

A SERIES TO SAVOUR

MANY FIRSTS

Bangladesh's crushing victory in the fifth and final one-day international against Zimbabwe will go down in history for several reasons:

The eight-wicket win gave Bangladesh their first ever series triumph in their 106th ODI appearance.

The 3-2 comeback win was only the second time in one-day history that a team had fought back from two-nil down in a five-match series.

The 150 run stand between Aftab Ahmed and Mohammad Rafique is a Bangladesh record for the second wicket and only the second highest for any wicket behind the 170-run opening stand between Mehrab Hossain and Shahriar Hossain.

Aftab's astonishing 24 runs (6,4,2,4,4,4) off Elton Chigumbura is the maximum a Bangladeshi batsman has scored in a one-day over.

The victory in the final game was the first instance of a Bangladesh team winning three matches in a row.

BISHWAJIT ROY



If anybody terms January as the month of fairytales for Bangladesh's cricket, it will not be an exaggeration.

The series against Zimbabwe came to an end on the last day of the month in grand style and there were hardly any dreams left unfulfilled.

The Tigers even broke the series myth that the luck of the coin was a must to win matches by successfully chasing 198 with some devastating batting from Aftab Ahmed and Mohammad Rafique. Naturally, captain Habibul Bashar sported a smile that can only come after a satisfying well-earned triumph.

"The way we finished the demanding series was fantastic. It was an amazing experience. We tasted our maiden Test victory in Chittagong, managed to draw the second Test from a difficult situation and finally clinched the one-day series from being 2-0 down. I couldn't have asked for more," said a delighted Bashar.

Despite the thumping margin of victory in the last match for the home team, the series was keenly contested and Zimbabwe made themselves proud by fighting all the way. But there was no denying that Bangladesh definitely had the edge in terms of experience.

"They just played very clever and smart cricket in the series. We believe the better side won," said vice-captain Mluleki Nkala, who appeared in the post-match briefing in absence of skipper Tatenda Taibu who had suffered a leg injury in the field.

Bashar was asked about the positives from this series which he would like to carry on to the next assignment against England in May

and the 32-year-old responded with a single word "confidence."

"We have a lot of talent in the squad and there was never any doubts about their potential. But we have struggled along the way as we lacked confidence. We are very much aware that our next mission will be a difficult one but we have gained the confidence from this series to fight better against stronger sides," said Bashar.

"Our challenge in this series was to prove that we were the better side and now we can safely proclaim that. Especially in this last game, it was amazing to see the way our batsmen dominated," Bashar added.

Bangladesh's premier batsman admitted that at times the pressure of high expectation threatened to get to them but the players showed great maturity under those circumstances.

"Never before have we started a series thinking we would win but this time it was a different scenario. And as people of this country are extremely passionate about cricket, we are always hearing all kinds of suggestions some of which are difficult to take as an international cricketer. But I must say the boys handled those situations brilliantly. Everybody was focused on making dreams come true.

"They never gave up hope even when we trailed the one-day series 0-2 and I think that is most significant sign for our future. I guess this 3-2 win is better than a clean sweep if you considered the character of the series. Now we have learned how to make a come back," said Bashar.

Bashar thought the destructive batting Aftab Ahmed showed yesterday was just a glimpse of the future.

"We are satisfied that all the

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LET'S HAVE SOME FUN PARTNER! Mohammad Rafique (L) and Aftab Ahmed congratulate each other during their blitzkrieg against Zimbabwe at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN