



FEELING ASHAMED! Dejected Bangladesh cricketers watch the South Africans (not in picture) party during the presentation ceremony after the end of the second and final Test at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIDDER

It takes time: Ashraful

BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong

WARID Cricket Series

It was another wonderful day for cricket with brilliant sunshine and pleasant weather in the port city. The fog hovered in the early morning hours but the sun came to light once the fourth day's proceedings started at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

But there was little left in the match for any cricket lover when Bangladesh resumed their second innings with 54 for five on the board, still requiring 271 runs to salvage themselves from a humiliating innings defeat.

There was actually a formality to be completed in the morning which South Africa did in little over an hour to secure a massive innings and 205-run victory to clinch the series 2-0. Nothing could have been more frustrating than to be a part of such an event which was nothing new in the Tigers' eight-year history of Test cricket.

What in fact remains on such a day was nothing but to delve into the same old questions: Why is the same thing happening time and again and when will the Tigers, especially batsmen, learn from their mistakes to make themselves competitive in the highest level of the game?

Unfortunately if watching the 63-minute action was a painful experience then it was more frustrating to hear Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful in the marathon post-match briefing where he appeared as a completely 'confused' man.

On one hand the ace batsman admitted that they were not good enough to sustain in this level right at the moment and again he

claimed that they have the ability to handle a team like South Africa, especially their fiery bowling. He actually portrayed the helpless picture of Bangladesh cricket.

"It looks easy from the outside but out in the middle it's really tough to handle this kind of bowling. Everybody should understand that we never faced 145kph bowling in our domestic competitions. Actually we are still not comfortable against quality bowling," he explained.

"But it was not our best possible result what we did here. We have the ability and talent to do much better result. But we couldn't do justice to that," he contradicted.

Then where lies the problem? Is it a psychological problem? And how can we brought out from the vicious circle of the same old failure. Ashraful's simple answer was: "It takes time". But the question was how long?

Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons however believe that they can improve only if they faced quality teams like South Africa more often.

"We saw very good cricket from South Africa. Steyn (Dale) was too fast, too good and our players need to be exposed to that type of bowling more often, if we expect them to perform against 145km, swinging, aggressive bowling. We need to practice more often and expose them to it more often. I am sure they will get better," he hoped.

"It's not the pace of the wicket, it was actually the speed of the ball. Wickets have nothing to do with it. That's a flat wicket. Even if a ball come to 120, 130kph speed, you batsmen are still overawed and play the silly shots. We have got to address the issue. There is not too many players around with 150kph speed and Dale Steyn is one who

basically destroyed us," he added.

"I have definitely seen some improvement in the way we went for our business. We pushed them in the first Test, we were only five wickets away from winning a Test match against South Africa, which is pretty good. Still we are playing some silly shots outside the off-stump and I think that is the only area that we are really lacking," he added.

"Players don't get exposed in our national league, in our premier league. You guys have seen how we are training at the moment. You have got to give them some time," he said.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the second and final Test between Bangladesh and South Africa at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Monday:

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 583-7 decl (Smith 232, McKenzie 226; Shahadat 3-107)

BANGLADESH: First innings 259 (Nafees 69, Shakib 40; Ntini 4-35, Steyn 4-66)

BANGLADESH: Second innings (overnight 54 for 5)

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Ntini	5	3	10	0
Steyn	11	2	35	3
Morkel	4.5	1	21	1

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AC Milan v Arsenal
Live from 1:45am (Wednesday)
Barcelona v Celtic
Delayed from 3:45am (Wednesday)

ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm



Sachin Tendulkar

India's superstar batsman
"I know him very well and am sure he didn't bowl intentionally. I told him that my son is a big fan of his and that he will have to deal with the consequences when he comes to India for the IPL."

While shrugging the beamer from Brett Lee during the first CB Series final off with a joke.



Premier Div Cricket League
Abahani v BKSP
Venue: Dharmandi Cricket Stadium
City Club v Surjo Tonon
Venue: Fafullan Cricket Stadium
Mohammedan v Partex
Venue: BKSP-2

'Tigers too young'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

WARID Cricket Series

South African captain Graeme Smith said yesterday that Bangladesh should emphasise on experience if they want to survive in Test cricket.

The left-hander praised the improvement of Bangladesh's bowling department but was surprised at the way the young players got into the Test fold.

"I think your (Bangladesh) bowling has improved. From the last time I came here five years ago, the bowling has developed. They have got more skill in that department. I don't see the batsman around who played with us five years ago," said the surprised left-hander.

