

So close, yet so far

MOHAMMAD ISAM in Chittagong



When Jacob Oram picked up the coveted man-of-the-series award after his side's 79-run victory in the deciding one-day at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Tuesday, Mohammad Ashraful's heart must have twitched ever so slightly. Had he decided to drive the tall New Zealander for a single instead of the scoop just two hours ago, it could have been a completely different picture. And essentially, that is how close it was for the Tigers to clinch a major ODI series victory.

Bangladesh, for once, got into positions where winning was always a probability in all three matches. There were times when the Black Caps were found wanting in front of Ashraful's men.

Coach Jamie Siddons' remarks that the series was close to being 3-0 in favour of the Tigers was met with muffled laughter in the sauna-like conference room in Chittagong after the ODI series was over, but the Australian was right if one takes the batting performance out of the context.

The Tigers' batting has always been the thorn in the flesh and it was the same old story in this series as well. Barring Zunaed Siddiqui's 85 and Ashraful's 60 and 40 in the

first two games, the likes of Shakib and Tamim Iqbal were nowhere to be found. Tamim redeemed himself somewhat in the third ODI but Shakib Al Hasan failed in both the innings he got to bat.

The team management has expressed concern with his subdued manner since returning from the self-imposed study break he took for his HSC examination. Shakib, who made himself unavailable for the Kityly Cup and Asia Cup, was in good form in the Pakistan tour of April. But since his return, he made little impact in the Australia tour. But a member of the team management remained confident of a return to form as his bowling showed that he was not entirely out of touch.

Mushfiqur Rahim was given a promotion in the batting order and though it worked in the first attempt, it is never a long-term option. Imrul Kayes replaced him in the final ODI and that too must be stop-gap since the youngster is an opener.

But all eyes fall on Ashraful and if one evaluates his three knocks in the series, it is easy to see that his batting is the most influential factor for Bangladesh winning a one-day international. He played with minimal risk in the first game but ended with a 100-plus strike rate which made it easier for Zunaed to build his innings. He was painstakingly slow in the second game, by his standards, but had he

stayed in the middle a little longer or found some support from his teammates, it would have been two match-winning innings in a row.

Instead, he ends up as the man who played one good innings, one average and another that typifies his nature as an impetuous stroke-maker.

But as for the rest of the Tigers, it was a series not to be forgotten easily.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza set the tone of the tour with an excellent spell of bowling in the first one-day that had everything: swing, seam, movement, pace and a freak accident. He didn't exactly make the Kiwi batsman hop but he made them think. The Narail Express did the same in the next two games and he provided his captain with a crucial opening spell that so often goes missing. Mashrafe ensured that the Tigers had something to work with by the time the first two Powerplays were up.

Syed Rasel, back from a long lay-off, provided the support from the second one-day after two poor overs in the first game. The Mashrafe-Rasel duo worked wonders in the 2007 World Cup campaign and had there been a better show from firebrand Shahadat Hossain, it could have been the perfect combination: pace, swing and accuracy.

Nonetheless, one has very little to complain about the pacemen

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Young Tigers recruit Nayeem Islam goes through the bowling motions during training at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday. Nayeem has been picked in the 13-man Test squad and looks good for a debut in the first Test against New Zealand.

PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIDDER

Nayeem becoming 51st Test player

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong



October 17.

The right-handed batsman who made his one-day international debut in the three-match series against the Black Caps, will become the 51st Test match player for the Tigers.

Nayeem proved his mettle with three good shows with the ball in hand and although he was run out without facing a single delivery in his first innings, he batted well enough in the final ODI.

"I was a little nervous to start the innings like everyone else but once I had spent some time in the middle, I felt relaxed," said Nayeem while talking to the media yesterday.

"Once I heard that I would be in the Test team, I was very happy. It is like a dream for me," said the man from Gaibandha, who plays his first-class cricket for Rajshahi.

Nayeem, who played the under-19 World Cup in 2004, has been in good form for the last two seasons and his time in the GP-BCB National Cricket Academy and the Bangladesh A team has admittedly helped him make a calm beginning.

"I have been playing with the Academy and A team in foreign conditions so probably I felt much calmer because of that," said Nayeem.

"There are no personal goals for me but to bat for a long time. Although I like batting between four and six, I would stick to whatever the team tells me to do," added the young batsman.

Primarily a middle-order batsman, Nayeem's useful contribution with the ball has given him the place of a spinning all-rounder as well.

"I am used to bowling 15-20 overs so if the captain asks me to bowl more than that, I must try to do that," said Nayeem.

Rajshahi captain Khaled Mashud backed Nayeem, saying that the inclusion is of a solid player.

"He has the quality of playing in the longer-version and he deserves to play for Bangladesh given his domestic performance," said Mashud who announced his retirement from international cricket this month.

The former national captain also praised his bowling abilities: "I think he is a rare breed among off-spinners because he can read a batsman and not just bowl off-break for the sake of bowling."

