



HERE I AM: Mohammad Ashraful looks to the heavens after completing his century on the first day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Tuesday.

Ashraful keeps his words

BISHWAIJIT ROY from Chittagong

Before the Test match that started yesterday at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium, Mohammad Ashraful told that he loved to play against Sri Lanka and was looking forward to coming up with a big one in the start of the new season.

The 21-year-old was true to his words as he let his bat do the talking with a masterly 136.

The talented batsman, who burst onto the international stage with a century on debut to become the youngest ever to do so, played yet another authoritative innings just to show the world what he is capable of.

But after spending five years in international cricket, the Bangladesh batting genius however could not be fully satisfied with the heroic innings because of the manner it ended in.

"The wicket was fantastic for batting. Some of our batsmen got a good start but failed to carry on, that's why I always tried to play with straight bat to be successful. It is fine that I made a hundred but the way I got out was not a good one for me. I would have been really happy if I were there till the end of the day's play," said Ashraful, one of the experienced cricketers in the squad.

Ashraful was on playing a tired-looking shot in the final overs, but he blamed it on poor shot selection.

"I was not tired at all, actually I got a wrong ball to go for a big one. I have had a chance to prolong my innings as well as put the team in a comfortable position, but I played

a bad shot and (Upul) Tharanga took the catch brilliantly in the deep. Over confidence might be a reason behind the mistake," conceded Ashraful.

When asked about his success against Sri Lanka's leading wicket-taker Muttiah Muralidaran, he said that he followed his bowling even on the television.

"I was never in problem to pick him. Actually I watched most of his matches on TV, that's why I can read him easily. The spin bowling is Sri Lanka's main strength and I love to play the spinners which might be a reason that I was successful against them," he explained.

Ashraful rocked back and hooked away pacer Lasith Malinga to the vacant fine-leg fence to complete his hundred in style, but he looked little bit nervous in the nineties.

"No, I was not nervous. You saw that I even tried to play reverse sweep during that time because I was successful against India during my 158-run knock. I was actually confident that's why I went for a big shot to complete the hundred," he explained.

He however refused to compare his one hundred with the other. "You can't compare one with another," he said.

Coach Dav Whatmore described his innings as a responsible one and he found inner confidence in the batsman.

"He played a responsible innings. He was a little bit unlucky as unfortunately he lost his concentration little bit at the end," said Whatmore adding that it was just beginning of the batsman.

The Bangladesh coach however was not fully happy with the achievement of making three

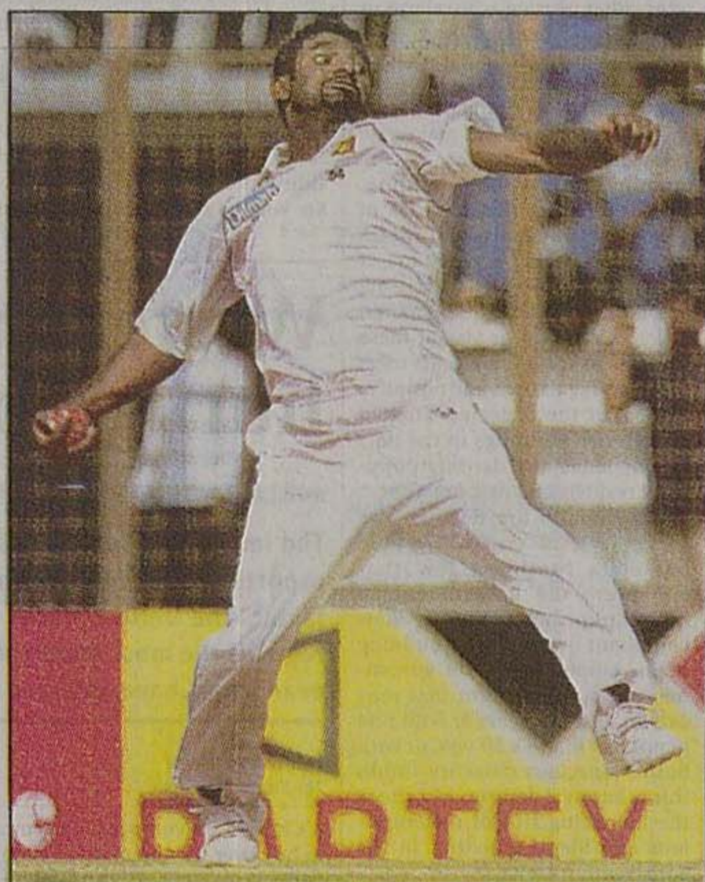
hundred runs in a day.

"The run is good, but it could have been much better, because the wicket was brilliant. We need to understand that this is a five-day game, however there is an improvement," he said adding that Ashraful

showed the maturity which might inspire the other batsmen.

