

Loss that means nothing

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY, from Colombo

Despite all the success in recent years, Sri Lanka are hungry to improve as a team and in terms of individual achievements even against a bottom-ranked side like Bangladesh.

"The important thing for us was to make sure that we go very hard at them. We hadn't played Test cricket for a while and we needed to get back into things pretty quickly and maintain our standards. That's the challenge we had. We are always focusing on improvement in every game," was the initial reaction of Sri Lankan skipper Mahela Jayawardene after his side's thumping victory at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) ground yesterday.

But for the Tigers, this was not the case. If anybody thought that Mohammad Ashraful's men were shell-shocked after their disastrous performance to lose the first Test of the three-match series by an innings and 234 runs, the biggest margin of defeat against the Lankans, he is simply living in a fool's paradise.

It seemed that the Bangladesh players took it normally, almost as if it was just another defeat, as if it was expected against the mighty Lankans who are almost invincible at their own den. Making the same old mistakes and then promising to rectify and 'learn from the mistakes' for the next game is now a common feature for the Bangladesh national team players.

"It was frustrating that we took the match to the fourth day with five wickets in hand and then were all out within half an hour. I think we can take inspiration from our third day's

effort. We threw away wickets but hopefully we will not make the same mistakes in the next game," was the usual statement from Ashraful, who made a miserable debut as captain.

"Our second innings performance proved that if we concentrate hard, it is possible to play quality bowlers. For most of the second innings we actually stuck to our gameplan and it came out pretty good. That is the confidence we will take as we move on to the rest of the series," he added.

What was more surprising: The way Bangladesh batted on the third day or losing five wickets within half an hour on the fourth day morning?

The first one might be right. Because it is rare in Bangladesh's Test history that they batted throughout a day but it was familiar the way they lost their last five wickets within five overs as it has, time and again, happened during their six-year stint as a Test nation.

Jayawardene was asked whether Bangladesh's pathetic batting on the fourth morning after their fightback on the third day surprised him. The soft-spoken Lankan skipper was diplomatic about the issue.

"I don't know what the reaction in the Bangladesh dressing room is but we were hungry for the victory," he said adding that it was a brilliant effort by his side under tough conditions.

"The batsmen who got in made sure that they made big hundreds. Everyone chipped in, especially the lower-middle order. The fast bowlers were brilliant. They were very

SEE PAGE 22 COL 5



PHOTO: AFP

A HUNTER OF TIGERS: Champion off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran leads the Sri Lankan team off the Sinhalese Sports Club ground after their massive victory against Bangladesh on the fourth day of the first Test yesterday. Man-of-the-match Murali took a match haul of nine wickets.

Imran fumes after debacle

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY, from Colombo

Undoubtedly the time span of over six years is nothing close to a long time in Test cricket. But it is also true that the duration is not too short for showing at least some consistent improvement at the highest level of the game.

The reality is that Bangladesh have yet to prove their point as an improving side in Test cricket despite the fact they had a high-profile coach like Dav Whatmore for the last four years.

Every single Bangladeshi present at the Sinhalese Sports club ground yesterday felt that they had become a laughing stock.

Coach Sarwar Imran and former national captain turned selector Akram Khan are no exceptions as they believe that this has happened time and again because the problem remains the same since Bangladesh's entry into the elite

arena in 2000.

Former pace bowler Imran was incidentally the Bangladesh coach in the inaugural Test match against India at Dhaka and then was again involved with the national side during the 2003 home series against South Africa.

"It is painful to see that we are still almost same as six years ago. Nothing has changed in our approach to Test cricket because we are making the same old mistakes," said a disappointed Imran, who has returned to the national side as an assistant coach for the tour.

"We have a bunch of talented cricketers but I must say that we hardly worked out on anything to stay at this level with our heads high. We made 400 runs in the first innings and then were dismissed for below hundred in the inaugural Test (in November 2000). Do you think we have improved much from that standard? Nobody believes that Bangladesh can score 300 runs consistently and in that case what

have we achieved in the last five or six years?" queried Imran.