Mashud hoped that his protégé from the Rajshahi team does well but refrained from advising him as it would put more pressure on the youngster.

Alok lights up Hyderabad

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Alok Kapali struck a scintillating century as Dhaka Warriors posted a competitive 168 for 9 against Hyderabad Heroes in their second match of the Indian Cricket League (ICL) at the Lal Bahadur Shastri Stadium in Hyderabad yesterday.

The home side were 73-4 after 9 overs when this report was filed.

Kapali scored exactly 100 off 60 balls after Warriors captain Habibul Bashar won the toss and elected to use the wicket first in front of a boisterous home crowd. The stylish right-hander set the field afire with exciting stroke-play and picking up the gaps with immaculate accuracy. His magnificent knock contained five sweetly-

timed sixes and eleven eye-catching hits to the ropes.

The 24-year-old batsman from Sylhet played a lone hand to salvage the Warriors, who were at one stage reeling at 54-5 in the rebel



KAPALI...100

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Indian tournament. It was definitely an innings of high standard after his maiden one-day century against India in the Asia Cup in June this year.

Although it would not count as official since the ICC does not recognise the tournament, his effort against the likes of former Pakistan paceman Abdul Razzak, New Zealand paceman Chris Harris and South African left-arm spinner Nicky Boje spoke for his ability as a talented batsman.

Even Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons said at a post-ICL debriefing that Bangladesh would definitely miss the services of a batsman like his calibre. Kapali along with 11 other national players risked their national careers for the banned league creating huge uproar in the country last month.

Rokibul stays with Tigers

MOHAMMAD ISAM in Chittagong

Batsman Rokibul Hasan will remain with the Bangladesh side during the first Test against New Zealand starting at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium from October 17.

The right-handed batsman who injured his left index finger while fending a Brett Gieves delivery during the first one-day international in Australia, has missed the New Zealand ODI series and was not fit enough to even feature in the 13-man squad for the first Test.

The team management confirmed last night that Rokibul will be with the side and the team physio's word would decide his participation in the second Test match.

Rokibul was seen apprehensive to use his left-hand while fielding yesterday but he was fine with the bat in hand. The young batsman had informed earlier that it was the fielding that was of main concern.

There was a call from within the team management that Rokibul must stay in the team because of a lack of facilities outside the national team's setup. Although it was a point to argue, finally it was agreed that Rokibul will remain simply because he still remains in contention for the second Test match.

Bangladesh take on Mozambique today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will play Mozambique's under-23 side in a Group B match of the Merdeka Cup football tournament today in Kuala Lumpur.

The match will kick off at the Shah Alam Stadium at 6:45pm Bangladesh time.

It would be the first international assignment with the national team for new coach Shafiqul Islam Manik, who said from the Malaysian capital yesterday that he felt a little bit of pressure after all.

"The fans back at home have little hope on the national team. So the players and the coaching staff had no pressure at all during our brief camp," Manik told The Daily Star over phone on the eve of Bangladesh's first ever match against the Africans.

Bangladesh have not won a single international for the last two and a half years including last year's

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Abahani rout Gazipur

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani blanked Gazipur 3-0 in women's team event in the National Lubricants table tennis tournament at the Engineers Recreation centre yesterday.

Bangladesh Biman, however, suffered an upset when they lost a five-set thriller 3-2 to Dhaka.

In men's team event, Rangpur Eleven Star, Palolic Developers, Wari, Biman, TT Academy, Molar and Armanitola Friends won their respective group matches.

Mohali awaits milestone

Cricket

AFP, Mohali

Sachin Tendulkar will resume his quest to become the world's most prolific batsman when India take on Australia in the second Test starting here Friday.

Tendulkar needs just 15 runs to overtake West Indian Brian Lara's Test match tally of 11,953 runs and establish a fourth world record in his illustrious career.

The 35-year-old is already the world's top-scorer in one-day internationals (16,361) and has the most centuries in Test matches (39) and one-dayers (42).

The master batsman came close to surpassing Lara's milestone in the second innings of the drawn first Test in Bangalore where his gritty 49

helped steer the hosts to a draw. Australian paceman Brett Lee said his team had planned well for Tendulkar ahead of the series.

"Sachin is world-class player," Lee told reporters here.

"We had a plan in place for him in the first Test. It worked in the first innings but in the second he got a start and played very well."

"He has a lot of experience and can hang in there if the situation so demands. That is why I love the challenge of bowling to the Little Master."

The other senior batsmen in the Indian side, including Venkatesai Laxman, Rahul Dravid and the retiring Sourav Ganguly, also hit valuable innings to rescue India from defeat.

However, skipper Anil Kumble left many questions hanging over his form and fitness with the 37-year-old veteran leg-spinner going

wicketless for only the third time in his Test career, the first time ever in front of a home crowd.

The captain also dropped two catches off his own bowling to cap a miserable outing.

