

A rare effort

BISHWAJIT ROY

The dense fog, bad decisions, missing chances and in the end, it was Bangladesh's rare effort that marked the first day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The Tigers putting pressure on their opponents is not rare but continuing it till the end is. And Mohammad Ashraful's men did the exceptional where the patience of the bowlers was key to see the visiting scoreboard reading 172-6 after Sri Lanka has decided to bat first on a green-top surface.

Who believed that Bangladesh would tighten the grip on their opponents when pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza trapped Malinda Warnapura in front early with past records suggesting otherwise, especially against the Lankans? But Shakib Al Hasan proved that his recent success was no fluke regardless of the critics' qualms about his chances against a team very strong against slow bowling.

There was nothing special but everybody stuck to the basics: spotting the ball into the right area to make sure the batsmen made the mistakes and ensure the day's play would be evenly poised.

And Shakib applied the theory perfectly to pick up the prized scalps of Mahela Jayawardene and Kumar Sangakkara as well as the solid Tillakaratne Dilshan. Some credit, however, must go to Shahadat Hossain who has a bad reputation as an erratic bowler but the lanky paceman gave perfect support to pick up two wickets.

Questions would be raised about poor efforts by Mushfiqur Rahim, who left the field

after being struck by the ball on his face which was also a tough chance to send Warnapura back, behind the stumps but in the end it was bad umpiring that upset the Tigers most.

That was the reason Shakib pointed out the necessity of the 'review system' for teams like Bangladesh.

"Overall it's a good day for us but some close lbw appeals went in favour of the tourists. I feel the necessity of the review system for teams like us," the young bowler expressed his frustration while talking to reporters at a press conference after the day's play.

"No doubt it's a rare day for us as we kept the pressure till the end. It could have been much better if we had some decisions in our favour but the beauty was that we even kept the patience despite some unsuccessful appeals," said Bangladesh skipper Ashraful.

Undoubtedly, Shakib made his captain happier for gradually emerging as the main weapon for the skipper.

"There was nothing in the wicket, so my main objective was to put the ball in one spot. I had a belief that they would make mistakes if I continued bowling in one area and they ultimately did that," Shakib disclosed the secret of his success.

The Magura-lad was as simple as he could be when asked how it feels to appear before the media on regular basis. "Nothing special, I'd rather get enough chance to bowl and you know luck is also a factor."

The young man took guard by saying that they will need to pick up a quick wicket on the second morning to keep the pressure on their mighty opponents as he believes that they have to work hard for even the last scalp.

"What I believe is that we don't have such a bowler who has got the special ability to wrap



Bangladesh left-arm spinner Sakib Al Hassan (L) exults after getting through the defence of Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardena during the opening day of the First Test match at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



Did U Know?

Chris Gayle scored his eighth century in the second Test against New Zealand on Tuesday and became the eleventh West Indies player to exceed 5,000 runs.



Talk Turkey



Patrice Evra
(Man United defender)
"My target is to win three titles in a row. To win it again would be the best feeling. We have the potential to do it but we must keep working hard."
Focusing on a hat-trick of Premier League titles.



What to Watch

BTV
Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
First Test, Day 2
Live from 9:30am
STAR Cricket
Australia v South Africa
Second Test, Day 3
Live from 5:30am (Sunday)



Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
First Test, Day Two
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur
Time: 9:30am

Destiny within sight of title

SPORTS REPORTER

Destiny 2000 brushed aside Titas Club 4-0 in the 14th round at the Chess Federation hall room yesterday to consolidate their lead in the Dutch-Bangla

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

Gambhir gives Kirsten credit

AFP, New Delhi

A more relaxed approach to batting has been the success mantra for Indian opener Gautam Gambhir who today acknowledged that coach Gary Kirsten played a vital role in making 2008 the "best year" of his cricketing career.

Tests at an average of 70.88, said Kirsten had helped him understand his game better.

"I was too hard on myself. I wasn't too relaxed and it used to tie me up in knots on occasions. Gary helped me be at ease with myself. I now take it as it comes. Gary has helped me understand my game a lot better," Gambhir told PTI in an interview.

"It was the best year of my cricketing career. When the year began, I never thought it'd turn out to be like that," he added.

The 27-year-old Gambhir is not prepared to rest on his laurels and promised to maintain his consistency in the coming years.

"Consistency will be my goal. It's not as if I have any specific target in mind. However, I am aware I need to keep working on my batting," said Gambhir.

Gambhir has learnt to curb his aggression whenever needed and says he can be both ultra-aggressive and

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

Test trumps elections

MOHAMMAD ISAM

A group of friends went to see a Test match yesterday and were so engrossed in their favourite game's finer points that the looming general elections seemed distant.

It could have been very easy for a lawyer, an auditor, a banker and a business student to talk about what might happen after the polls, why the 'no' vote is so much in the reckoning or the state of the economy for that matter and even though they did come from different paths and varied professions, the love of the game made them forget everything else and discuss only the game.

One, an auditor in a New Jersey firm, was at a Test match in Dhaka after several years and was happy to see that all the talk about evolution and the 'Twenty20 revolution' has not sullied the purest form of the game. A one-time age-level cricketer himself, the 23-year-old Arman Alim came to see his beloved Tigers and left the ground impressed by Shakib Al

Hasan's variation of flight and spin even though he wanted to see Mahela Jayawardene play some sublime cover drives.

Another made sure the likes of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shahadat Hossain and Mahbulul Alam took all his advice on fast bowling and line and length from a distance of roughly 120 yards. And I think they did.

