

MacGill shine in gloom

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite an off day from the usually imperious Australian team, there were two shining lights in terms of performances as both Stuart MacGill and Adam Gilchrist gave the men from Down Under reason to smile.

Leg-spinner MacGill, who is usually only second fiddle to Shane Warne in the team, checked the Bangladeshi batsmen at a stage where five hundred looked a gettable target, with some quality bowling to capture his career-best eight for 108.

The performance saw the leggie continue his rich vein of form against the Tigers after he had captured 17 wickets in the two previous Test matches that he had played against them. It also became the 12th time in his 39-Test career that MacGill has captured five wickets or more.

MacGill however played down his achievement. "The first thing that you do is concentrate on doing your job well and at the end of the day hopefully you are good enough to help your team."

"I would be a lot less happy with my personal performance if we didn't win the game. So probably, as it stands, I would have to make a few," said the ever-willing MacGill.

When asked to evaluate the situation MacGill was obvious in his judgement. "The game is far from finished. We will try very hard, first up, to get a second bowl. At the

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8-UP MACGILL: Australia leg-spinner Stuart MacGill is elated after dismissing Bangladesh wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud on the second day of the first Test on Monday.

PHOTO: STAR

Day savours best day

BISHWAJIT ROY



The cricket world will be watching intently as proceedings unfold over the next three days at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium. And this because of Bangladesh's unexpected challenge that has put the Aussies on the ropes at the end of the second day's play in the first Test on Monday.

It is uncommon in modern cricket to see Australia being dominated over two entire days, much less by the minnows from Bangladesh.

So there was every reason to be delighted for members of the Bangladesh team. But Tigers coach Dav Whatmore, ever the professional, played down the excitement with some chosen words and said that the team still have a long way to go despite being in an advantageous position.

"The situation as it stands now puts Bangladesh very much on top of this game. So barring any major mishap in the batting in the second innings or our bowling we are very much in the driving seat," said Whatmore when asked to evaluate the situation.

"It's obviously number one playing against number ten but from the first day when we scored 355 with five still remaining we were in a pretty good

position. And now the immediate goal is that we have to get the remaining wickets," the Sri Lankan-born Australian said.

Whatmore was pragmatic when asked to comment on the good performance of Bangladesh and also ruled out Ponting's comment played a part in the Bangladesh brilliant performance.

"We aim to go out there and do our best... I just feel we are proving a point. Cricket here is focused at the moment and we are carrying on a lot of confidence from our series against Sri Lanka and Kenya... We have batted and bowled well," he explained.

However, the Bangladesh coach admitted that it was probably his best day since taking over the coaching reins three years ago.

"I have been happy with ODI cricket so far but what happened today was a rare sight in my tenure in the longer-version game. Given the opposition we have played against... so far in Tests... I must say that I am very pleased and satisfied," he said.

Whatmore also ruled out underestimation on the part of the Aussies.

"I am not sure if it was really underestimation. As I have said all along I think it has to do with adjustment. They have played a lot of cricket in the last six months and came here from South Africa and Australia after gruelling tour," he

opined.

When he was asked weather the Tigers' two days performance surpassed his expectation, he said "We surpassed the expectations only in the first hour or so after our initial projection. But we keep re-assessing our objective throughout the game and we have managed to do things correctly."

"We are enjoying the situation and we should continue to enjoy the situation," said the coach but he also warned of an Aussie backlash. "A long way to go yet. You can't win a game in a session but you can go a long way to losing a game in a session. It is important to continue to do things correctly," he added.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the second day of the first Test between Bangladesh and Australia at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium on Monday:

BANGLADESH: First innings (overnight 355-5)	
Omar lbw b Gillespie	27
Nafees b MacGill	138
Bashar c Lee b MacGill	76
Saleh c sub (Symonds) b MacGill	67
Ashraf lbw b Gillespie	29
Aftab c Hayden b MacGill	29
Mashud st Gilchrist b MacGill	17
Rafique b MacGill	6
Mortuza lbw b MacGill	6

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Nepal-Sri Lanka first semifinal tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

Surprise-pack Nepal will take on Sri Lanka in the first semifinal of the inaugural AFC Challenge Cup at the MA Aziz Stadium tomorrow.

Despite a loss to Brunei in the group stage, Nepal scrapped through to the semis by virtue of better goal difference only when Bhutan held Brunei to a goalless draw.

Sri Lanka, however, started favourites in the same group and grew in confidence to eliminate Chinese Taipei after a disastrous performance in the SAFF Championship in Pakistan last.

It would be the two South Asian sides' ninth meeting with Sri Lanka winning four compared to Nepal's two victories.

"The morale of our players is high after beating India in the quarterfinal," said Nepal coach Shyam Thapa, whose boys ousted India 3-0.

"Sri Lanka have defeated good teams so far and their players are physically stronger than ours. They are also used to play in these hot conditions," he said.

"It is very difficult to move fast in hot temperature and our players have been struggling. I hope they perform their best against Sri Lanka because it will be a big achievement for our team to reach the final."

