



US OPEN: 'IT'S LIKE A DREAM'

THURSDAY, JULY 13, 2023

TEXT BY PREM KUMAR | YVES LACROIX/BADMINTONPHOTO

SHARE



At 20-18 in the decider against **YONEX US Open 2023** sixth seed **Brian Yang**, **Jonathan Matias** stared at the scoreboard in disbelief; the Brazilian was getting flashbacks of a junior match he lost from a winning position to the same opponent.

Hands trembling, focus flailing, the world No.68 allowed Canadian Yang to draw level.

Matias then remembered the pearls of wisdom his sports psychologist shared. A few minutes later, the 23-year-old got over the line 26-24. He had won the first game 21-17 before Yang prolonged the opening round match with a 21-12 victory.

"I was trying to focus but I couldn't, there was just too much emotion," Matias explained later. "My hands were shaking, I couldn't think. Although I knew where the space was, I wasn't confident of sending the shuttle there. I kept telling myself 'don't take risks or do anything stupid'.

"A junior match I led 18-13 and lost 20-18 to Brian kept popping in my head. I struggle too much with these things, a lot of doubts. That's why sometimes I play good, sometimes I play bad.

"I'm just so happy in the end because this is a big win for me. I could play my best badminton and beat a player of Brian's calibre. It's a relief to know I'm in the right way."

Matias came prepared, having lost both his previous duels with Yang.

"My strategy was not to let him play at the net, because he has a good spin. And don't allow him to control the backcourt. Just put the shuttle behind him, not him behind the shuttle," said Matias.



In the last eight months, Matias has aced two International Series – Peru in October and the Santo Domingo Open last month. And now he has his first win at a Super 300 tournament. Both his previous appearances at this level ended before the second round.

“Means a lot this because I’m trying to qualify for the Olympics. I’m still fighting with Ygor (Coelho). It was my goal to play a Super 300 this year and now I’ve won a match. It’s like a dream.”

Not many Pan American shuttlers can call themselves HSBC BWF World Tour regulars, a trend Matias is keen to change. At the same time, he knows to make the step up, he needs to trust himself more. That’s where his sports psychologist comes in.

“I overthink a bit too much. I’m already working on that part of my game with an expert,” said the 2018 Pan Am Under-19 champion who faces Japanese Koo Takahashi in the Round of 16.

“Ability wise, I know I can play because in practice, I do unbelievable stuff.”