Amiruddin Zain, the business student who was separated from his favourite game for a few years while pursuing his business degree in northwestern Canada enjoyed a day out in the new home of cricket but reminisced of the days in the Bangabandhu National Stadium. Rashed Zaman, the banker, was wholesomely pleased that the Sri Lankans never managed to get on top of the situation.

Najeeb Huda, a Cambridge graduate, needed to be reminded that it was a Test match and a ball outside the off-stump need not be always attacked. But all of them left with fists pumping and a bout of high-fives and a promise that they would be back to see the Tigers bat on the second day.

Men in hats frustrate

SPORTS REPORTER

There was heavy fog; the wicket was two-paced; there was variable bounce; the noises from outside were too loud; the Christmas meal was not good enough.

Any of the above could be an excuse but as the saying goes, excuses are the nails used to build a house of failure.

And it was just a failure for the two ICC Elite Panel umpires to give any good decisions on the first day of the first Test between mighty Sri Lanka and hosts Bangladesh.

Less said about Steve Bucknor the better. He denied every bowler from his end and his refusals bordered on being irritable. It did not surprise many when he judged Michael Vandort not out off Shakib Al Hasan in the 32nd over.

An arm ball on the middle stump that hit the tall Vandort on the front foot -- it looked a tad high in the replay but from the unparalleled vantage point of Bucknor, there could have been no doubts or excuses.

Maybe umpiring is his forte but isn't he the guy who was in the middle of the Sydney debacle in January? Wasn't he in the middle when the 2007 World Cup final was reduced to a farce?

Then you have Nigel Llong. Young, inexperienced and fresh as a daisy but it was his decision that began a poor day for the two men in the middle. In the very first over, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza wrapped Vandort on the pads and looked gone but the Englishman's decision took everyone by surprise.

Was it any better than club-level umpiring? One must look at domestic matches in Bangladesh to be a judge and when he does take a closer look, it would be a huge surprise that even our best guy in the job is not even close to the ICC Elite Panel.

Sri Lanka eye 300

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka were looking forward to score around 300 runs to put pressure on the home team even after being reduced to 172 for six on the first day of the first Test at Mirpur yesterday.

"Anything around 300 to 350 would be a competitive score. We have a good bowling lineup with Murali (Muttiah Muralidaran) and Rangana (Hearth), not to forget about the fast bowler like Vaas (Chaminda). As the game goes on, I think they will be factors," said Sri Lankan opener Michael Vandort.

"I think it's evenly poised, 172-6 is not a position we wanted to be in. Guys yet to bat will have jobs in their hands and hopefully take the score to 300," he added.

Runs take Riyad closer to Tigers

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Mahmudullah Riyad is itching to get back into the national team after a rewarding few months in the domestic circuit.

Ever since the tall allrounder was given the chop from the Bangladesh team in the victorious one-dayer against New Zealand, back in October, the urge to wear the Bangladesh colours have made him stronger.

"After the ODI series against New Zealand, I got back to the nets and made sure I trained harder and spent more time in the nets," said Riyad while watching the first session of the first Test between his colleagues and the Sri Lankans yesterday from his home.

"I made sure I did my bit. I started well but had a struggle in the next few matches but the last 3-4 matches have been really great. I scored four

hundreds and I have enjoyed each of them," said Riyad.

So what did he eat? Well nothing special but he focused on batting for long periods. "I made sure I concentrated more while I was in the mid-

103 he made against Sylhet late in November at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium, Riyad scored three more to follow including a brilliant 152 in a lost cause against Khulna this month.

"The Khulna hundred was important for me because I paced the innings quite well. I made sure I was there till the end," informed the 22-year-old.

But his best was saved for last when his century gave Dhaka a most memorable win against Barisal in the final round game. Riyad scored an unbeaten 116 when all seemed lost for his side on the final day. Dhaka needed a further 120-odd for victory and along with Elias Sunny, Riyad blazed his way to his fourth and a fitting finish to the tournament for him. "Among the hundreds, this was my favourite. Our team were eight down for 90 something and I just had Elias (Sunny) with me. We needed a lot of runs for victory and again I made sure I finished it," said Riyad.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4



MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD

I wanted to bat for a long time and look, it resulted in big runs for me," he said.

The man from Mymensingh stockpiled the runs in the last few rounds. Starting from the

SL will tour Pakistan

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's President has given the green light for the national team to tour Pakistan next month in place of India, who cancelled their five-week series over the Mumbai attacks.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama announced the decision to go ahead after talks with President Mahinda Rajapakse who sanctioned the national team's tour from January 20 to February 25, the foreign ministry said.

"Minister Bogollagama is of the view that sport is an effective means of promoting connectivity between nations and thereby enhancing friendship and mutual goodwill between countries," the ministry said in a statement.

Last week, Sri Lanka Cricket, the sport's governing body here, said they agreed to take India's place and ask the hosts to scrap two Twenty20 games and turn them into one-day matches.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had said Sri Lanka agreed to tour the country in place of India after playing in Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka are likely to play Test matches in Karachi, Lahore and Multan, while Karachi would also host the two proposed one-dayers. The remaining one-dayers would likely be played in Lahore.

Pakistan last played a Test match in December last year, against India in Bangalore.

India called off their tour of Pakistan after New Delhi refused to grant the team permission to travel across the border in the wake of last month's attacks on Mumbai, which India

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

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মনজুকুল আহসান বুলবুল
বার্তা প্রধান, এটিএন বাংলা

উপস্থাপক: সৈয়দ মুনির খসরু
অধ্যাপক, আইবিএ, ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়

পরিচালনা: হানিফুর রহমান মুকুর
নির্বাহী পরিচালক, এমআরটিআই

সমর্থক: