



“It’s going to be feisty”

England’s Adam Lallana says his side must keep their emotions in check for their Euro 2016 clash with Wales Ⓔ

Words Amit Katwala

Gareth Bale and Adam Lallana came through the ranks together at Southampton. The England player says Bale's rapid rise has been no surprise.

"I always knew he had a spectacular talent," says Lallana, ahead of today's long-awaited Euro 2016 Group B clash with Wales. "It's just a credit to how hard he has worked. You don't get these things without working hard, and he has sacrificed big parts of his life. He's a great lad. I still speak to him when we play against him."

Their most recent meeting was in 2014, when Liverpool played Bale's Real Madrid in the Champions League at the Bernabeu (pictured, right). Lallana expects an even more electric atmosphere in Lens today, with Wales top of the group after beating Slovakia and England's draw with Russia.

"It's going to be a feisty game, obviously," he says. "There'll be a lot riding on it, with the history between the two countries, and it's got the making of being a great game. I'm really looking forward to it."

But Lallana also stresses the need not to be taken in by the power of the occasion: "It's important for us that we keep the emotion limited and don't go overboard."

It's been a long and emotional season for the 28-year-old at club level - although he insists he's not feeling fatigued.

"I'll look back on the season with mixed feelings," he says. "I'm delighted with how it's gone in getting to two finals [League Cup and Europa League], but not getting any silverware is very disappointing. Hopefully we can learn from that and go one step further next season."

Red Lions

The presence of several Liverpool players in the squad - Daniel Sturridge, Nathaniel Clyne, Jordan Henderson and James Milner - is testament to how the Reds have transformed their fortunes since the arrival of Jurgen Klopp in October. In fact, 12 Liverpool players are present at the Euros - the joint highest from any one club, along with Juventus.

"It's been brilliant," says Lallana of his time under his new boss. "I've got a good relationship with him, as have lots of the players. I just hope he can bring silverware to Liverpool. That's what the fans are crazy for. He'll have a good pre-season, and a full season next year to work with his team, and he'll be shrewd in the transfer market."

Lallana is in Bournemouth when we speak, spending one last weekend with his young family before joining up with the rest of the England squad. He hasn't quite finished packing, but he'll take a PlayStation and playing cards to pass the time between games and training sessions.

It's the morning after the Portugal friendly, a 1-0 win that failed to provide conclusive answers as to Roy Hodgson's preferred starting XI.

"I'm not sure," says Lallana, who came on after 78 minutes in that game, when we

ask if he knows any better. "The manager has a very talented squad and he can choose any one of the players to come in. There's lots of goals in the team, lots of different types of players, and a good blend of old and young, experience and fearlessness. I'm really excited."

Lallana's attacking midfield position will be one of the most hotly contested in France - although he says he doesn't mind where he plays. We ask what his strengths are in an England squad packed with creative schemers.

"I feel like, especially over the past couple of years, I've worked on winning the ball back," he says. "I like winning the ball back. I reckon maybe at times I'm a bit too eager to do it, but I'm still learning and still working on my game - that's what I'd say has been my main asset."

Bale prep

Lallana's managers - Klopp now, and Mauricio Pochettino at Southampton - have been a big influence on that pressing game. With such an attacking squad, it's important that England's forward players defend as well - particularly with the likes of Bale on the opposing team.

"You've got to be careful - you just have to be aware of their strengths" says Lallana.



"I still speak to Gareth when we play him. There'll be a lot riding on this game with the history between the two countries"



"They obviously have other very talented players, but you've definitely got to be aware of their individual qualities."

The Portugal friendly was supposed to prepare England for Bale by pitting them against Cristiano Ronaldo, although the Madrid man missed out because of his turn in the Champions League final. Lallana says Hodgson was "relatively pleased" despite that setback, and the soporific effect of the opposition going down to 10 men.

"You know, we might face a team that's gone down to 10 men at some point and then everyone will be saying that it was a great test," says Lallana.

He adds that playing for England at a major tournament (having been part of the 2014 World Cup squad) is "the pinnacle" of his international career: "It's such a proud moment for my family, and it's something I'll look back on with immense pride."

Lallana says he is quietly confident about England's chances. We have a feeling the fans at this game, with both pride and points on the line, will be slightly more vocal with their views. ●

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