



Great triumph, but what next?

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Nobody wants to hear something out of tune in times of joyful celebration. The Akbar Ali-led Bangladesh Under-19 team has captivated the cricket-mad nation with a World Cup triumph in South Africa. Cricket always brings people in the country together and they embrace any achievement of the cricketers from the bottom of their hearts and there was no exception when the young Tigers sealed the country's famous success with a three-wicket victory against their Indian counterparts in the ICC Under-19 World Cup.

The success has come at the ideal time for Bangladesh cricket and it's brought a breath of fresh air amid all the doom and gloom following the senior team's one shocking defeat after another across all formats since the last year's disappointing ICC World Cup campaign in England, champion all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's two-year ban and alleged corruption in lower-tier cricket.

Without any doubt, Test cricket has more weight than a global age-level tournament but there were not many following the Bangladesh-Pakistan Rawalpindi Test on that day. While the young cricketers put on a spirited display in Potchefstroom, their senior fellows exhibited another meek surrender to Pakistan at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium before suffering an innings and 44-run defeat in the first Test. The fans have become fed up with the repeated failures of the national side.

So, the young Tigers' success is significant in more ways than one.

Success has not come overnight. There has been much talk of the reasons behind the triumph and it was a well-designed long-term plan that formed a team into a good unit. We must salute those unsung heroes who tirelessly worked to groom these young cricketers at the grassroots level and those local and foreign staff who prepared the team to execute their plan in the middle. Sometimes a small thing can have

a big impact. It was a good initiative by the board's game development committee when they sent the team to Bogura for fine-tuning their skills with the aim of providing players a slight taste of South African conditions as the grassy surface aided pacers, offering seam movement and bounce, apart from arranging a number of international series home and abroad.

It was ultimately a good management plan that brought all the pieces together to help the team accomplish the goal, much like England did with their four-year plan to end their long wait for World Cup glory. So, the BCB high-ups deserve praise for the young Tigers' success.

There is however a stark contrast in what has been happening with the national team or domestic tournaments. Were there any specific plans and aim, instead of banking only on the experience of the Big Five before the ICC World Cup in England? Are there any specific goals with the domestic

structure? Is it a good sign to cry out for long-term planning after spending so many years as a Test side? Is it possible to achieve desired results at the senior level by arranging a first-class tournament with 10 or seven days' notice?

Is our thinking clear regarding next T20 World Cup or 2023 World?

Akbar Ali's team's success probably provided food for thought for the people who are at the helm of Bangladesh cricket.

Undoubtedly the young cricketers showed a lot of promises but one cannot deny one fact: there is a gulf of difference between senior and age-level cricket. The biggest question is how the authority will fill the big gap in order to make many from this squad into future cricketers of the country.

It would be tragic if the question is raised: where are those champs, where are their spirit in the senior level?

It would be fantastic if we can celebrate the occasion keeping our eyes on the future.

Mominul rues batting after innings defeat

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh skipper Mominul Haque rued lack of partnerships throughout their first World Test Championship fixture against Pakistan after the Tigers succumbed to their sixth consecutive Test defeat, losing by an innings and 44 runs on the fourth day at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

With this victory, Pakistan take a 1-0 lead in the two-Test series. Bangladesh started the day on 126 for six but could not survive more than an hour and 25 minutes as they were bundled out for 168.

Mominul talked about how their batting failure, even on a flat and batting friendly Rawalpindi pitch, had impacted the game's result.

"The pitch was a batting friendly one. We were not able to put up any big partnerships. Most of the players got settled, scored some runs and then got out. In a flat wicket we could not even make a hundred partnership. It is really difficult to come back and win when batsmen get out after scoring 30s or 40s," said the skipper, whose team is yet to secure a point in the in the World Test Championship, having already featured in three games.

Mominul, who was thrown questions thick and fast during the post-match conference following their 10th defeat in 11 Tests against Pakistan, credited the host team's bowlers but also said that he had no excuse for such a poor performance.

"It was a very disappointing performance for us. There is no excuse for it. So I think we just have to improve a lot of things.

That's it. They [Pakistan] also bowled very well. They knew our strengths and knew where to bowl," said Mominul.

Pakistan were bowled out for 445 in their first innings in reply to Bangladesh's 233. Mominul gave credit to the Bangladesh bowlers for their determined show during the latter part of the Pakistan innings.

"One thing that we learned from this Test is that if we want then we can do well. On the second day, Pakistan had already

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH: First innings 233 and second innings 168 all out (Tamim 34, Najmul 38, Mominul 41, Liton 29; Naseem 4-26, Yasir 4-58)
PAKISTAN: First innings 445
Result: Pakistan won by an innings and 44 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Naseem Shah.

scored like 350 or 400 for just three wickets. But after that we bowled them out in just one hour before lunch. How the bowlers bowled during that period was something to learn from, that we can do it if we want," concluded Mominul.

Pakistan captain Azhar Ali credited young pacer Naseem Shah, who became the youngest bowler to take a Test hat-trick on Sunday, but also felt it was an overall performance which saw them win by such a big margin.

"Naseem and other bowlers bowled superbly and it was an outstanding batting display, so all in all it was a complete team effort," said Azhar.

Inter win derby to move to top

AFP, Milan

Inter Milan moved top of Serie A on Sunday after storming back from two goals down to snatch a 4-2 win over AC Milan in a pulsating derby at the San Siro.

Inter pull level on 54 points with Juventus, who lost 2-1 at Hellas Verona on Saturday, but are ahead of the champions on goal difference thanks to an exhilarating second half turnaround after Ante Rebic and Zlatan Ibrahimovic had put Milan 2-0 up at the break.

Lazio are just a point behind in third after Felipe Caicedo scored the only goal in a hard-fought win at Parma earlier on Sunday.

Milan had dominated the first half with Inter struggling to deal with Ibrahimovic, who soared above Diego Godin before knocking down for Rebic to tap the opener past Daniele Padelli.

Stefan De Vrij blocked another cross to deny Rebic a second tap in but Franck Kessie flicked on for a waiting Ibrahimovic to turn in the



Inter players celebrate their 4-2 win over city rivals AC Milan which took them back to the top of the Serie A table on Sunday.

second.

The comeback began five minutes after the break when Brozovic lashed home a stunning volley and two minutes later Mattias Vecino finished off an Alexis Sanchez pass to level the scores.

De Vrij put Inter deservedly ahead with a superb diving header with 20 minutes to go, and after Ibrahimovic hit the post for Milan

Romelu Lukaku then headed home substitute Victor Moses' cross three minutes into injury time to maintain Inter's charge for a first Serie A title in a decade.

Milan's collapse means they missed the chance to move into the Europa League places and sit 10th.

Caicedo kept Lazio's own dream of a first 'Scudetto' in 20 years alive as a 1-0 win over Parma moved the

Romans second in Serie A.

Simone Inzaghi's side are right in the title discussion after extending their unbeaten run to 18 league games.

Their last Serie A defeat was in September to Inter Milan, who they host next weekend at the Stadio Olimpico.

Caicedo broke through just before the interval as the Ecuadorian volleyed home after Parma failed to clear a ball into the box.

Napoli's struggles continued as they collapsed to a 3-2 defeat at home to Lecce.

Last season's runners-up had rekindled hopes of European football next season after league wins over Juventus and Sampdoria, and by eliminating Lazio from the Italian Cup.

Gianluca Lapadula netted a double, opening the scoring after half an hour, with Marco Mancosu sealing victory with a superb free-kick eight minutes from time.

Arkadiusz Milik had levelled for Napoli just after the break with Jose Callejon reducing the deficit late on.



Pakistan leg-spinner Yasir Shah (R) celebrates with captain Azhar Ali (C) after dismissing Bangladesh's last man, Abu Jayed (L), on the fourth day of the first Test at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium yesterday. Pakistan won the match by an innings and 44 runs.

PHOTO: AFP

Messi inspires Barca revival

AFP, Madrid

Lionel Messi gave a hat-trick of assists on Sunday as Barcelona ended their turbulent week with a thrilling 3-2 victory over Real Betis to stay in touch with Real Madrid at the top of La Liga.

Madrid's 4-1 win away at Osasna earlier in the day put pressure on Barca to respond, only for Betis to twice lead at the Benito Villamarin through a penalty from Sergio Canales and brilliant solo effort from Nabil Fekir.

Yet both times Barcelona hit back as Frenkie de Jong and Sergio Busquets pulled them level before Clement Lenglet headed in with 18 minutes left, all three goals teed up by Messi.

Fekir and Lenglet were then sent off in a frantic contest by the end of which, Barca had the victory they so desperately needed following a difficult few days for the club.

