

Self-belief hinders Tigers

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY from Kandy

Was there only pain, frustration and embarrassment on the faces of the Bangladesh team members after crashing to another disgraceful innings and 193-run defeat against Sri Lanka? It may sound harsh but the reality was that the early finish bought a sense of relief to the visitors' camp as it gave them reprieve of doing anything wrong in the remaining two days of the third and final Test at the Asgiriya Stadium yesterday.

After Sri Lanka's massive first innings total on the third day (500-4), Bangladesh had apparently reached the conclusion that it would not be possible for them to handle this attack -- especially Muralidaran on the fourth day track. And expectedly, they surrendered to the champion off-spinner, who claimed six wickets for 54 runs to finish with a series return of 26 wickets.

How could one then expect a fightback from this team who lack any self-belief against a world-class bowling attack? Almost every single batsman echoed throughout the series "the Sri Lanka bowling is too good."

Their attitude towards the five-day game and the way they threw away wickets, one after another, since the first game to the last innings simply irritated the local media, especially the former Lankan cricketers turned commentators, who sometimes visited the press box. A straightforward question that came from everybody was, "have they come here for fun?"

So it was not surprising that their performance reached a nadir in the third game. It was expected that their performance would gradually improve but rather it was on a constant decline since the first game. They lost the first game

inside four days, second inside three and the last inside four days two of which was lost due to rain. It means that Bangladesh suffered the defeat in a little more than two days.

In the previous two games, they had some solace in their second innings performance but they had nothing here yesterday after they were bundled out for 176 runs just before the tea session.

That was the reason why that even a 'positive' man like Bangladesh interim coach Shaun Williams had to fight hard to find some positives from the match.

"It is very difficult to get positives from this kind of result," said the blank-eyed Australian. But he was quick to portray some optimistic views by saying that "Nafees (Shahriar) batted well and the bowling of Syed Rasel was also encouraging and most importantly Ash (Mohammad Ashraful) showed his capacity as a captain in his first assignment. Actually we learned a lot of things from the series."

"We hoped before leaving home that it would be a very competitive series but it was not the case in the end," he added.

Ashraful however was not ready to accept that the outcome was the worst in Bangladesh's six-year Test history and he also denied that his team was eager to get the Test match series over and done with.

"I don't think so because we have hardly played good Test series' except one or two exceptional ones. You think like this because of a three-match series but I must say we have completely failed in batting and bowling," he said.

Sri Lanka is always a tough opponent especially at home but we had the expectation of better showing this time because we worked hard at home and here, but

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



PHOTO: AFP

Champion Sri Lankan spinner Muttiah Muralidaran salutes the small crowd with the match ball at the Asgiriya Stadium in Kandy yesterday after taking his 700th Test wicket during the third and final match against Bangladesh.

Mohammedan ride on Emeka, Zahid



SPORTS REPORTER

The championship race of the inaugural professional football league eventually came down to the two city rivals when Mohammedan recorded a 2-1 come-from-behind victory against Farashganj yesterday.

Arup Baidya gave Farashganj an early lead but Nigerian striker Emeka's tenth goal in the run brought back the black and whites before Zahid Hossain slammed a second half-winner.

With ten wins in 17 games, Mohammedan pushed their collection to 35 points to come level with top-of-the-table Abahani who have a match in hand, against their Khulna namesakes today.

With Muktijoddha and Sheikh Russel rapidly disappearing from the scene, Abahani and Mohammedan

seem to be the teams to beat for lifting the title of the B. League, which has three weeks to go.

The riversiders, who conceded a 3-1 defeat to Mohammedan in the first leg, rushed early blood when Arup broke the deadlock after nine minutes.

A darting run by Rony at the left found Robin and the young striker switched the ball to Arup who hammered a left footer into the back of the net before the Mohammedan backline and goalkeeper Himel could react. Arup had also pulled off a stunner against Abahani in the last match at home but from a further distance.

Shafiqul Islam Manik's side threatened to equalise midway through the first half but Emeka's freekick from a difficult angle was punched out for corner by Farashganj keeper Mamun.

The old-Dhaka backline kept things tight under pressure but it was unsettled in the 35th minute when Mohammedan leftback Kamal's long centre picked up forward Paul on the edge of the area.

The Mohammedan skipper

turned the ball with a light header to his compatriot Emeka who pushed home from close to make it 1-1.

It was Paul who again set up Mohammedan's match winner in the 65th minute when the stout Nigerian controlled the ball well to dodge two rival backs inside the area and released a square-pass to right for a speeding Zahid who slotted the ball beyond Mamun. It was Zahid's second goal after scoring the first one in the opening round of the tournament.

Emeka was in thick of things but the second highest scorer of the competition fluffed an easy chance when he fired wide in the 74th minute after latching on to a superb through by Sharif.

Mohammedan, however, escaped narrowly three minutes from time when rival substitute Kutub's first touch on the ball set Puma in a good position but the Nigerian's shot on the cross was saved by shot-stopper Himel scrappily.

Emeka counter-attacked in the very next minute but failed to seal a

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

U-19s suffer first loss

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh under-19 side succumbed to a six-wicket defeat to Sri Lanka under-19s on the final day of their second three-day match at the Police Park ground in Colombo yesterday.

Trailing by 34 runs at the start of the day, the visitors piled on 303 runs before being bowled out in the 85th over. But the score merely gave the Lankan youngsters a target of 87 runs, which they finished in 19.5 overs losing four wickets.