"Just imagine what (Mohammad) Ashraful did. First he played two reverse sweeps against (Muttiah) Muralidaran and how a batsman of his standard then went for a lofted shot (which dismissed him). Rajin (Saleh) also, suddenly and unnecessarily, tried to push (Tillakaratne) Dilshan although he played defensively to those deliveries in his innings. We repeatedly told them not to play high-risk shots but ultimately what happened?" he fumed.

"I think we are not mentally tough to sustain at this level. Our batsmen still think that scoring 30-40 is good enough to keep them in the team. When a batsman scores 30 runs, his duty is to make a big one like what the Sri Lankan batsmen did in this match. Our batsmen are too ambitious. At this level, everybody should cope with the pressure, like sledging," he observed.

SEE PAGE 22 COL 1

1ST BD-SL TEST SCOREBOARD

Final scoreboard on the fourth day of the first Test between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground on Thursday.

BANGLADESH: First innings 89 (Shakib 16, Nafees 15; Muralidaran 5-15, Fernando 3-33)

SRI LANKA: First innings 577-6 declared (Vandort 117, M Jayawardene 127, P Jayawardene 120 not out, Vaas 100 not out, Shahadat 2-102)

Bangladesh: Second innings (overnight 233-5)

Javed Omar lbw b Malinda 62

Nafees c & b Muralidaran 38

Rajin c M Jayawardene b

Dilshan 51

Bashar c P Jayawardene b Vaas 17

Ashraful c Vaas b Muralidaran 37

Shakib c Warnapura b Malinda 8

Mashud b Malinda 1

Mashrafe lbw b Muralidaran 9

Rafique b Malinda 0

Shahadat st P Jayawardene b

Muralidaran 1

Abdur Razzak not out 0

Extras (b-2, lb-10, nb-17, w-1) 30

Total (All out in 87.1 overs) 254

Fall of wickets: 1-86, 2-126, 3-

160, 4-227, 5-231, 6-238, 7-250, 8-

252, 9-253

Bowler O M R W

Vaas 12 3 36 1

Malinda 17 2 80 4

Muralidaran 36.1 12 87 4

Fernando 15 5 28 0

Dilshan 7 3 11 1

Result: Sri Lanka won by an

innings and 234 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Muttiah

Muralidaran

Umpires: Asad Rauf and Suresh

Shastri

Second Test at P Sara from July 3.

A great escape



SPORTS REPORTER

Five days after their 7-0 demolition of Rahmatganj, Abahani struggled to find the back of the net against their Chittagong namesakes and needed an 87th strike from Pranotosh Das to collect full points in the B League with a come-from-behind 2-1 win yesterday.

Chittagong Abahani took a surprising lead on the stroke of the breather through captain Khokon Das but a regrouped home side

came back with Zahid Hassan Emily's equaliser at the Bangabandhu National Stadium 13 minutes after resumption.

With eight wins in 14 games, the sky-blues posted solo lead in the table at the end of the 16th week with 29 points.

Although it was a one-way traffic from the start, the Dhaka giants were kept at bay by the visitors' five-man backline and Nepalese goalkeeper Surendra who made his first serious save after 12 minutes.

Emily, who scored four goals against Rahmatganj, latched onto a long centre by fullback Siraj but Surendra parried the ball from point-blank range.

Surendra fumbled on a corner by Ujjal midway through the first half but Chittagong Abahani defender Dhiman rescued the side with a goal-line save.

Quick on counter attacks, the port city foreign strikers Santosh and Tamra Goi tested a rather shaky Abahani defence often and Tamra's overhead pass in the 32nd minute set Khokon with a golden

chance. However, the midfielder's first-time volley on one-on-one from 12 yards was brilliantly palmed over by Biplab.

Ibrahim, who came back to the side after a one-match ban, looked like a fish out of water in the midfield and Amalesh Sen pushed the Ghanaian forward to his natural position five minutes from the break when the Dhaka coach replaced Cameroonian striker Souleyman with Abul Hossain.

Emily found the net in the 43rd minute but his goal was ruled out for offside, inspiring the tourists to make most of a defensive gaffe in the next minute by Abahani's stand-in skipper Pradip, who got the armband in absence of suspended Arif Khan Joy.