Barca turned the tide, with a chaotic



Barcelona talisman Lionel Messi wiggles past Real Betis defence during their La Liga fixture in Seville on Sunday. The Argentine made a hat-trick of assists as the Blaugrana won the match 3-2.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Gareth Bale returned to the starting line-up after four matches out of the squad and a fortuitous deflection meant he assisted Isco's equaliser after Unai Garcia had given Osasuna a surprise lead.

Sergio Ramos then headed Madrid in front before substitutes Lucas Vazquez and Luka Jovic made the scoreline more emphatic.

"I'm pleased with all the players and what they're doing," said Zidane. "It's very good to stay in front."

Barca's exit in the Copa del Rey overshadowed Madrid's own shock

defeat at home by Real Sociedad in the quarterfinals, a loss that brought a dramatic end to their 21-match unbeaten run.

But Zidane will be relieved to see his team swiftly back on track with a performance full of the kind of resilience that Real's rivals have so lacked in recent weeks.

Bale also keeps coming back under Zidane and the 30-year-old had chances to add a goal to a spirited display before going off to a decent reception from the away support in the second half.

BFF asked for documents of Tk 10cr expenditure

SPORTS REPORTER

Due to lack of proper vouchers, documents and copies of Tax and VAT return, the National Sports Council (NSC) recently sent back Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) appeal for advanced settlement of Tk 10 crore out of the Tk 20 crore allocated by the government for the 2019-20 fiscal.

The game's local governing body in January submitted expenditure of Tk 10 crore to the NSC for advanced settlement after disbursing Tk 5 lakh each to 63 District Football Associations (DFAs), Tk 5 to Tk 2 lakh each to clubs of Bangladesh Premier League, Bangladesh Championship League, First, Second and Third Division Football Leagues along with money spent for the national men's team, women's team and hosting of the Bangabandhu National Football Championship.

"It is not possible to have an advanced settlement of Tk 10 crore due to lack of detailed bill-vouchers, copies of taxes on source which is why the authority concerned has been requested to submit the proper documents of expenditure," read an NSC letter to the BFF, issued on February 2.

"It is not true that they did not accept our papers; rather they asked us to submit supporting documents against the expenditures. We gave away Tk 5 lakh to each DFA, who spent it. NSC asked us whether it is possible to submit the supporting documents from the DFAs or submit an estimation of the expenditure regarding sectors of DFA expenditure," BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said.

"This is not the first time that we got money from the government and gave them supporting documents. The finance wings of BFF and NSC is working together and we will submit the documents within four to five days," said Shohag.

After the allocation of Tk 20 crore, BFF's senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy and vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed told reporters that they would spend the money only on the senior men's team, women's team and development work, but the BFF is now spending it for clubs and DFAs.

"There is no guideline from the government on where to spend the money, rather we gave them an outline of the estimated expenditure and we are now spending money in line with that outline," said Shohag.



Sana named breakthrough archer of 2019

SPORTS REPORTER

Country's best archer Ruman Sana has been recognised as the 'breakthrough archer' for 2019 by the world game's governing body on Monday.

Bangladesh team's German coach Martin Frederick has been recognised as the best coach as World Archery announced names of nine winners, based on public and expert votes.

Sana was also nominated in the category of best recurve male archer along with Brady Ellison of USA, Lee Woo Seok of South Korea, Khairul Anuar Mohamad of Malaysia and Mauro Nespoli of Italy, but the lad from Khulna failed to beat eventual winner Ellison in that category.

In 2019, Sana won a bronze medal in World Archery Championship after qualifying for 2020 Tokyo Olympics directly from the same competition. The 24-year-old then won a gold medal in Asia Cup Stage-2 competition and completed the year with triple gold medals in the South Asian Games.

| TOP FIVE | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|----|----|---|---|-----|-----|-----|
| Team | P | W | D | L | G/F | G/A | Pts |
| Real Madrid | 23 | 15 | 7 | 1 | 44 | 14 | 52 |
| Barcelona | 23 | 15 | 4 | 4 | 55 | 28 | 49 |
| Getafe | 23 | 12 | 6 | 5 | 35 | 20 | 42 |
| Atletico Madrid | 23 | 10 | 9 | 4 | 23 | 15 | 39 |
| Sevilla | 23 | 11 | 6 | 6 | 29 | 23 | 39 |

performance that might have been punished by better opponents, but that keeps them three points behind Real Madrid, who had earlier won at a canter in Pamplona.