Not out overnight on 14, right-hander Ashraful Aziz held his own as he scored 63 off 80 balls, striking eight boundaries and a six. All-rounder Nasir Hossain chipped in with a quickfire 28 but none of could provide a stonewalling approach.

For the hosts, captain Sachith Pathirana and Tissara Perera took three wickets each.

Reshma shares lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Reshma Jebun of Aruail School in Brahmanbaria was among four girls who are on top of the points table in the StanChart 9th National Schools Chess tournament at the NSC conference room yesterday.

She beat Nipa Mahmud to reach three points, joining the foreign trio of Shaati Mazumder and Arna Sarkar of Kolkata and Pritika Toyal from New Delhi.

In the boys section, eleven players are in the lead with three points while in the Kindergarten-Class V group, six players have acquired maximum three points.

ERRATUM

On Friday July 13, we ran a report titled "Arambagh stun Reds" which was published on the Sports page. In the report it was mistakenly mentioned in the fifth paragraph that "Arman Al Azizi was given his first match and so was Kum Einstein, a Cameroonian striker who did not impress." Actually Kum Einstein did not feature in that match. We regret the error.

Lost in every way

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Maybe losing is not as bad after all. Bangladesh have done it so many times that maybe another 50 would not hurt. 50 defeats? Is that even possible? Well, they are close to it and by next year, the Tigers will accomplish that feat because Test matches are not for the Tigers to win, rather to surrender.

But one good aspect about this massive defeat is that, come the next Test, incidentally the 50th Test match for Bangladesh, everyone will definitely remember this summer's series in Sri Lanka as just another loss in the island nation. Honestly, does anybody even care about losing now? A win would make everything work and that's what we are waiting for.

For the next few months, during which the national team will play in the

Twenty20 World Championships, the Tigers will wait for their next big scalp or just wait for an upset when a big team is found out on their off-day because that's how they usually win.

It is hard to think for a team with such low self-esteem to win a game or even give a fight. The opposition captain tells the new boy at the helm that he is batting too low down the order and unbelievably, our captain agrees. Someone does not yield in like that or that's what happens. The statement was defeating.

Then came the bomb. By describing Mohammad Ashraful's batting as low as that of Chaminda Vaas, the Kandy Test became the loudest one in recent memory.

But then again, there were no ripostes from the Bangladesh side so it is assumed that they agree to what Muralidaran has to say.

Then there is the whole business of Shahadat Hossain's grunting. The opposition captain happens to be the only player who feels distracted. The umpires have always taken a harsh

stance, which is normal because the Tigers always get the shorter straw. The bowler has maintained that he finds it hard not to make a sound but nobody cares. Try telling Brett Lee not to grunt.

But these things do not matter when you lose so badly. Nobody takes you seriously and here, even the Tigers do not take themselves seriously. They lack the self-pride or even the slightest sense of belonging at that level. Whenever someone makes a harsh comment on us, there is no strong reply rather we bow our head in submission that we are nothing and you can stamp all over us.

It will be six months when Bangladesh play their next Test matches. Against New Zealand at their home den, it will be another uphill task. Without even thinking, one can assume that the six-month period will not be of self-reflection but of quickly forgetting what happened in Sri Lanka.

Surprise early finish

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER from Kandy

In the post-match briefing yesterday, Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene was asked whether he expected such an emphatic win in the third Test after rain almost halved the first two day's play. The Sri Lankan skipper said that not only Bangladesh's pathetic batting, but also his opponents' performance in the whole series surprised him.

It wasn't just Jayawardene but everybody present here in the stadium was surprised at the way the Bangladesh batsmen batted in their second innings.

"Why is this guy (Javed Omar) selected for one-day side? Is there any technique in his batting?" inquired former Sri Lankan cricketer and now commentator Ranjith Fernando when he was the opener's Javed Omar's poor

defence from the press box during his painstaking 22.

The way former Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar came down to charge Muttiah Muralidaran was judged as the 'ugliest batting' while it was asked 'when will this guy (Nafees) learn how to handle a quality off-spinner?'

All the other top-order batsmen including Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful, Rajin Saleh, Mushtaq Rahim, Tushar Imran and even the batting of Mashrafe Mortaza came under serious criticism from every corner.

And the common question was 'is this Test cricket?'

The home skipper, who had earlier raised questions regarding the determination and seriousness of the Bangladeshi players towards the longer-version game, was however not as straight-forward as the local media people or the former Lankan cricketers including Russell Arnold.

"I am surprised the way we

finished the series especially today (Saturday) after two days of rain. Actually the performance of Bangladesh batsmen in the whole series surprised me. Mainly the way we bowled in the first innings and scored 470 runs in a day put pressure on them," Jayawardene explained.

"When you perform on that level, it is always tough for a team like Bangladesh to keep up. Credit should go to my whole team, the way we played, the way we executed our gameplan was brilliant. We should not take anything away from them," he said with a bit of sympathy.

On the other hand, Muttiah Muralidaran who once again proved to be too good for the Bangla7deshi batsmen highlighted his team's success and not his individual achievement.

"If you are winning a match in less than two and a half days (dis

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



PHOTO: STAR

Mohammedan striker Emeka keeps possession of the ball despite being pulled off by Farashganj defender Mamun Mia during their B.League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Ad