The centre-back lost possession at the right side of their box to

SEE PAGE 22 COL 2

Sreesanth ruled out

2nd India-SA ODI today

Cricket

AFP, Belfast

Shankar Kumar Sreesanth has been ruled out of India's second one-day international against South Africa here at Stormont.

play tomorrow (Friday).

David added batsman Gautam Gambhir had joined a sick list featuring wicket-keeper batsman Mahendra Singh Dhoni and seamer Ajit Agarkar.

"Gautam Gambhir has also had a bit of a viral fever so he's in the hotel," said David as heavy rain, which meant outdoor practice was impossible, forced the players to concentrate on gym work.

"Ajit Agarkar and Dhoni seem to have recovered but we would have loved to have had them practice today because they've not played cricket for a week and to have an idea of exactly how they are feeling."

Pace bowling reinforcements Ranadeb Bose and Ishant Sharma, both of whom had been due to join up for the Test series against England later this tour, arrived on Wednesday.

Bose's was not a trouble-free trip, as David explained: "Ishant, unfortunately, his kit got lost on the way but hopefully we should be able to trace that back."

David said the illness within the India camp which had seen the likes of left-arm quick Rudra Pratap Singh and off-spinner Ramesh Powar play on Tuesday despite not being fully fit, was posing selection problems.

"We have an idea but it's all dependent on who is fully fit and available. We will have to wait on

SEE PAGE 22 COL 1

Sania Mirza of India crashed out of the second round of Wimbledon on Thursday in a straight sets defeat to Russian number 11 seed Nadia Petrova.

Mirza was outclassed by her

opponent who wrapped up a 6-2, 6-2 victory in 64 minutes on Court 18.

Mirza had blasted her way past

first round opponent Yaroslava Shvedova 6-0, 6-3 on Tuesday.

In the men's outing, British hope Tim Henman's 14th and possibly last Wimbledon campaign ended in a bitter 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/5), 3-6, 2-6, 6-1 defeat against Spain's Feliciano Lopez on Thursday.

Henman broke to lead 2-1 in the fourth set and having been on the receiving end of Lopez's fist-drenching bravado in the first two sets, he repaid the favour with his own fighting gesture aimed directly at the Spaniard.

The Briton, four-times a semifinalist, will be 33 in September and with his world ranking already down at 74, it looks almost certain that Centre Court has seen the last of its favourite son.

ICC senior management, is that the game in Zimbabwe and, more widely, the rest of the cricket world, will not be well served by Zimbabwe resuming Test cricket at this stage. It is respectfully suggested that we must find other ways to assist cricketers in Zimbabwe."



Abahani midfielder Pranotosh Das (L) shoots the ball past Chittagong Abahani goalkeeper Surendra (R) for the match winner in yesterday's B. League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Speed irked at Zimbabwe

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

A report by the BBC's Mihir Bose claims that Malcolm Speed does not believe Zimbabwe should be allowed to resume playing Test cricket in November, and that there the board's accounts have been "deliberately falsified".

In his BBC blog, Bose writes that he has seen a copy of Speed's confidential report delivered to the ICC board today (Thursday) in which he says: "My personal view, shared by the cricket committee and

the main discrepancy concerns payments totalling \$640,350 to "three unknown companies" which the board failed to inform the auditors about. There are also queries relating to a deal with a car company worth \$972,000. The board is believed to have imported the vehicles and then sold them to obtain extra local currency in direct contravention of the country's strict foreign-exchange regulations. The issue is further clouded

SEE PAGE 22 COL 3



PHOTO: AFP

South Africa batsman Herschelle Gibbs returns the ball while he bats at the Civil Service Cricket Ground in Belfast on Thursday, ahead of today's second one-day international.

STAR Sports
Wimbledon Championships
Third Round
Live from 4.30 pm
ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8.30 pm
England Vs West Indies
Second Twenty International
Live at 10.28 pm
SAB TV
India Vs South Africa
Second One-Day International
Live from 3.30 pm

What to WATCH