"Pradeep Maharjan and our captain Basanta Thapa are still recovering from injuries but I hope that they will be fully fit for the crucial tie," he informed.

"We drew 1-1 with Nepal in the group stage but combination of our players was not good then. Now, we have settled well and the morale is also very high," said Sri Lanka coach Sampath Perera.

"It will be a tough match but I am confident that we can reach the final."

Zoysa back in SL fold

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's cricket selectors on Monday recalled seamer Nuwan Zoysa for the upcoming Test tour of England but captain Marvan Atapattu remained an uncertain starter.

Atapattu, who has been sidelined for the last three months due to a back injury, was named captain of the 16-man squad pending a fitness test before the team's departure on April 19.

Opening batsman Jehan Mubarak and Ian Daniel have been put on standby in case Atapattu does not make the tour, which includes three Tests and five one-day internationals, Sri Lanka Cricket said.

SQUAD

Marvan Atapattu (captain), Mahela Jayawardene, Kumar Sangakkara, Upul Tharanga, Chamara Kapugedara, Tillekeratne Dilshan, Thilan Samaraweera, Michael Vandort, Prasanna Jayawardene, Chaminda Vaas, Nuwan Kulasekara, Lasith Malinga, Nuwan Zoysa, Farveez Maharoo, Muttiah Muralitharan, Malinga Bandara. Coach: Tom Moody.



RAJIN Saleh and Khaled Mashud battled well in the morning to see the new ball off and although they were a bit slow, their approach served Bangladesh's purpose to reach a total about 430 runs. The Australian new ball bowlers looked a bit tired and could not penetrate through the Bangladesh batting.

AKRAM INSWINGER

The pick of the attack was once again Stuart MacGill with a career best 8-108, which proved he could be a match winner. It was a great spell of leg break bowling to achieve such a performance, no matter which team he was playing against.

Both the Bangladesh seamers used the new ball cleverly as they exploited the slow and low bounce of the wicket and got the key wickets of Matthew Hayden and Ricky Ponting to put a lot of pressure on the Australians.

Shahadat Hossain was bowling wide of the crease to the left-handed batsmen but he should try and learn to bowl close to the stumps. Mashrafe Mortuza got the early breakthrough and showed that he has great talent and ability but he should stay fit to play regularly for Bangladesh.

Mohammad Rafique came and got two crucial wickets and showed that he is a great character and asset for the side. But the pick of the bowlers for me was Enamul Haque, who bowled a dream ball to Clark with his first delivery and took the stumps off. Clark is a good player of spin but he had no clue

about that ball. The Bangladeshi captain impressed me a lot as he made some positive moves and handled the bowlers well by making good changes.

In the last half hour of the game, the Bangladeshi players looked tired as they all went quiet on the field. That was the time when rest of the players should have backed up the bowlers by getting behind them.

Tomorrow is going to be a very crucial day for Bangladesh. They should look to get an early wicket. Obviously Adam Gilchrist's wicket is the key but what they should do is to put a defensive field against him and attack the other batsmen. The quicks should bowl wicket to wicket and let the spinners do the trick.

So far the first two days belonged to Bangladesh in all departments and there are still three more days to go and the Australians should not be written off as they have a good record of coming from behind to win Test matches.

Booters crash out Tajikistan face Kyrgyzstan in semis



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh crashed out of the AFC Challenge Cup when Tajikistan handed them an embarrassing 6-1 defeat at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The biggest-ever home defeat for the national football team was a study of striking contrast on a day when their cricketing brothers continued their surprise dominance against world champions Australia not far away from the premier venue of the country.

Bangladesh looked like a fish out of water against a Tajik team that completely outplayed their opposition with a display of superior skill and fitness throughout the 90 minutes to set a semifinal clash against their neighbours Kyrgyzstan.

Bangladesh, who had never conceded more than two goals in a home match, looked visibly shaken although they had made a brief comeback after conceding the opening goal inside 90 second.

Exploiting Bangladesh' weakness in the air and the unexpected rigidity of Aminul at the goal, the tall central Asians toyed with the opposition with long crosses.

Even before the home players were settled, Tajikistan took the lead when Ibragimov Rabimov leaped to meet a corner by Odil Irgashev and put a bullet-header into the roof of the net.

Without injured captain Joy, who suffered from toothache and fever, the hosts looked pathetic in the midfield as well as in defence.

Run ragged by their mighty opponents, Bangladesh showed a moment of brilliance when Alfaz Ahmed struck the equaliser in the 18th minute. Taking a pass from Ujjal, the veteran striker lobbed the ball over an out-of-

position rival goalkeeper Aslidin Khabibuloev from 25 yards with a deft right-footer.

