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Why did Ashraful bowl?

BISHWAJIT ROY



There is a thin line between courage and stupidity and Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful, with his stunning decision to field after winning the toss against Sri Lanka, drew millions of cricket fans at home in a puzzle that which category he falls on.

If you look at it from an entertaining point of view, forget the wicket, the desire of the opposite captain and the words of wise men who always preached that 'if you win the toss ten times then you bat first for nine times and then the other time you think to bowl but eventually you bat first', it was a spectators' delight with Sanath Jayasuriya carrying his IPL form into the one-day game.

After the Jayasuriya thunder, Kumar Sangakkara greeted Ashraful's decision with a sparkling hundred and in the end Sri Lanka posted a total at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore beyond the best in the business and in the process shattered the confidence Bangladesh had built the other day against the UAE.

Ashraful might argue that the strong wind just before the start of the match prompted his decision but simply gifted his Sri Lankan counterpart Mahela Jayawardene by inviting the vaunted batting line-up a chance to use the surface first, which even the word placid would not do justice to.

Even if Bangladesh went on to win the match, don't forget in that case they have to rewrite their own record book by chasing down a score of 357 runs, still one can't give a single reason behind the decision to put the opposition in first on a tailor-made surface. It rather reflects a team's lack of self-confidence.

The first and foremost question was why a team shot on their own feet by taking this decision because Ashraful got the golden opportunity to keep the momentum after scoring 300 against UAE in the first game after deciding to bat first.

It's a very simple practice that one must decide to bat first when the toss is won and if it's a day-night affair, there is even no need for a second thought.

It was more surprising because the decision also hardly reflected Jamie Siddons's policy of playing

50 overs to reach a competitive total of 240-plus.

Actually one can't find a single logic why Ashraful took this decision to put his bowlers to the sword (it would definitely haunt Dollar Mahmud most as the young pacer conceded 49 runs in three overs) and not to forget that he had the support of a man like Jamie Siddons, the former assistant coach of the all-conquering Australia team.

If it was their so-called achievement of scoring 285 against Pakistan in April this year at the same ground then sorry to say that Ashraful's men are living in a fools' paradise because their batting in chase of 309 runs had been simply nothing more than an effort to reduce the margin of defeat.

It would also be ridiculous to think that they considered their very few successes including one against Australia at Cardiff when they had won batting second.

There could have been only an asinine answer: The rotation of a decision (Ok, as we batted first in the opening game then why not try a different thing in the next match).



Philipp Lahm (L) of Germany runs off to celebrate with teammates after he scored the winner in their breathtaking 3-2 win over Turkey in the Euro 2008 semifinals in Basel last night.

PHOTO: AFP

India's huge win

AFP, Karachi



Skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Suresh Raina hit aggressive hundreds to lead India to a huge 256-run win over Hong Kong in their Asia Cup Group B match here on Wednesday.

The 27-year-old Raina compiled a 68-ball 101 for his maiden century while Dhoni notched an unbeaten 96-ball 109 as both shared a rapid-fire 166-run fourth wicket stand to shot India to the highest Asia Cup total of 374-4.

Leg-spinner Piyush Chawla then spun Hong Kong with figures of 4-23 as the minnows were bundled out for a paltry 118 in 36.5 overs.

India meet Pakistan on

Thursday to decide who tops the Group. Pakistan beat Hong Kong by 155 runs.

Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and United Arab Emirates are placed in Group A. The top two teams qualify for the Super League stages in which all teams play each other once to decide July 6 finalists.

It was an expectedly one-sided affair as Hong Kong were no match for a superior India who completely dominated the match.

Hong Kong never posed any trouble for their stronger opponents as only Irfan Ahmed (25), Jamie Atkinson (23) and Tabarak Dar (21) offered a little resistance.

Dhoni was delighted with his team's performance.

"You have to be ruthless no matter who you play," said Dhoni. "Everything clicked for us, Raina batted superbly and we played like

we should."

Earlier, it was the Indian batsmen led by Raina and Dhoni who enjoyed a run feast.

Both were on the rampage, hitting the hapless Hong Kong bowlers to all corners of the park during their brisk 123-ball stand.

Raina reached his second fifty off just 16 deliveries, smashing five sixes and three boundaries in the process.

He hit three of those sixes off paceman Shaukat Ali before hitting another off Irfan to reach his first one-day international hundred off just 66 balls.

In all he hit seven boundaries and five towering sixes before he miscued a lofted shot off Azaal Haider in the 46th over.