"You keep picking 19-20 year olds all the time. I think it is important that these are the guys who are identified, give them experience now. Let them learn how to play around the world, so that next time we come here, they are developed, gained experience and turn into a better player."

"If you pick 19-20 year olds every series, you are not going to get better and gain experience. Maybe Habibul (Bashar) played in that series in 2003, but the rest of the guys are all new. I think there is need to gain experience, need to take responsibility in this level," he continued his answer on Bangladesh's poor batting performance.

Smith expressed his satisfaction over his side's performance in the two-match series which he believed would be helpful for their next series in the subcontinent - India.

"I am very happy. I think this Test match was a really good one for us. The way we played, the way we

adapted from the first Test match. You know, just a little bit of time we had to think about things, to implement the things (since Dhaka Test). I think these two Test matches were really beneficial for us," he said.

Smith however believe that they will get a much better Bangladesh in the three-match one-day series.

"In the one-day format, Bangladesh have some good players, which is good for them in this condition," he opined.

The South African skipper, who termed his world record opening partnership with Neil McKenzie a special and terrific one, however was looking forward to their next

engagement in India.

"We have got the bowlers who have got pace, who have aggression. In Pakistan we adapted, we adapted in Bangladesh and now we are going to do the same in India. It is key for us to find a format that is going to work for us. We have really adapted to the conditions here. So hopefully we can do well in India," he said.

On the other hand, man-of-the-series Dale Steyn who almost single-handedly destroyed Bangladesh's batting with a display of real fast bowling said that he was working hard to do much better than what he did now.

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PHOTO: STAR

WINNERS TAKE IT ALL: South Africa's Dale Steyn (L) and captain Graeme Smith pose with the man-of-the-series and man-of-the-match trophies respectively.

India could finish it today

CRICINFO, Brisbane

SERIES

The repercussions of a second final defeat go further than Australia losing a tri-series that has been so important to the country over the past 29 years. Another slip on Tuesday would lead to two of the team's long-term players bowing out a couple of days early without a satisfactory send-off.

At the moment the timing of the Adam Gilchrist and Brad Hogg retirements depends on the result at the Gabba and in the side's current form an early and empty-handed exit would not be unexpected. Gilchrist will have a say in the outcome, but the spot of Hogg is not as secure and Australia will consider Stuart Clark as they try to smother India on a bouncy surface.

In the other dressing room a much happier scenario applies to Sachin Tendulkar, who capped his last series in Australia with a composed century to seal the six-wicket win in Sydney. There has been no public decision on his future, but another trip to Australia is as unlikely as Harbhajan Singh seeking residency here. When Tendulkar spoke about his 117 on Sunday night he was content, which is a worrying sign for Australia.

"It was extremely good to go one-up in the series, the first blow is what matters," Tendulkar said. "We don't have much time before the second final, but we have to get up and put up a good show. We are up for it and we want to continue this winning performance."

The tourists are desperate to go home and the prospect of staying in Australia for another couple of days is not attractive. Controversy is raised with almost every gesture,

word or gloop of saliva and the tour has worn down everyone. Another performance like the one India gave on Sunday would end the season of theatrics, which has been combined with gripping contests.

Over the past decade it has been rare to see Australia controlled and their five games against India have resulted in two successes each and one washout. The home team is concerned and after the SCG defeat Ponting had to remind his players that they pride themselves on their output in big games. When the most important tussle of the limited-overs season arrived they were over-run.

"You would be un-human not to have a little bit of a hit to the confidence when you're not getting the results that you're looking for," Australia's coach Tim Nielsen said. "That's the challenge of elite sport. Our challenge at the moment is to keep these blokes up and get them

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IFA SHIELD Baichung sinks Mohammedan

SPORTS REPORTER

A brace by Baichung Bhutia helped Mohun Bagan come from a goal down and eliminate Mohammedan Sporting Club of Dhaka from the 113th IFA Shield with a 3-1 win in the final group match yesterday.

The match at Barasat looked set to go into the break scoreless but it suddenly became alive when midfielder Enamul Haque Sharif put the Bangladesh professional league champions ahead after 42 minutes.

The celebration was very short lived as star striker Baichung levelled two minutes later. The Indian international then fired the Kolkata heavyweights ahead in the first minute of the stoppage time.

After two scoreless draws, Mohammedan needed to win in a bid to reach the semifinals but could not find their second goal of the competition.

