, but for what he did last year. These three goals are already going to count for next year’s Ballon d’Or, that’s for sure. He is a player who gets whistled at because he can make a difference.



Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti predicts Vinicius Junior winning his maiden Ballon d’Or come October 28 in Paris.

Vinicius Junior emerged hero in yet another typical Real Madrid comeback in the Champions League, scoring a sublime hatrick to help the defending champions and the record 15-time winners thrash Borussia Dortmund 5-2 at the Santiago Bernabeu on Tuesday. In what was a repeat of last season's final, Real went 2-0 down at half-time before producing a sensational show in the last 45 minutes. Up next for Real is a clash against rivals Barcelona in LaLiga, but Los Blancos will have to make do in the Clasico on October 27 without goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and forward Rodrygo after both players sustained leg muscle injuries in yesterday's game.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Villa top of table but still cautious

REUTERS, Birmingham

Three victories and three clean sheets into Aston Villa's first Champions League campaign in 41 years, the momentum continues to build for the Midlands club but when asked if fans can start to dream big, manager Unai Emery cautioned not so fast.

His side beat Bologna 2-0 at a raucous Villa Park on Tuesday with second-half goals from John McGinn and Jhon Duran to sit provisionally top of the table -- a lofty position fans might not have foreseen when Europe's elite competition kicked off.

"In case we are keeping the same (winning) performance we are getting and getting points through it, of course we can change our objective and to be the top eight," Emery said.

"But I want to feel it is like a natural way we are doing it, and not a surprise, because we are playing good ... we are being consistent and we are getting points, and we are feeling comfortable."

The top eight in the new 36-team league phase automatically qualify for the last 16, while the next

16 compete in a two-legged playoff to join them in the knockout stage.

Villa are the only team with three wins and three clean sheets so far, with another nine matches to come on Wednesday.

Asked if he felt a sense of satisfaction about the clean sheets, Emery said "Yes. But most of all for (goalkeeper) Emiliano Martinez, very happy. He's pushing a lot for clean sheets."

"But really, I think this is the consequence, we were playing seriously, we were playing organised and being disciplined tactically as well."

Duran was substituted for Ollie Watkins right after his 64th minute goal -- an athletic lunging strike into the bottom corner -- and was visibly livid over Emery's decision when he trudged off

the pitch.

The Spanish coach said he had no issues with the player's behaviour, calling Duran's performance on the night "fantastic."

"Sometimes they are reacting a little bit, but it's under my control," Emery said.

Bologna, meanwhile, have one point from two losses and a draw.

