pitch and how it would play. With Bangladesh going for two spinners in the allrounder Shakib and Rafique there was a clear indication that the home side thought it would take to spin. That made the toss even more important to win for the home team as they would prefer to bat first and set the Africans a total in the fourth innings on a wearing track with two spinners. Luck favoured Bangladesh as they won the toss and set out to bat first against an intimidating fast bowling attack. Steyn ripped through the batting with a wicket on the second ball of the match and followed that up with another one an over later. Just outside the first hour and Bangladesh were 60 for 4 with Ashraful batting fluently and slightly recklessly. That soon became 82 for 5 as Ashraful perished to a rubbish shot, playing one too many after having raced to 34 of 27 balls. It was reckless to say the least from the captain and one wonders how many more times he will need to learn from his painfully obvious mistakes.



Rafiqe picks up Kallis with straight ball that kept low.

Aftab and Shakib who both faced the same attack in the three-day warm up match steadied the ship to take Bangladesh to 150 without further loss. Then as it happens so often one wicket brought another and Bangladesh eventually folded for 192 in a mere 54 overs, proving once again that they did not have the stomach to grind out runs in a test match situation. South Africa went into bat with 30 overs to play and were rocked early when a fired up Shahadat Hossain scalped Smith and McKenzie cheaply. Hashim Amla and Jacques Kallis were also removed when Rafique turned them both over with balls that kept low; an alarming sight on the first day of a test. By stumps south Africa was teetering precariously at 76 for 4 as Bangladesh showed there was fight to their game.

The following day Prince fell early to a run out but AB de Villiers and night watchman Botha kept up with the pace. They milked the bowling quite easily and de Villiers was particularly severe on anything loose. He eventually fell to a most unusual dismissal when Ashraful sent down a rank long hop that bounced twice before de Villiers tried to send it into orbit. All he succeeded in doing was getting a top edge that Ashraful gratefully accepted. With him went the rest of the South African batting as Shahadat mopped up the tail with four quick wickets. Amazingly Bangladesh gained a valuable 22 run lead, something which has not happened for some time. Shahadat ended with superb figures of 6 for 27 in 15 magnificent overs and deserved all the praise he got.

With a slender lead Bangladesh went into their second innings with confidence. It's a shame that the batsmen did not carry the same confidence with them as the home side lost wickets early yet again. Before long it was 85 for 4 with a lead of over a hundred runs and the game hug in the balance. Junaid put together a wonderfully crafted partnership with Aftab as he got to a fifty and the highest score in the match. With the score at 148 they fell in successive overs and the end was in sight for the innings. Jacques Kallis bowled an immaculate spell to finish things off at the end and South Africa was left to chase a tricky 205 in the last innings.

They started well and put on 50 in no time before Mckenzie fell to Shahadat for the second time in the match. One down Amla and Smith added another 70 runs without much fuss as they played the bowling with consummate ease. It looked to be a straightforward chase for the visitors before a triple strike from Shahadat and Rafique brought the visitors to a tricky 144 for 4 on a wearing wicket and with a few fired up bowlers. With the pressure of a chase South Africa needed some time and space to breathe as they took stock of the situation. That time and space was provided by the Bangladeshi captain Ashraful as he spread the field far and wide in an all out effort to help the South Africans with their run chase. When the pressure needed to be applied he loosened it and with the field spread back Prince and de Villiers milked easy singles to take them to the brink of victory. It was dumbfounding captaincy from Ashraful by the end of the third day the visitors only needed 27 more to win.

The match was duly ended on the fourth morning as Shahadat picked up another wicket just for good measure and was left agonisingly on 9 wickets for the match. It was more than a hard fought victory for the visitors and in the process Bangladesh proved they were up for a fight and were not to be taken lightly, but with every step forward there seems to be half a step back for Bangladesh cricket. They played well but still could not occupy the crease for long periods of time and Ashraful's batting and captaincy both left a lot to be desired. The second match should be another keenly fought contest but with every step forward there should be no looking back. ■