

Blame it on Bashar

BISHWAJIT ROY



Without any doubt, Bangladesh badly missed their main bowling weapon -- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza -- to repeat their World Cup success against India in yesterday's match at Mirpur. But the fact is, it was not the only reason behind the Tigers' five-wicket loss in the first one-day of the three-match series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

It has been time and again told that Bangladesh batsmen hardly produce a total for their bowlers to defend but the batters did their job by putting on 250-7 in the 47-over-a-side match. But their efforts were not enough to script another glorious victory.

Habibul Bashar is perhaps the one to blame because of the way the Bangladesh captain handled the match that could have gone the home side's way in front of an electric crowd. The question was not why Bangladesh lost yet another match, but how.

If reckless batting was his first fault -- however made up for by his soldiers Tamim Iqbal (45), Javed Omar (80) and Shakib Al Hasan (50) -- then his reactive captaincy seemed simply pathetic for everybody who watched the game.

The 34-year old skipper was waiting for something to happen rather than trying to make it happen and help his side when the game was in his hands with India wobbling at 144-5 after 28.1 overs in reply to a challenging total on a pitch where batting was not easy against the slow bowlers.

Dashing Mahendra Dhoni (91), hamstrung and limping on one good leg, and Dinesh Karthik (58) kept cool in the middle under

difficult circumstances during an unbeaten 107-run sixth wicket stand to take the match away from the home side. But they should have given some credit to Bashar for allowing them to pick up the singles easily and release the pressure on way to win the match with one over in hand.

The Bangladesh captain, who many believe has hardly any reason of continuing his one-day career, was completely exposed as a defensive captain when the situation demanded improvisation from him to make up for the absence of pace spearhead Mashrafe.

Putting only four fielders inside the ring instead of piling on the pressure ended in comforting the match winning pair who banked on Bashar's lack of killer instinct.

So, understandably he was the man in the receiving end at the post-match briefing but the pale-faced Bangladesh skipper was not ready to take any blame rather he thought that Dhoni made all the difference by playing a fantastic knock.

"No, we were not defensive. It is very difficult for many team to stop Dhoni that's why we thought that it would be better not to allow him big shots," he answered surprising the audience.

"Our main target was to pick up wickets but unfortunately our spinners were not as successful as in the previous few matches. But I don't want to blame them. You should understand that India batted well to win the match," he said.

The question was also raised, interestingly by an Indian journalist, about why his side's body language was negative when the match was in their control.

"From outside it might have looked different but inside we didn't feel something like that," he replied.

Bashar, however, admitted that his fielders missed some vital run out chances.

"Definitely I felt the absence of Mashrafe but someday you should play without your strike bowler. Yes, we put up a very good total on the board to create a chance but ultimately everything did not go in our favour," he said.

On the other hand 'under pressure', 'difficult situation', 'tough condition' were the words used by Indian skipper Rahul Dravid, who for the first time wore a smiling face in front of the press since their arrival on May 7, cricket manager Ravi Shastri and man-of-the-match Dhoni.

Dravid heaped all the praises on Dhoni and Karthik for the hard-fought victory after their disappointing five-wicket defeat to their World Cup nemesis.

"Really it was a special partnership under such a difficult and pressure situation. They controlled the innings and kept the run rate at move by rotating the strike and I must say it was exceptional batting we saw today," David said.

"We were in a tough condition and it was not easy to field first and then bat against three quality spinners. So I must say it's a good win and mind it, a win is always a win. Many sides might have lost under this condition," he added.

He also explained the reason behind promoting Dhoni to number three. "Because he has the ability to change gear in different conditions," he responded.

While the Tigers captain hoped that they will fight back in the next two games by correcting their mistakes, Shastri warned that the hosts will have to play better.

"I am proud of my boys because they won a match under a difficult situation. Bangladesh will have to play better than this if they want to bounce back," said the former India all-rounder.



PHOTO: STAR

India top-order batsman Mahendra Dhoni plays a one-legged drive through the extra-cover region during his match-winning knock of 91 in the first ODI against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.



Did U Know?

Steve Waugh and Mohinder Amarnath were both used to carry a red handkerchief in their pockets while batting.



Mohammad Ashraful

(Star Bangladesh batsman)
"I don't know why this question is coming up again and again. They have other good players also."
When somebody asked him about the absence of Sourav Ganguly and Sachin Tendulkar in the



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Second Semifinal
Live at 6:00 pm



Oldham hold Bangladesh U-23s

SPORTS REPORTER

Oldham Athletic gave up an early lead to draw their second exhibition match 1-1 against Bangladesh national under-23 team yesterday.

The English club, who lost 2-1 to Mohammedan in their tour opener in Dhaka, took the lead after five minutes through captain Mike Pearson at the Sylhet Stadium.

The home side equalised three minutes before half time with a strike from prolific Farashganj striker Mohammed Robin.

