

'Skipper has to set standards'

MOHAMMAD ISAM in Chittagong



Captain Daniel Vettori hoped that his side could carry on from their performance in the first Test at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

New Zealand chased a stiff target of 317 runs with three wickets in hand on the fifth day of one of the most enthralling Tests witnessed in Bangladesh.

Gracious in appreciation of the Tigers, Vettori realised that this was an important win for his young team.

"We didn't play all that well in the first innings and it wasn't acceptable, the guys know that. But I was pleased with the fightback. I still feel we are a long way off from our best but we got the job done," said the bespectacled left-arm spinner who scored a vital 76 to anchor the visitors.

"I think it is important for captains to set the standards. It is pleasing for me to make a contribution with bat and ball. I was pleased with the performance, having chased 317 in Bangladesh, who had the momentum."

"Shakib and Razzak bowled exceptionally well throughout the match. It wasn't an easy thing and if you take a look at New Zealand's history, we haven't chased all that well in the second innings away from home. I hope we can carry some momentum towards Dhaka," added Vettori.

Batting at four, the tall south-paw batted with little fuss and made sure that everything he tried, was kept in the ground.

"I came in as a nightwatchman

because I thought it was handy to get another left-hander in against the spinners at the top-order and plus I was in form," admitted Vettori.

He, however, had respect for the hosts, despite their poor Test record.

"I never said that (they don't deserve to play Test cricket) and since I come from a country where

it took us almost 50 years to win a Test match, we are never in a position to say who belongs and who doesn't.

"We respect Bangladesh and if you look at the last 4-5 years, they have done pretty good stuff. They are very talented and they are good enough in my opinion," opined Vettori.

But the New Zealand captain

thought his side were in deep trouble when Brendon McCullum got out to a controversial decision.

"I thought when McCullum got out, it was going to be tough for us. He got a rough decision but then the partnership between Flynn and me made it comfortable," said Vettori.

Earlier, Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons had said that his boys did

not get the better of 50-50 decisions, but Vettori fully disagreed, saying: "I think they got the rub of the green."

Siddons insisted that although they weren't plumb, it did make a difference.

"I think on a day like today we need the 50-50 decisions to go our way. It wasn't plumb leg-before

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PHOTO: ZOAHER HOSSAIN SKIDER

SO CLOSE YET SO FAR: The Tigers are led in celebration by Abdur Razzak (2nd from L) after the left-arm spinner grabbed the wicket of Brendon McCullum during the fifth day of the first Test against New Zealand at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Tuesday.

Curse of captaincy

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

His actions usually speak louder than words but during yesterday's press conference, Mohammad Ashraful looked exasperated for a moment.

On the face of it, he has totalled just two runs and fielded poorly in the second innings. He got beaten by a Daniel Vettori's armer and played a horrendous shot in the second dig, and later dropped a skier off Daniel Flynn late in the match and misfielded on many occasions.

Expectedly, Ashraful was booed while going off, something that he is getting used to.

"It doesn't irritate me but this is the reality. I have accepted it. They support me when I do well, so I would like to have some support when I don't do well," said the Bangladesh captain.

He was asked several questions about his fielding and his shot-making but he remained adamant with his answers.

"I think luck didn't favour me because that was a very good catch (by Aaron Redmond). But if it

means that I attack and get runs, I will do that," insisted Ashraful.

"I tried hard to perform because I know that a captain's performance is very important. It didn't affect my fielding but I should've done better," added the ace batsman.

But what was missed most was his captaincy that literally stood out like a beacon on a day that had 'crucial' written all over it.

The target, 317 runs, with 145 already made, would be tough to defend but from the start of the final day, Ashraful did what was necessary. He kept fielders in attacking positions but made sure runs didn't slip away. He found good support from his fieldsmen and the bowlers, most of whom were mentally fatigued after four days of absorbing cricket.

Then in the 84th over and after much consultation, he decided to take the new ball but gave it to left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak.

In the last few days, Vettori has time and again mentioned that spin with a newer ball was more dangerous than with the older one.

"I had to take a chance and the ball was always skidding with the new ball. It also bounced and turned with the harder ball on a

hard surface," said Ashraful after the match.

The captain had little choice at times but his decision to have in-and-out fields -- keeping options for both defence and attack -- sometimes paid off, with the wickets of Aaron Redmond and Ross Taylor and sometimes, the Black Caps played with the Tigers' patience and ultimately persevered.

"I think they had such a low run rate to achieve, they had to play defensively," said Razzak.

"Even with 17 runs to win (when Vettori got out), I thought we were in with a chance," he added.

Ashraful tried a lot of options, but 36 required, he knew that the time was almost up.

"After tea today [Tuesday] I thought that the match was going away from us. But we still had a chance if we could have taken one or two wickets in an over," hoped Ashraful, who defended his defensive fields saying that he did what the situation demanded.

Ashraful will forever be maligned and in the same breath, be called the match-winner. Maybe this is the dilemma of talented players, they just can't make every-one happy.

The straw that stirs the drink

NUR UDDIN ALAMGIR, Chittagong

New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori proved to be the kingpin as his side won the first Brac Bank Test against Bangladesh at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Vettori was the significant player behind his side's victory and was single-handedly responsible for keeping the Kiwis afloat in the face of a thorough testing from the Tigers.