It was Isfaq Ahmed who sealed Bagan's victory in the 83rd minute. Group A runners-ups Bagan will take on South Africa's Santos FC in one of the semifinals.

Churchill Brothers of Goa, meanwhile, emerged Group A champions after their 2-0 win over Kolkata Mohammedan with Kalu Ogba and Jaison Vales scoring in the second half for the I-League runners-ups at Barasat also yesterday.

Churchill, who play Mahindra United in the semifinals, had beaten Mohun' Bagan 1-0 in the tournament opener.

It was a sad day for Kolkata

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Nokia connects football

SPORTS REPORTER

World's leading cellular phone makers Nokia yesterday officially announced their association with the Bangladesh national football team.

It agreed to the offers of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) to support the national team for the two coming international tournaments, the AFC Challenge Cup and the SAFF Championship.

Although the two parties claimed that an agreement has been signed, it would need confirmation of the higher authority, which is expected to be finalised within a week. However, the Nokia and BFF officials were reluctant to disclose any financial details.

It has been reported that the Finnish mobile giants will spend about Tk 14 lakh behind the top footballers of the country in the initial stage.

"We are happy to have Nokia with us. But we won't give you the

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Where have all the batsmen gone?

WARID Cricket

SHAKIL KASEM

The fact that Bangladesh wrapped up the formalities of yet another Test match, albeit on the losing end of the bargain, without going the full distance against South Africa, should cause concerns for all connected with the game.

For as far back as anyone would care to remember, ever since Bangladesh ventured into the rarefied atmosphere of Test cricket, batting has never been the team's forte. For too long it seems our batsmen have been letting the team down. One assumes this malaise of the batting order not standing up to be counted and simply curling up to die at the first sign of a shot being fired in anger has posed questions to the management and players alike. The problem that needs to be addressed is whether enough is being done to redress this issue.

Based on what is regularly being on view, presumably, not enough. If so why not? I am not certain who would be the individuals queuing up to answer these questions, but a good start may be to tap the curators, coaches, analysts, and the host of backroom boys who seem to be such an integral part of the team these days. It may well be an interesting inquisition.

Test matches being finished within the third or fourth day, irrespective of wicket conditions or quality of bowling faced, are increasingly and embarrassingly becoming all too familiar when Bangladesh take to the field. Snide remarks of international cricket persons and inuendoes notwithstanding, questions marks are regularly placed against each Test outing. For sure, no one, least of all the Bangladesh side wants this state of affairs to continue.

Regrettably, it does not appear we will be able to come up with the kind of batting performances that is essential to survive in the big bad world of Test cricket, in a hurry. The reasons are fairly obvious and have been so for some time now. For a start, our domestic structure for the longer version of the game has not yet been an effective tool for promoting and encouraging our players to bat for long periods of time on varying conditions and different types of wickets. Added to this, to my mind, has been the inexplicable overdependence on relatively young batsmen, some still in their teens, being thrown in at the deep end and expected to perform accordingly.

While the adage old age and treachery will always triumph over youth and enthusiasm may not entirely be germane to the issue at hand, it does not need a rocket scientist to determine the outcome of a contest which pits a teenaged batsman with a handful or less of first-class matches under his belt against class bowlers

plying their trade in Test cricket for years. Davids have always been mythical characters while Goliaths sadly enough have little sense of humour. The old familiar refrain of talent being there is wearing a bit thin. Talent at the end of the day will have to deliver and for that to happen the talent has to be packaged in several layers of experience of performing at the top level of the game, be it domestic or otherwise.

Patience too is a highly essential virtue at the Test level; our batsmen, young and the not so young, would do well to realise this unpalatable fact of life after they have taken guard. An innings of sheer brilliance and dazzling array of shots that lasts long in memory but all too briefly in actual play, counts for little or nothing at the Test level. The bottom line as every cricketer worth his salt would realise, cricket is all said and done still a batsman's game. Our batsmen would do well to get those runs, taking as much time as possible, so that while we may still not harbour thoughts of winning a Test, at least think of not losing one. For want of a more poignant closing line, they owe it not just to everybody who follow their game, they owe it to their bowlers, who in a perversely twisted irony of fate nowadays, do not even get to bowl at the opposition the second time around!

The author is a former cricketer



PHOTO: STAR

BFF president SA Sultan addressing a press briefing at the BFF Bhaban yesterday in connection with Nokia's announcement to sponsor the national football team. Prem Chand (C), managing director of Nokia Emerging Asia, is also seen.