The Latics were scheduled to return to Dhaka last night for their third and final friendly against Abahani on Saturday.

SL drop Atapattu

AFP, Colombo

Veteran batsman Marvan Atapattu has been omitted from the 15-man Sri Lanka squad for the three-match one-day international series against Pakistan in Abu Dhabi, officials said.

Only nine of the 15 players who represented the country in the World Cup have been named in the squad for the series starting on May 18.

Veterans Kumar Sangakkara, Muttiah Muralidaran and Chaminda Vaas were released by governing body Sri Lanka Cricket to play county cricket in England.

Russel Arnold has retired from international cricket while seamer Nuwan Kulasekara, who played one game in the World Cup, were left out along with Atapattu.

Asantha de Mel, Sri Lanka's chairman of selectors, said that they decided to drop Atapattu as they wanted to groom young players.

"We just thought of taking this opportunity to take a look at a few young players. Marvan will be considered in the future, but for this series we thought of going with a couple of young guys," de Mel said.

Uncapped opening batsman Malintha Warnapura (27) has been named in the squad after his excellent form with the "A" team, along with Ishara Amarasinghe (28), another uncapped player.

"Malintha deserves the break. He's done exceptionally well with the 'A' team and his choice was automatic. Ishara bowls at a good pace and he's got the talent and we want to see how he goes," de Mel added.

"He's someone like Lasith
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Shakib's quiet brilliance

MOHAMMAD ISAM



While Javed Omar's coup de grace was a statement to the cricket fans, Shakib Al Hasan just went about his business out in the middle, batting like a hardcore professional. His 50 off 68 balls almost went unnoticed as at the other end, Javed played the best knock of his career.

Shakib struck the ball with ease and more importantly, knew the gaps as if he had them memorized. His swift footwork, both while meeting the flighted ball or when he darted between the wickets was refreshing for supporters who have witnessed slow batting every time wickets fell in succession.

A scoop was his first scoring shot when one considers that he mostly plays, and played, cultured shots all through his innings. He kept Javed on his toes for most of their 107-run stand as the two

batsmen, with a massive age gap, made the Indians suffer in the sweltering heat.

After skipper Habibul Bashar needlessly chipped the ball straight at mid-on off Ramesh Powar for a duck, Bangladesh almost gave away a solid start as they slipped to 78 for two from the comfortable 78 for none.

Far from halting the progress of the Bangladesh innings, the 20-year-old left-hander kept the run-rate almost at par with the opening pair.

He hurried the Indian fieldsmen who were looking for a breather after they got rid of the rampant Tamim Iqbal. Quick singles from the range of short third-man to the covers and all the way across to the short fine-leg region was aplenty as he ran for himself and for batting partner Javed. The boy ran ragged.

But all this must have gone unnoticed as everyone were more focussed on Javed's surprising effort. Javed struck the big hits and cleared the infield (uncharacteristically) but it was Shakib who re-laid the foundation for the batsmen to follow. Javed struck two

sixes over long-off and deep mid-wicket but Shakib took charge of the situation quickly as he milked the spinners in the next few overs.

He took 29 singles, five twos and a three in his knock of 68 balls that spanned one and a half hour. And 28 runs off his 50 came on the off-side.

For a man who has not played a single Test match due to the quirks of international scheduling, Shakib seems to know his own batting quite well. Apart from working the gaps, his scoop shot, albeit bordering on the insanity at that moment, went to show his level of confidence.

After the break, Shakib took a brilliant diving catch to get rid of Virender Sehwag in the seventh over and typically, picked up two crucial wickets that almost won Bangladesh the match.

Had it not been for Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Dinesh Karthik's brilliance, Shakib would have coolly walked away with the best player award because had it not been for the partnership, Bangladesh would have won, having banked on Shakib's crucial 50.



PHOTO: STAR

MR CONSISTENT: Bangladesh middle-order batsman Shakib-Al-Hasan (C) prepares to play a sweep shot as India wicketkeeper Mahendra Dhoni (L) and Dinesh Karthik looks on during the first ODI between the sides at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Woolmer murder suspect could be named soon

PTI, Kingston

A suspect in Bob Woolmer's murder may be named after a high-level meeting between the officials of Jamaican Police and Scotland Yard in London on Thursday, according to a newspaper report.

The 'Jamaican Observer' said the highly complex case could come closer to conclusion after the meeting.

"I am not saying much, only that the case will be closer to closure after that high-level meeting," a source close to the investigation was quoted as saying by the paper.

A team from the Jamaica Constabulary Force, led by Deputy Commissioner Mark Shields and including Deputy Superintendent Colin Pinnock, have left the island to meet Scotland Yard detective superintendent John Sweeney.

The team will also meet with the British Forensic Science Service and a British pathologist who had conducted independent tests on
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Pakistan keen on Whatmore



AFP, Karachi

Pakistani cricket authorities are interested in hiring outgoing Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore as a replacement for the late Bob Woolmer, an official said Thursday.