He batted, bowled and led from the front, inspiring his teammates to come out of a sticky situation with a win -- all factors that led him to being named the man-of-the-match.

On the first day of the match, Vettori scalped top-order batsmen Tamim Iqbal and skipper Mohammad Ashraful. Day Two saw him remove Mushfiqur Rahim, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Abdur Razzak to finish with a five-for in the first innings.

During his batting, he stood firm as wickets fell around him to score an unbeaten 55 and guide the tourists to a face-saving total of 171.

On Day Three, he took four more wickets, accounting for Tamim and Ashraful again and adding to the prized scalp of Shakib Al Hasan and

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Tamim, Mashrafe in same boat

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

Tamim Iqbal and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza yesterday confirmed that they had refused an offer from an agent associated with the rebel Indian Cricket League.

It was reported in a local Bengali daily that the Bangladesh opener was being courted with a big offer and that he was close to a move to the other side of the border.

But Tamim said that although he did talk with an unnamed agent, he declined it.

"I got a call in the evening of the day before yesterday and the guy on the line asked if I would consider a 9,00,000-dollar move to the ICL. I rejected it straightaway," admitted Tamim, who immediately informed the Bangladesh Cricket Board, which he thinks is doing enough for the players already.

Mashrafe also informed that he too refused a second offer, made some 15 minutes after the phone call to Tamim.

"A man, probably speaking from India, asked me to join the Dhaka Warriors but I immediately refused him," said Mashrafe.

Tamim's offer has been bettered from the previous one made to the same player, during the same time when the first ICL raid took place in Bangladesh cricket.

"Yes it is higher but the first time I was offered, I thought it was a joke," said the left-hander.

"I come from a good family background and the two main reasons for not going would definitely be my love for my country and the game," he announced.

"Their main motive is money but I think I have enough of it already," remarked the Chittagonian.

"I took the offer simply as an appreciation of my importance in international cricket. There's no right or wrong about it."

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Heads high in defeat

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY

Defeat at times is graceful. And wasn't that wonderful to watch the young brigade of Mohammad Ashraful pushing the mighty New Zealand on the fifth day of a Test match till conceding a defeat in the final session and then, for a change, leave the field with their heads held high.

The effort was indeed out of the ordinary from a team that rarely saw the dawn of a fifth or even a fourth day of a Test match.

Nobody had expected such a resolute performance from the Tigers like the resolute Kiwi captain Daniel Vettori who did a la Inzamamul Haq or Ricky Ponting

only to stop an unbridled street celebration nationwide. The celebration might be held for a third time but cricket-crazy millions certainly take the opportunity to salute the Tigers for being competitive in its real sense.

It was just not a freakish individual performance but a collective effort and if these young guns continue to play like this an elusive Test win against a major team will come sooner rather than later.

Truly Bangladesh team achieved many things during the absorbing five days at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium. Questions may be raised against some individual errors or the captain himself might be put in the

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PHOTO: STAR

ALL-ROUNDERS STEP UP PLEASE: The two star performers of the match, New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori (L) and Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al-Hasan pose with their respective cheques during the presentation ceremony at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday. Both men had good all-round contributions to the game and Vettori won the man-of-the-match award while Shakib was awarded for his outstanding performance in the match.



Did U Know?

Debutant Indian leg-spinner Amit Mishra became the sixth Indian player to take five wickets or more on debut on the third day of the second Test against Australia on Sunday.



Sir Alex Ferguson
(Manchester United manager)
"He's been a smashing player for us and I wouldn't want to lose him. I'm quite confident he will be staying."
On Carlos Tevez.



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Chelsea v Roma
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ZEE Sports
UEFA Champions League
Atletico v Liverpool
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)



Citycell B. League
Sheikh Russel v Muktadipasha (5:00pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

CHITS FROM CHITTAGONG

SPORTS REPORTER

Mushfiqur Rahim follows the lineage of wicketkeepers who make their presence felt verbally.

Just like Moïn Khan, Nayan Mongia, Romesh Kaluwitharana and our very own Khaled Mashud, Mushfiqur is slowly building a reputation that keeps everyone on their toes, especially the umpires.

During the final day's play, the young wicketkeeper appealed for almost everything that took place around him - bat-pad, pad-bat, leg-before, caught behind, only pad, no pad and sometimes he would just mouth an appeal.

Curiously, Mushfiqur also seems to be one of very few stumpers who produce a dead-pan reaction whenever he makes an error, as if nothing happened. Clever boy.

NO CROWDS

Chittagong has been very disappointing in this Test match. Maybe it was the location, the lack of facilities or just maybe a lack of cricketing culture in our country but this has been a frustrating time. Almost similarly, it has been a problem in other parts of the sub-continent, notably Mohali where a BCCI high-up called it 'the revenge of the public'.

On the vital fifth day, the stadium was not even half-filled. Only about 500-800 fans turned up at the venue situated on the outskirts of the port city.

The severe dearth of amenities is perhaps what is discouraging. The toilets reek and there is no food court or carts and no place to even buy water.

The authorities, whoever it may be, should take a long look at it.

ASHRAFUL RECALLS

The Chittagong Test will always be compared with the tragedy in Multan and Fatullah.

On the first occasion, in 2002, Bangladesh was stopped by big

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