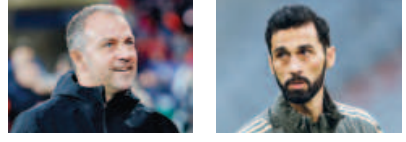


Barca eye title party in Clasico

STAR SPORTS DESK

Barcelona can capitalise on Real Madrid's turmoil by clinching a second consecutive LaLiga title at home on Sunday. Real, trailing Barca by 11 points, are reeling from a dressing-room brawl between Federico Valverde and Aurelien Tchouameni, with the season slipping away and another trophyless campaign looming.



➤ Hansi Flick's Barcelona need just a draw in the Clasico to secure their 29th LaLiga title.

➤ A win in the remaining four games could see Barca reach 100 points, equalling the all-time league record set by Jose Mourinho's Real Madrid in 2011-12.

➤ Winning the remaining matches would see Barca break the single-season record of 32 wins, held jointly by Mourinho (2011-12) and Barca's Tito Vilanova (2012-13).

➤ Barca could become the first team in a 38-game LaLiga season to win all home matches if they beat Real Madrid and Real Betis in the coming weeks.

➤ Historically, the title has been decided in the Clasico only once -- in 1931-32, when Real Madrid drew 2-2 with Barcelona to win their first of 36 league titles by edging out Athletic Bilbao.

➤ Real will miss Valverde (injured in the brawl) and Kylian Mbappe (injury), while Tchouameni is available. Barcelona will be without Lamine Yamal due to injury.

COST OF PACE WITHOUT PRECISION

SPORTS REPORTER

Nahid Rana's opening delivery of the first Test was a bouncer, not express pace but still clocked at 140.9 kph. Pakistan debutant Azan Awaiz was late on the pull, very late in fact, as the ball thudded into the front of his helmet. It sparked excitement on a green Mirpur surface where Bangladesh's pacers believed they held the advantage in pace. Yet an inability to bowl consistently in the right areas allowed Pakistan to cruise to 179 for one in 46 overs at stumps on day two yesterday.

It was not only Rana, introduced as first change, who generated early excitement. Taskin Ahmed extracted an outside edge in his opening over, though the chance fell short of third slip. But Taskin, usually so consistent with his lengths, was spraying it around and not holding a line, with the corridor of uncertainty largely absent.

Ebadot Hossain also forced an edge that saw Mahmudul Hasan produce an acrobatic effort, but the chance went begging. Like the others, Ebadot leaked boundary balls as Bangladesh's pace attack looked deflated towards the close of play.

Bangladesh senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin concurred that the green surface got the pacers "focus on pace a bit too much" instead of "bowling in the right areas".

"Mentally, when any fast bowler sees grass on the wicket, there's always excitement. When there's movement and the ball is carrying quickly, bowlers start thinking they can beat batters with pace," Salahuddin said.

Earlier in the morning, Bangladesh failed to capitalise with the bat after resuming on 301 for four, eventually folding for 413. Pakistan, meanwhile, ended the day in a commanding position thanks to Azan's unbeaten 85 and fellow debutant Abdullah Fazal's 37.

"Pakistan actually bowled very well in



SCORES IN BRIEF



BANGLADESH VS PAKISTAN

1st Test, Day 2

Bangladesh 1st innings: 413 all out in 117.1 overs (Shanto 101, Mominul 91, Mushfiqur 71; Abbas 5-92)

Pakistan 1st innings: 179 for one in 46 overs (Azan Awaiz 85 not out, Imam-ul-Haq 45, Abdullah Fazal 37 not out; Miraz 1-37)

the morning. It was very difficult for us to build partnerships," Salahuddin said. "I think we bowled a bit erratically today, but since this is Test cricket, there's always a chance to come back," he added.

Bangladesh's bowling figures reflected the inconsistency. Taskin and Rana conceded at economy rates of 5 and 5.2 respectively, while Ebadot went at 4.75. Pakistan opener Imam-ul-Haq, who scored a brisk 45, felt that boundary balls played into their hands.

"We were lucky that we were getting boundaries every one or two overs and it was good for the debutants that they didn't feel the pressure of runs drying up," Imam

said in the post-day press conference.

Pakistan pacer Muhammad Abbas, meanwhile, completed a five-wicket haul after a tireless effort on day one, thriving through game awareness and relentless accuracy -- qualities Bangladesh quicks struggled to replicate.

"The strength of Abbas is that he does not give you anything," Imam said. "When we play county cricket, it is difficult to face him, especially on a green track where he always asks you questions again and again and hits the right areas."

That discipline, more than raw pace, ultimately marked the difference between the two attacks over the course of the day.



Cyclists ride through the athletics track of the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday during women's 2000m team pursuit event on the final day of the 45th National Cycling Competition. Army dominated the competition and finished champions with 12 gold medals, followed by BGB with six, Bangladesh Ansar with one and Gazipur District Sports Association with one gold medal. A total of 225 cyclists from 18 districts and four services teams participated in the three-day competition.

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