Kumble will assess his fitness before deciding on his availability for Mohali, where the wicket is known for being lively and may tempt India to use an extra fast bowler at his or Harbhajan Singh's expense.

Singh took just one wicket in Bangalore but hit a handy 54.

Australian captain Ricky Ponting's spin options include specialist Cameron White, who claimed Tendulkar as his maiden Test scalp in Bangalore.

Part-time spinner Michael Clarke contained the Indian batsmen and took two wickets despite the track providing little assistance

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Did U Know?

Spanish driver Fernando Alonso became the youngest F1 champion in history in 2005 after winning the World Driver's Championship title at the age of 24 years and 58 days. Alonso retained his title in 2006 to also gain the title of youngest double champion.



Zaheer Khan

(India fast bowler)
"I have never seen an Australian team play such defensive cricket -- which is a good thing for us."
About this week's first Test in Bangalore.



TEN Sports
ICL Twenty20
Delhi v Kolkata
Live from 8:00pm

Shame!

AFP, London

The bell has yet to toll for English cricket as a whole -- but a village side were left red faced after their church eleven lost to German rivals, prompting an apology to locals in the parish magazine.

St. Symphorians Cricket, from the southern town of Worthing, slid to defeat against a visiting side from their twin town of Munchberg who limited them to just 36 runs despite having little grasp of the rules.

The Germans had earlier managed 81 all out.

The parish magazine apology read: "In affectionate remembrance of St. Symphorians Cricket."

"Deeply lamented by a large circle of sorrowing friends and

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Russel back on top

SPORTS REPORTER



Citycell B LEAGUE

A sublime strike by Aminul Islam brought Sheikh Russel back to winning ways in the Citycell B League with a solitary goal victory against Arambagh yesterday.

The overlapping fullback, who was combining an attack down the right flank with midfielder Mobarak, took a square pass 30 yards out of goal and stunned Mitul at the Arambagh goal with an outswinging left-footer that slammed into the far right of the keeper.

The 15th minute goal was enough for Russel to regain lead in the points table with 11 points after five games. It was the third win for

Wajed Gazi's Russel, who dropped points in both their away matches in Chittagong against local Mohammedan in the second round and Abahani in the previous game.

Arambagh's second defeat in the four games kept them at third from bottom but they deserved at least one point after dominating the second half.

With three Moroccan players, Russel were on the offensive from the word go before empty stands at the Bangabandhu National Stadium but Alfaz and skipper Touati Youness failed to really test Mitul with long range efforts before Aminul separated the two sides.

Aminul then split the rival defence in the 37th minute with a through but Alfaz, the veteran striker and top scorer of the league who has been ignored for the

national team's trip to Malaysia, shot the ball straight to Mitul under pressure from his marker.

Russel were on top of their form after resumption but Youness nodded an Alfaz chip over in the 56th minute. Youness was in the thick of things but the Moroccan import committed an unpardonable mistake two minutes later when his drop-header on a centre by Aminul was parried by Mitul, included in the starting line-up for injured first-choice Piru.

Arambagh built tremendous pressure but the loss of Kenyan striker Nicodemus on the half hour for a first-half injury proved costly. Jerry Weah, his replacement, failed to make any impression as the Arambagh raids ended in vain.

Mostafa Kaba, though, came close in 70th minute but the

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Russel forward Alfaz Ahmed (second from left) loses the ball following a tackle by an Arambagh player during their Citycell B League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



FANCY A CHANGE IN SPORT? Indian maestro Sachin Tendulkar practises keepy-uppies with a tennis racquet during a training session at the Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali on Wednesday. Tendulkar stands on the brink of overtaking West Indian great Brian Lara's record for most runs in Test cricket and is expected to break the milestone in the second Test against Australia.

Meet from Sept 24 to Oct 5 next year

AFP, Dubai



CHAMPIONS TROPHY

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said Wednesday it had decided to reschedule the Champions Trophy tournament in Pakistan, postponed this year amid security concerns, to next September.

The ICC said in a statement the tournament would go ahead between September 24 and October 5, 2009, with the matches being played in just one city in Pakistan, rather than the two

mooted for this year.

The tournament, which will include one reserve day, will therefore be five days shorter than the originally scheduled event.

The Board said it had considered available options following the original postponement and had decided that the final week of September and opening week of October fitted the bill with the shortened timeframe allowing for a single city.

The ICC Board said it will make a final decision on the location following India's tour to Pakistan

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ECB boss comes up with new idea

AFP, London

England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chairman Giles Clarke says England could in future host Test matches between Asian countries as part of its commitment to supporting the five-day game.

Clarke told the November edition of The Wisden Cricketer (TWC) magazine that matches such as Pakistan versus Sri Lanka, which he said "would be unlikely to attract big crowds in either of the participating countries", could draw big crowds at English venues.

"Indeed, it might be said that Pakistan might get a better crowd in Leeds than in Karachi," Clarke said.

"It's something we are considering how we play these types of games and where we can play them."

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