Pakistan, due to play a three-match one-day series with Sri Lanka in Abu Dhabi next week, have been without a coach since Woolmer's alleged murder at the World Cup in Jamaica two months ago.

Woolmer was found unconscious in his hotel room a day after Pakistan crashed out of the World Cup following a three-wicket defeat at the hands of minnows Ireland.

"We are interested in hiring Whatmore and although he has yet to apply for the post we can discuss

Mashrafe boost for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

The absence of pacer Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was one of the main causes of Bangladesh's five-wicket defeat against India in the first one-day. However, the good news is that the firebrand may be available for the second game to be held at the same venue tomorrow.

The 'Narail Express', who was the hero of Tigers' World Cup victory against the same opponents, ruled himself out of yesterday's first game after failing a fitness test in the morning.

"We are confident that he will be available for the second ODI on Saturday but we will continue to assess his condition during Friday's training," said Bangladesh team physio Paul Close.

But viewers were still treated to some glimpses of the quick bowler as he looked reasonably okay while frequenting the pitch with drinks.

The pace spearhead is nursing a lower-back strain, which he suffered during practice session on Tuesday.

The team-management are desperately looking to his quick recovery as his replacement--Shahadat Hossain--hardly made any impact in the first match, ruling out the luxury for the team think-tank of resting Mashrafe with the two Test matches also impending.

It was a matter of common consensus that if Mashrafe had been fit in the first match than the 250-run total could have proved good enough for Bangladesh.

the arrangements with him." Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) director of cricket operations and former fast bowler Zakir Khan told AFP.

The PCB advertised the post internationally last month.

"We have a committee which will finalise the coach as we have also received applications from England and Australia," said Khan, one of the three members of the committee along with former Test players Imtiaz Ahmed and Mudassar Nazar.

The 53-year-old Whatmore, who was born in Sri Lanka but played seven Tests for Australia in the late 1970s, finishes his four-year tenure with Bangladesh at the end of the month.

He has been highly regarded ever since he masterminded Sri Lanka's triumphant World Cup campaign in 1996.

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BANGLADESH-INDIA FIRST ODI SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the first one-day international between Bangladesh and India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday:

Shri-er-Bangladesh National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday:						
BANGLADESH		R	B	4s	6s	
Javed Omar run out (Zaheer Khan)		80	117	7	2	
Tamim Iqbal c Virender Sehwag b Dinesh Mongia		45	53	6	0	
Habibul Bashar c Gautam Gambhir b Ramesh Powar		0	2	0	0	
Shakib Al Hasan st Mahendra Dhoni b Dinesh Mongia		50	68	2	0	
Mohammad Ashraful b Dinesh Mongia		29	22	3	0	
Aftab Ahmed lbw b Virender Sehwag		16	16	1	0	
Mohammad Rafique c Dinesh Karthik b Ramesh Powar		11	7	0	1	
Mushfiqur Rahim not out		1	1	0	0	
Extras: (leg byes 1, wides 13, no balls 4)		18				
Total: (For 7 wickets in 47 overs)		250				
Did not bat: Abdur Razzak, Syed Rasel, Shahadat Hossain						
Fall of wickets: 1-78 (Iqbal), 2-78 (Bashar), 3-185 (Omar), 4-200 (Shakib), 5-236 (Ashraful), 6-240 (Aftab), 7-250 (Rafique)						
Bowler		O	M	R	W	NB/W
Zaheer Khan		7	1	54	0	4nb, 2w
Sree Sreesanth		5	1	14	0	1w
Munaf Patel		7	1	31	0	2w
Ramesh Powar		10	0	55	2	
Dinesh Mongia		10	0	49	3	
Virender Sehwag		8	0	46	1	2w
INDIA		R	B	4s	6s	
Gautam Gambhir lbw b Syed Rasel		21	17	4	0	
Virender Sehwag c Shakib Al Hasan b Syed Rasel		30	21	7	0	
Mahendra Dhoni not out		91	106	7	0	
Yuvraj Singh c Abdur Razzak b Shahadat Hossain		1	9	0	0	
Rahul Dravid c Abdur Razzak b Shakib Al Hasan		22	39	2	0	
Dinesh Mongia c Aftab Ahmed b Shakib Al Hasan		17	25	2	0	
Dinesh Karthik not out		58	60	4	0	
Extras: (leg byes 4, wides 6, no balls 1)		11				
Total: (For 5 wickets in 46 overs)		251				
Did not bat: Ramesh Powar, Sree Sreesanth, Zaheer Khan, Munaf Patel						
Fall of wickets: 1-35 (Gambhir), 2-56 (Sehwag), 3-63 (Yuvraj), 4-112 (Dravid), 5-144 (Mongia)						
Bowler		O	M	R	W	NB/W
Syed Rasel		9	0	66	2	
Shahadat Hossain		7	0	43	1	1nb, 2w

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