



STORY OF THE DAY: (L-R) Zimbabwe opener Barney Rogers whacks a six but he was the lone ranger as Mashrafe bin-Mortuza ends the innings by shattering the stumps of Tatenda Taibu. The Aftab and Rafique show starts and it was sensational. Captain Habibul Bashar rather befittingly hit the wining runs and the celebrations began.

One & only Rafique

SPORTS REPORTER

For Mohammad Rafique it's easier to hit big sixes and fours.

"I always feel comfortable to hit sixes rather than taking ones or twos," quipped the left-arm slow bowler, wearing his childlike smile after his all-round show in the fifth and final game.

Not many will argue that the 35-year old is the top crowd entertainer in the country and whenever he goes out to bat or bowl, the cricket-crazy fans get behind him with loud cheers.

As Rome was not built in a day, Rafique also took his time to earn

the confidence of millions as he has always been trying to give more than hundred per cent for the cause of the country.

And he came nothing short of that when the crisis-time opener smashed a 66-ball 72 that virtually won the fifth match, with it the series, for Bangladesh.

Interestingly, Bangladesh, in its 106-match history to date, had previously won only one ODI batting second and Rafique had played the same role like yesterday's.

The exciting left-hander hammered an explosive 77 off 87 balls as a pinch-hitting opener to pull off the country's first-ever one-day

victory, against Kenya at Hyderabad in 1998.

And his yesterday's batting onslaught came on top of a 2-34 off 10 overs that earned him the man-of-the-match award.

"I'm happy that I could contribute something for my team to win the match. I always tried my best to give hundred per cent. I never thought of any personal achievement and that's why I am more happy today as we won the series," said Rafique.

When asked what was the key behind his success, Rafique smilingly said he always believed that anything is possible.

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Aftab blooms at last

AL MUSABBIR SADI

The Tigers failed to chase two moderate targets and lost the first two matches against Zimbabwe in the five-match one-day series. They won the next two matches but still, their batting was not up to the expectation due to lack of big hitters.

Coming to the crunch match, yesterday's series decider fifth game at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, one man changed the complexion of Bangladesh batting with his heroics and he was Aftab Ahmed.

The team management kept faith in Aftab, who struggled in the Test series and came up with scores of 1

and 15 in the first two games. The 20-year-old right-hander from Chittagong showed signs of improvement hitting 38 and 44 before coming of age in the final match with a career-best 81 not out.

No-one had doubts about his ability to fill up the much needed hard-hitter's place in the side but he failed to carry on after getting off to good starts.

But the little big man, who scored his maiden one-day half-century (67) against India in December 2004, had his sights on guiding the team to victory this time.

He came to the crease in the third over and launched an assault

against the Zimbabwean attack immediately. Having opened his account with a flicked four off Christopher Mpofu, Aftab lofted Tinashe Panyanagara for a straight six and nicked the same bowler to warm up for the biggest over of the day.

Elton Chigumbura, who did not bowl in the last two matches due to injury, came in as first change in the eighth over. He received a rude awaking as his first ball was hooked over fine-leg for a six as Bangladesh raced past 50.

"That was the shot I enjoyed most in the day," said Aftab after the match yesterday.

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PHOTO: STAR

ONE FOR THE PHOTO COLLECTION: Probably for the last time, a packed audience watched cricket at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Cricket is moving to the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.



MAKE THIS A HABIT: (L) The jubilant Bangladesh team goes for a lap of honour after the series victory, (R) The Tigers celebrate with the one-day series trophy.