After Raina left, Dhoni needed little time to take over. He

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SCORE AGAINST DANDRUFF WITH CONFIDENCE
CLEAR men
NO DANDRUFF



ESPN
Asia Cup Cricket
Sri Lanka v UAE
Live from 4:00pm
Euro 2008 Championship
Second Semifinal
Russia v Spain
Live from 12:45am (Friday)
STAR Cricket
Asia Cup Cricket
India v Pakistan
Live from 4:00pm
STAR Sports
Wimbledon Championships
Second Round
Live from 4:30pm



Xavi Hernandez

(Spanish midfielder)
"I am very happy as we have already taken a big step towards making history. But we still aren't there yet. We want to get to the final and win it - and this team is ready to do so." His guarded optimism ahead of Thursday's Euro 2008 semifinal against Russia.

Pioneer League

UNB, Dhaka

Shahadat Hossain scored the winner for Moghbazir Kira Chakra in their 1-0 win over Siraj Smriti Sangsad in a North Zone play-off match of the Dhaka City Corporation Pioneer Football League at the Shaheed Bir Sreshtha Mustafa Kamal Stadium in

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PHOTO: AFP

Centurion Kumar Sangakkara works the ball through the covers during Sri Lanka's Asia Cup match against Bangladesh at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore yesterday.

PRESIDENT'S CUP Abahani's last match today

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani will play Pakistan WAPDA for pride when the two sides clash in a dead rubber in today's Group A match of the AFC President's Cup in Kuala Lumpur.

The match will kick off at 2pm Bangladesh time at the MPPJ Stadium in the Malaysian capital.

The Bangladesh champions' unceremonious exit from the continental club competition was confirmed when they lost 4-0 to Nepal Police and 2-1 to Regar TadAZ of Tajikistan.

WAPDA, who were edged 2-1 by Regar on the opening day, wasted a great chance to stay in contention for a semifinal berth when Khuda Bakhsh won a penalty in stoppage time but failed to score in a 1-1 draw against Nepal Police on Tuesday.

With six points, Regar are fancied to join fellow Central Asians -- Kyrgyzstan's Dordoi-Dynamo and Ashgabad of Turkmenistan -- in the last four. But last year's runners-up

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

ECB cuts ties with ZC

Cricket

AFP, London

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced Wednesday it was suspending all ties with Zimbabwe and cancelling Zimbabwe's tour of England next year.

The Government has written to the ECB today (Wednesday) and has made a clear instruction that Zimbabwe's bilateral tour scheduled under the ICC Future Tours Programme for 2009 should be cancelled, the board said in a statement.

The move also cast doubt on whether Zimbabwe would be allowed to compete in next year's Twenty20 World Cup in England.

A letter written by Culture, Media and Sport Secretary Andy Burnham to the ECB said the British Government had "concluded that it would not be right to allow the proposed tour (to

England) by Zimbabwe Cricket in 2009 to take place."

Burnham, speaking to lawmakers in the House of Commons, said he hoped his letter would help to secure a "positive outcome" when the International Cricket Council (ICC) executive board considers the issue of Zimbabwe at its meeting in Dubai next week.

He added: "The Government has previously called on the ICC to reconsider its rules to allow teams to forfeit tours to countries, such as Zimbabwe, where serious human rights abuses are occurring. Unfortunately the ICC has declined to do so."

"Therefore, the Government has decided to make it clear that it will take all necessary steps to prevent players from Zimbabwe from participating in that tour."

He said that, in reaching a decision, ministers had taken into account the "close ties" between the Zimbabwe cricket team and the regime of President Robert Mugabe.

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Bangladesh A draw opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A drew their first match against their Irish counterparts at the end of the third day of their tour opening three-day at the College Park in Dublin yesterday.

After captain Zunaed Siddiqui declared the second string side's innings on 265-9, the hosts reached 138-3 before the umpires called stumps. Young Paul Stirling struck 52 while his opening partner Reinhardt Strydom scored 46 and also shared a 104-run stand. But both fell to left-arm spinners Suhrawardi Shuvo and Arafat Sunny. Apart from Sunny's single wicket, Shuvo took two.

Earlier, right-handed Nayeem was dismissed by four-wicket hero Peter Connell for 125 as he took the visitors score from second day's 193-7 to one of respectability.

Later, tail-ender Nazmul Hossain added 27 to take Bangladesh A's score past the 250-mark.

SCORES IN BRIEF

IRELAND A: First Innings 159 all out and second innings 138-3 in 50 overs (Strydom 46, Stirling 52; Shuvo 2-44, Sunny 1-21).
BANGLADESH A: First Innings 265-9 in 83.3 overs (Imrul 0, Zunaed 9, Farhad 12, Rajin 6, Nayeem 125, Dhiman 3, Suhrawardi 38, Sunny 0, Nazmul 27, Mahbubul 10*, Rasel 6*, extras 29; Connell 4-65).