SCOREBOARD
Scoreboard at stumps on the opening day of the first Test between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka at the

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Sri Lanka spin wizard Muttiah Muralidaran, who took three wickets, in his delivery stride in his 100th Test at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Tuesday.

Mahmud's debut as commentator

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

Former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mahmud said that Mohammad Ashraful's hundred made his debut as a commentator a happy one.

The 34-year old Mahmud, who retired from international cricket after playing the first one-day international against the visiting Sri Lanka in Bogra, started his new innings yesterday as an expert TV commentator.

"ESPN-STAR Sports authority just contacted me on Monday night to join the commentary team. I am really excited that Ashraful made a hundred on my first assignment. For his calibre the hundred is not a big one and I am expecting much more from the talented guy," said an excited Mahmud.

"I was a little bit shy on the first day, but everybody appreciated me. Actually it was totally a new experience for me. I am especially excited because I can remain involved with the series as a commentator," he added.

Australian duo inspires Eng captain

REUTERS, Nagpur

England captain Michael Vaughan is confident of making a comeback from the knee injury which forced him out of the Test series against India and is looking to Glenn McGrath and Shane Warne for inspiration.

The Yorkshire batsman played down fears that his long-term problem could be career-threatening.

"I'm very optimistic and enthusiastic about the game of cricket and I certainly won't rule myself out of playing cricket again in the future," he was quoted as saying on the England Cricket Board (ECB) website.

England coach Duncan Fletcher was hopeful on Tuesday that Vaughan's injury was nothing serious.

"At the moment we just feel it probably might be just a niggle," he told reporters. "If it turns out to be a permanent thing, it is a big concern."

The 31-year-old Vaughan is returning home to have further checks, having undergone surgery on his right knee after the problem flared up during the tour of Pakistan late last year.

"There have been better players with bigger injuries than this one that have come back," Vaughan said.

"I remember Glenn McGrath a few years ago had nine or 10 months out of the game, and Shane Warne had 12 months out of the game with a shoulder injury."

"They seem to have come back

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Shoaib down under for op only

CRICINFO, undated

A senior official of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Monday vehemently rubbished speculations that fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar had gone to Australia to undergo a biomechanic test on his bowling action after questions were raised during the recent home Test series against India.

"These are all baseless rumours. Shoaib can't even run, so where does the question of him undergoing biomechanic tests on his action in Australia arise," Saleem Altaf, director of cricket operations, told Reuters.

"He has gone to Australia to purely consult a knee specialist Dr. David Young, who has by the way, told us he'll be operating upon both knees on Tuesday to remove pieces of cartilage which are floating," Altaf said.

Considerable controversy was created during the series against India when the Indian coach Greg Chappell and a noted commentator raised questions over Shoaib's action which has not been tested under the ICC's new bowling action review protocol that came into effect last March.

Dalmiya served show cause

PTI, Kolkata

The Board of Control for Cricket in India on Tuesday issued a show cause notice to its former president Jagmohan Dalmiya, asking him to explain within 15 days why appropriate action should not be taken against him for "irregularities" pertaining to PILCOM accounts.



AKRAM INSWINGER

he is called the number one batsman in the country and recognised as one of the top young players in the world.

It was brilliant batting against a very tidy bowling side that included the likes of Muttiah Muralidaran. Young boys should take lessons from Ashraful's performance today. The way he played Murali, proves that the guy has huge talent.

But the other Bangladeshi batsmen, perhaps, did not do justice to the young man whose strokes were sights for sore eyes. They needed just to stay at the wicket and support him. Runs would have come automatically.

The second highest score in the Bangladesh innings, Nafees Iqbal's 34, compared to Ashraful's 136 is no contribution at all. Had they shown some more patience, it would have been a great day. The way Nafees got out just before lunch was a pity. Before any break, you should not relax. The best way is to stay there and play a few

maiden overs if needed. No harm done that way. No coach can help the batsmen in these situations because they need to help themselves.

Although there is no Chaminda Vaas, you can not ignore the Sri Lankan attack because Murali is the best spinner ever in the world. Also, Lasith Malinga's slingy action makes him a difficult bowler to pick. Ashraful really did well handling these two. I think he was getting desperate and running out of partners. So I don't blame the young man for being dismissed shortly before close of play.

Bangladesh have scored more than 300 runs on a day but the loss of nine wickets tells that they have a lot of hard work to get the Lankan batsmen out on a pitch that will assist them. The pace bowlers hardly would get any help. It's overall a good performance by Bangladesh considering Murali's presence in the opposition but had the hosts lost five wickets, I would have said perfect!

Bangladesh take on Hong Kong today

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh look forward to become third time lucky when they host Hong Kong in the second round of the 2007 Asian Cup Group F qualifiers at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

The match, which kicks off at 4pm, will be telecast live by Bangladesh Television.

Hong Kong, a great team in the 60s and 70s, thrashed Bangladesh 9-1 in the Merdeka Cup in Malaysia in 1975 but their status has been changed markedly over the years. The second international between them, in the Asian Cup qualifier in 2003 in Hong Kong, ended in a 2-2 draw.

"We know they are more experienced at this level. Also, they are professionals, which we are not. But this is our home ground and we hold the advantages. If my boys stick to the plan, we will win," said Bangladesh's Argentine coach

Diego Cruciani after the home side's training session yesterday. Cruciani, serving a two-match ban, would not be able to sit at the bench. He was also denied a place at the official press briefing. His side lost 5-0 to the group favourites Uzbekistan in Tashkent last week while Hong Kong also made a poor start, crashing 3-0 to Qatar at home.

"We conceded three bad goals against Uzbekistan and hope that it does not happen again," said the 41-year-old Argentine, who is expected to make at least two changes in the side, one in the attack and one in the back.

"Our strikers have been making too many misses. This is a worry for me."

It means veteran striker Alfaz or his young partner Emily would be replaced by Farhad or Kanchan, the first-choice striking duo for the SAAF Championship runners-up.

"We were a bit nervous and defensive against Uzbekistan but we want to attack tomorrow," he said.

First-choice goalkeeper Aminul, who was replaced after ten

minutes in Tashkent for a tooth injury, is fit but the coach is not satisfied with his confidence level.

He has misjudged the light for a few occasions in the last four months and Biplab has a chance to be the other replacement.

Cruciani, however, will prefer two defensive midfielders like the Uzbek game although he had used only skipper Joy in this position immediately after taking charge.

Tsang-Wai Chung, one of the two Hong Kong coaches, told at a press briefing that the weather was a bit hot for his boys but that would not be a big problem.

"I was there when Bangladesh drew with Hong Kong four years ago. That is all I know about Bangladesh's football. I think it would be a fighting game and we are here to win. We have discussed and evaluated our loss to Qatar and I think we don't have any other option but to win. There are only five matches to go," said Chung.

"J Mbassa, a Cameroonian midfielder who has become a

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First Test from today

India not taking weakened England lightly

Cricket

AFP, Nagpur

England coach Duncan Fletcher said he was expecting his injury-hit side to show courage in adversity in the opening Test against India here on Wednesday.

The tourists, attempting to win the first Test series in India in 21 years, suffered a major blow when they lost vice-captain Marcus Trescothick for personal reasons, and skipper Michael Vaughan and paceman Simon Jones to knee injuries.

The key trio were forced to return home, leaving their team in disarray on what Fletcher described as a "tough" tour.

"It is not an ideal preparation for the first Test of a series, but it gives a

few good opportunities to others," Fletcher told reporters Tuesday.

"It is going to be a very difficult tour for us. It is a challenge for each individual but the boys are keen to do well in India. The morale is high and you never know what things can do to players."

"We had not beaten Australia (in an Ashes series) for a long time, but we managed to do that (at home last year). We believe we can do it here also."

England last won the Test series in India in 1984-85 when David Gower's team triumphed 2-1.

Ashes hero Andrew Flintoff has been named captain of a depleted England side, but Fletcher said he was hopeful the all-rounder would do the job well.

"It is not an easy job for Flintoff as he is an all-rounder," said Fletcher. "The important thing is he is

very very keen to do the job and we believe he has the ability to lead the side efficiently."

Flintoff will be leading the team for the first time in Tests.

Batsmen Alastair Cook and Ovais Shah, and fast bowler James Anderson have joined the squad as replacements.

India captain Rahul Dravid said his team could not afford to take England lightly because the tourists had quality players in Flintoff, fast bowler Steve Harmison and batsman Kevin Pietersen.

"What happened to their key players is unfortunate," said Dravid.

"Having played with them (Flintoff, Harmison and Pietersen) and seen the kind of character they are, I have no doubt England will be a strong and competitive side."

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What to WATCH

- BTV**
2007 Asian Cup Football Qualifier
Bangladesh vs Hong Kong
Live at 4:00 pm
- STAR Sports**
Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka
1st Test, Day Two
Live at 9:15 am
- Int'l Friendly Football**
England vs Uruguay
Live at 1:55 am (Thursday)
- DD National**
India vs England
1st Test, Day One
Live at 10:30 am

- Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka**
1st Test, Day Two
Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium
2007 Asian Cup Football Qualifier
Bangladesh vs Hong Kong
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



India captain Rahul Dravid (L) and coach Greg Chappell relax during a practice session at the VCA Cricket Ground in Nagpur on Tuesday.