PHOTO: STAR

5TH BD-ZIM ODI SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the fifth and final CityCell one-day international between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Monday:

ZIMBABWE				
Matsikenyeri lbw b Nazmul	5			
Rogers st Mashud b Enamul	84			
Masakadza c and b Manzarul	23			
Taylor lbw b Rafique	36			
Taibu b Mashrafe	31			
Chigumbura c and b Enamul	1			
Sibanda lbw b Rafique	1			
Nkala c Enamul b Nazmul	8			
Panyangara run out	1			
Utseya run out	1			
Mpofu not out	1			
Extras: (lb-2, nb-1, w-3)	6			
Total: (All out in 49 overs)	198			
Fall of wickets: 1-12, 2-44, 3-139, 4-161, 5-165, 6-168, 7-184, 8-187, 9-191				
Bowler				
Mashrafe	9	1	42	1
Nazmul	9	1	51	2
Manzarul	10	2	21	1
Rafique	10	1	34	2
Enamul	10	0	39	2
Kapali	1	0	9	0

BANGLADESH
Rafique c Utseya b Chigumbura 72
Iqbal b Panyangara 9
Aftab not out 81

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Whoever wins gets thru'

AFP, Perth



Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq believes his team have the upper-hand in their final make or break triangular VB Series match against the West Indies Tuesday because of their now considerable experience on the tricky Western Australian Cricket Association Ground wicket.

Pakistan defeated the previously unbeaten Australians at the Perth ground on Sunday, giving them a huge psychological boost for the match that will decide which team plays the host nation in the series finals starting on Friday.

"Definitely we have the advantage because we have played one Test match and (played in Perth for) 15 or 16 days before that," Inzamam said.

"This track is totally different and

the West Indies are playing for the first time here."

Pakistan kicked off their Australian tour in Perth at the end of November, spending almost a month here as they played two tour matches prior to a losing four-day match against the Western Australian state team.

They also played the first Test against Australia on the notoriously lively WACA wicket, losing by 491 runs.

But Inzamam and his players said they were boosted by their breakthrough three-wicket tri-series win over Australia on Sunday.

"This win has definitely helped us for the coming games. Hopefully we will play the final and we will win," he said.

Pakistan's victory was marred by some serious fielding blunders which saw a string of clear catching chances go begging, but Inzamam said he hoped the problems would be sorted.

"I think the ground fielding is OK

but we dropped some catches and this is our weak area and we will really try to work hard on this and hopefully get it OK for the finals," he said.

Inzamam agreed that in-form West Indian captain and champion batsman Brian Lara presented a major hurdle after he belted 156 off 138 balls against Pakistan in Adelaide last Friday.

But he said Pakistan's bowling had improved against Australia and Lara would need to be on top of his game with medium-pace bowler Navedul Hasan and allrounder Abdul Razzaq showing better form.

"I think he realizes the bowling was not good in the last game," he said.

"I think especially Naved and Razzaq -- they have worked hard in the nets and they are good here."

Razzaq, who was named Man of the Match after taking 4-53 and making an unbeaten 63 against Australia, said Pakistan was missing

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Grand end to a grand venue

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangabandhu National Stadium officially hosted its last cricket match with the fifth one-day international between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe yesterday.

And nobody could have thought of a better way to say goodbye to the all-purpose venue built exclusively for cricket in the 50s.

A packed crowd, the same deafening noise and to cap it all a brilliant day in the field for the Tigers, who won game by eight wickets to seal a historic one-day triumph two weeks after clinching the two Test series 1-0 at the same venue.

But from today cricket will cease to exist at the grand old venue, which has seen many of Bangladesh's finest cricketing achievements notably the first-ever Test

match against India on November 10, 2000.

Now, cricket is all set to move to its new home at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur after a hectic home season against New Zealand, India and Zimbabwe.

But it is doubtful whether the Mirpur venue would be able to host an international game when the mighty Australians come here next year as the renovation is yet to start in full swing.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had already announced they would be leaving the BNS after the Zimbabwe series and it is due to be handed over to the Bangladesh Football Federation from March 1.

But cricket fans have already started to express their displeasure at pulling cricket out of a venue that

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PHOTO: STAR

MUSIC TIME: Fans, blowing musical instruments, partying in the streets of Dhaka after the Tigers' win.