Hockey team back home

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh hockey team returned home on Tuesday night after winning the 3rd Men's AHF Cup title in Singapore.

Bangladesh, who drubbed Oman 6-1 in the final, had already qualified for the coming Asia Cup by virtue of their place in the final.

"When we came to know that only two teams from the competition (AHF Cup) will qualify for the Asia Cup, the boys became more determined to win. It worked as a motivation and the team really played well," said coach Mahbub Harun.

The former Bangladesh international midfielder, however, was worried because of the lack of action in domestic circuit in the coming days.

"We have no tournaments

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Safin dumps Djokovic

AFP, London



Former world number one Marat Safin sent third seed Novak Djokovic crashing out of Wimbledon on Wednesday while Serbian compatriot Ana Ivanovic narrowly escaped the same All England Club black hole.

Safin, a US Open and Australian Open champion during his glory days before a slump sent his career into freefall, stunned the 21-year-old world number three 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 with a magical Centre Court display.

Over on Court One, women's top seed Ivanovic, buoyed by her breakthrough French Open triumph, had to save two match points to see off France's experienced Nathalie Dechy 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/3), 10-8.

There were no such dramas for five-time men's champion Roger

Federer who eased into the last 32 with a 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) win over Robin Soderling.

It was the world number one's seventh win in seven meetings with the 23-year-old Swede and the comfortable manner of his victory would have been aided by having seen danagerman Djokovic removed from his side of the draw.

Reigning Australian Open Djokovic, who had reached the third round at least in his last nine Grand Slam appearances and was runner-up to Rafael Nadal at Queen's two weeks ago, sent down 10 double faults and 28 unforced errors.

"It was a very bad day for me. I didn't do anything I was supposed to do. I made too many mistakes and had no momentum," said the 21-year-old Djokovic, a semi-finalist here last year.

Safin, struggling at 75 in the world, said the win came at the right time for him.

Safin goes on to face Italian 29th seed Andreas Seppi for a place in the last 16.

Djokovic was almost joined on

the scrapheap by world number one Ivanovic who saw off 29-year-old Dechy in a three-and-a-half-hour thriller and will now face China's Zheng Jie for a place in the fourth round.

Ivanovic admitted that she was fortunate to escape after a lucky netcord on the second match point in the 10th game of the second set saw the ball fall onto Dechy's side of the net.

Former double champion Serena Williams moved on with a 6-4, 6-4 win over Polish teenager Urszula Radwanska and will next face 2006 champion Amelie Mauresmo of France.

Australia's 2002 champion Lleyton Hewitt saw off Spain's Albert Montanes 7-6 (7/4), 6-0, 6-2 and will face Italy's Simone Bolelli who put out Chilean 15th seed Fernando Gonzalez 7-6 (10/8), 7-6 (9/7), 3-6, 7-6 (7/4).

Cypriot 10th seed Marcos Baghdatis, a semi-finalist in 2006, made the third round with a straight sets win over Sweden's Thomas Johansson.

Ansars' double delight

Table tennis

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Ansar retained both the men's and women's team titles in the AB Bank 29th National Table Tennis Cham-pionships yesterday.

In the men's final last night, the Billah brothers inspired Ansars to defeat Biman 3-1 to clinch the title while the women's team also won by the same margin earlier in the day at the NSC Gymnasium.

Mahbub Billah gave Ansars a bright start when he won a five-set thriller 3-2 against Manash but Mostafa Billah made it look easy thrashing Biman's Hamlet 3-0.

Edison's 3-0 victory over veteran Ansars paddler Kachi raised Biman's hopes but only briefly, as Mahbub outplayed Hamlet in straight sets to end the competition.

The two teams reached the final from a four-team league also involving qualifiers Pabna and Feni.

In the women's final, Saleha blanked Seema 3-0 and Rumi downed Ratna by identical margin

before Rahima recovered one set for Biman beating Soma 3-1.

Rumi, however, sealed Ansars' victory defeating Seema 3-0 in the final set.

Earlier in the semifinals, Ansars dumped Dhaka 3-0 and Biman ousted Rajshahi 3-0.

Dhaka and Chittagong were

pitted against each other in the boys' final. Dhaka eliminated Narail 3-2 in Group A final to book a ticket for the final while Chittagong won Group B upsetting Biman 3-1.

The singles, doubles and mixed-doubles events will be finalised over the next three days.



PHOTO: STAR

Raj of Kishoreganj (L) serves against Dinajpur's Kiran during their 29th National Table Tennis Championships match at the NSC gymnasium yesterday.