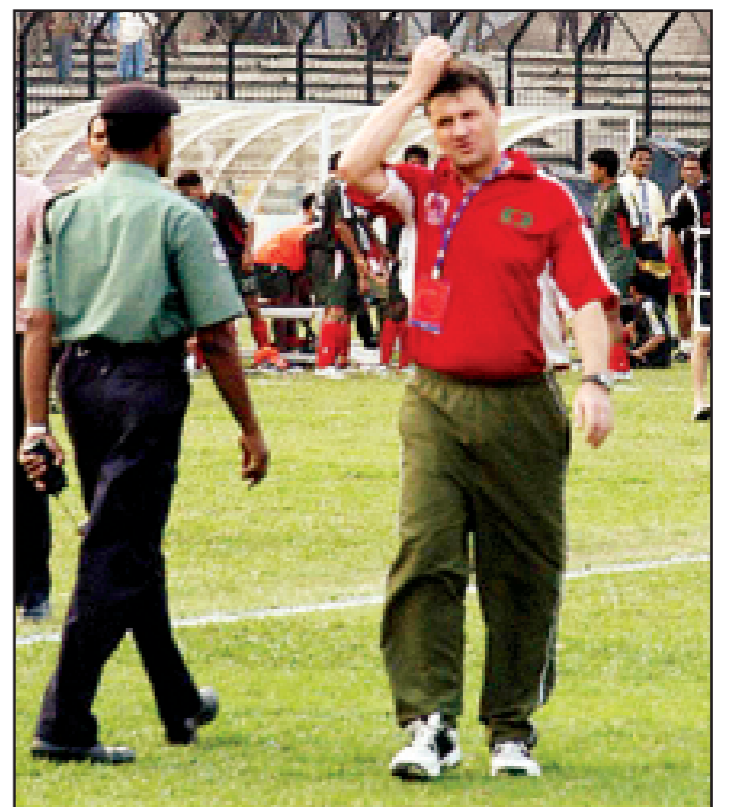
But the home celebration was over two minutes later as Khurshed Makhmudov rocketed in a left-footed volley into the top right corner from the top of the penalty area after Bangladesh defenders failed to handle another Irgashev corner properly.

The wily midfielder, who was too good to be stymied down the right,

lobbed in another pinpoint cross for Dzhomikhon Muhidinov - unmarked at the far post - to score the third goal with a simple header.

Nurmondzhon Hakimov made it 4-1 seven minutes after the break with an angular header on Rabimov's right-wing chip as Aminul for the fourth time stood rooted on the ground while Yusuf Rabiev found the net in the 64th

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WHAT'S HAPPENING? Bangladesh coach Diego Cruciani is confounded by his team's performance during their knockout match against Tajikistan in the AFC Challenge Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: STAR



Did U Know?

Shahriar Nafees became only the third Bangladeshi to score a Test century with his effort against Australia. The only previous players to make a century were Mohammad Ashraf and former skipper Aminul Islam.



Shahriar Nafees

(Bangladesh batsman)

"I enjoy batting for Bangladesh. My duty is to score runs for my team and not to think about batting positions. It's great that I made my hundred as an opener. I am looking forward to serve my team as best as possible." After scoring century against Australia in the first Test.

CHAMPIONS TROPHY ICC okays 4 Indian venues



AFP, New Delhi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) has approved four Indian venues where Champions Trophy matches will be played later this year, an official said on Monday.

The limited-overs tournament will be held at the Brabourne Stadium in Mumbai, the Sardar Patel stadium in Ahmedabad, the Punjab Cricket Association ground in Mohali and the Sawai Man Singh Stadium in Jaipur.

The ICC, which previously insisted on just three venues for the month-long event, okayed a fourth venue after the Indian board agreed to pay 200,000 dollars to the world body as compensation.

"The ICC had initially asked for a million dollars, but we convinced them to bring it down to 200,000 dollars," said Indian cricket chief Sharad Pawar.

Regular Test centres like Chennai and Bangalore were rejected by the ICC because of the threat of rain at that time, while the Eden Gardens in Kolkata declined to host matches.

The final programme for the October 7-November 5 tournament, organised by the ICC to raise funds for its developmental activities, will be unveiled in New Delhi on April 27.

The biennial tournament, regarded as a mini World Cup, features the six top limited-overs teams as on April 1, 2006 and two qualifiers drawn from the remaining four Test-playing nations.

Sri Lanka, the West Indies, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh will play each other on a round-robin basis from October 7 to determine the two

qualifiers.

World champions Australia, England and hosts India have been drawn in group A of the main tournament along with the second-placed qualifier.

The other group comprises South Africa, Pakistan, New Zealand and the top qualifier.

Two teams from each group will make the semi-finals. The final takes place on November 5.

The West Indies won the last edition of the Champions Trophy two years ago defeating hosts England in the final.



Bangladesh spinner Mohammad Rafique celebrates capturing the wicket of Australia opener Mike Hussey on the second day of the first Test at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium on Monday.

PHOTO: STAR

What to WATCH

BTV & STAR Sports

Bangladesh vs Australia
1st Test, Day Three
Live at 10:00 am

BTV

AFC Challenge Cup
FIRST SEMIFINAL
(WEDNESDAY)
Nepal vs Sri Lanka
Live at 3:30 pm

DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh vs Australia
1st Test, Day Three
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
AFC Challenge Cup
FIRST SEMIFINAL
(WEDNESDAY)
Nepal vs Sri Lanka (3.30pm)
Venue: MA Aziz Stadium, Chittagong