

The fight goes on

BISHWAJIT ROY

Mohammad Ashraf started with a magnificent cover drive against Muttiah Muralidaran.

That, however, hardly indicated anything as he usually does things this way before frustrating all. But there was a distinct change yesterday in the Bangladesh captain's approach that took the first Test against Sri Lanka into the fifth day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

After Sri Lanka set an improbable 521-run winning target for the Tigers, one could only pray for a respectable defeat but Ashraf, who looked suspect against the swing of Chaminda Vaas at times, made sure that the contest was not over at stumps on the fourth day.

While the other top-order batsmen threw away their wickets, he might have thought that he had been subdued for too long, as the 24-year-old haven't had a half-century in his last 19 innings since scoring an unbeaten 129 against the same opponents at the P. Sara in Colombo. It was time to wake up and, why not now when he was facing his favourite opponents against whom he had made three of his four hundreds?

Sri Lankan batsman Tillakaratne Dilshan, who appeared before the press at close of play, said Bangladesh have a long way to go and very less chance to win the match but efforts of Ashraf (70) and Shakib Al Hasan (34), who shared 74 runs for the unbroken sixth wicket, kept the home team in the game as Bangladesh finished the day on 254 for five, still 267 runs shy of the target.

It showed their determination and the way the two unde-

feated batsmen negotiated the last few overs under fading lights.

Ashraf was particularly brilliant after his drive dismissal in the first innings as he never looked over-cautious or over-ambitious in over two and half hours in the middle and most importantly, the right-hander tried his best to keep the shots along the ground.

"We think that attack is a better approach than making only defence against Murali," said Tamim Iqbal, who suddenly lost his temper by chasing a wide delivery of Dhammika Prasad down the leg side to edge to the gloves of Prasanna Jayawardene and put and to a well-composed 47-run knock.

But Ashraf played every ball according to the merit and he was perfect while playing strokes through the off-side, particularly against Muralidaran.

The Bangladesh captain's unbeaten 70 saw eleven boundaries and it was a treat to watch the way he completed his eighth half-century. The little man executed two eye-catching boundaries through cover and extra cover off the champion spinner to reach the landmark.

On the other hand, Shakib gave perfect support though he made risky cuts initially before showing rare patience in a bid to end his bad patch.

In the end, it could have been a much better scorecard for the hosts had the top order not been pathetic after making good starts.

The wicket still looked good for batting and Bangladesh made a positive start in reply to a towering target before a stupid run out spoiled it. It was Tamim Iqbal who made the mistake by inviting Imrul Kayes for a single after pushing the ball to cover from where Dilshan broke the stumps with

a direct throw.

Zunaed Siddiqui also looked well set but after Tamim's departure, he misjudged Muralidaran to become the first victim of the offie. Zunaed, who made 37, tried to leave the ball that bounced low and kissed the glove on way to first slip where Mahela Jayawardene took a simple catch.

Rokibul Hasan (24) also concentrated high but had no answer to Murali as a straight delivery on the off-stump saw the right-hander's stumps dislodged. Mehrab Hossain committed a crime when the left-hander unnecessarily stepped out to charge Murali and put and end to his 23-run knock. He failed to clear the mid-off fence where substitute fielder Kapugedera took a comfortable catch.

The dismissal was sign of a seemingly early finish of the match on the fourth day but the sixth wicket stand made sure the fight continued.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the fourth day of the first Test between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Tuesday:

SRI LANKA: First innings 293 (Samaraweera 90, Shakib 5-70)
BANGLADESH: First innings 178 (Kayes 33, Muralidaran 6-49)

SRI LANKA: Second innings Vandort b Mashrafe 6
Warnapura lbw b Mahbubul 8
Sangakkara c Mushfiqur b Mehrab 67
M Jayawardene c Zunaed b Mehrab 166
Samaraweera b Mashrafe 62
Dilshan c Mushfiqur b Shakib 47
P Jayawardene not out 3
Vaas not out 15

Extras: (b-16, lb-5, nb-8, w-2) 31
Total: (For six wickets declared in 108 overs) 405

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COMING INTO HIS OWN: Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraf, who took the first Test against Sri Lanka into the fifth day, drives one powerfully on the offside during his unbeaten knock of 70 on the fourth day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.



Did U Know?

In 1986 American cyclist Greg LeMond became the first non-European to win the Tour de France.



Fabio Cannavaro

(Real Madrid defender)
"I think that I will stay at Madrid but it's clear that anything can happen in football. For example, Roberto Carlos who played here for 11 years left Real Madrid." While not totally ruling out a move back to Italy.



BT
Bangladesh v Sri Lanka
First Test, Day 5
Live from 9:30am

ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm



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

New ICC code effective from tomorrow

CRICINFO, undated

International cricketers will have to be available for out-of-competition drug testing under the International Cricket Board's (ICC) new anti-doping code, which comes into effect from January 1. The new code, which complies with the latest World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) code, was recently given unanimous approval by all members of the ICC board.

"The ICC has a zero-tolerance approach to doping in cricket and this new code serves to reinforce that position," ICC chief executive Haroon Lorgat said. "This code means it has just become even harder for drug cheats to get away with doping practices and it is part of our continued battle to ensure fair competition for all."

Under the new rules, players identified by the ICC as part of its "international registered testing pool" will be expected to inform the ICC of their whereabouts every three months. Players are also expected to turn up for tests on request, and their failure to inform the ICC of their whereabouts or to turn up for tests could lead to an anti-doping violation. Three missed tests or filing failures (not reporting to the ICC about their whereabouts) in an 18-month period will constitute an offence.

The ICC will also establish a doping hearing panel, from which three people will be selected to sit as an anti-doping tribunal from time to time in order to determine whether an anti-doping violation has been committed. The

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Smith steers South Africa to drought-breaking win

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Graeme Smith's cool 75 set up South Africa's first series win in Australia as they eased to a nine-wicket victory in the second Test at the MCG Tuesday that destroyed the hosts' world-beating reputation.

Rain was the home side's only chance on the fifth day and while there was some in the morning, play began on time, Smith quickly attacked the wilting bowling attack, and the success was sealed after lunch when Hashim Amla flicked Michael Clarke for two behind square-leg.

While the visitors celebrated a superb 2-0 winning advantage following stunning comebacks in Perth and Melbourne, Ricky Ponting's players were glum after giving up their fortress. Australia's last series defeat at home was in 1992-93 and if they succumb again in Sydney from

Saturday it will be Smith's team that is officially No. 1. While Ponting's men cling to the top rating, the best they can hope for in the unofficial rankings is third following their performances over the past three months.

Smith came to Australia with a calm confidence and his strength and drive have been immense. In the first Test his 108 put South Africa on track for an incredible chase of 414 and in Melbourne his half-century ensured there would be no costly slips.

Late cuts were Smith's main method and he picked up ten boundaries in his 94-ball contribution to a settling opening stand of 121. South Africa needed that type of innings. While Smith was lbw playing forward to Nathan Hauritz, Neil McKenzie survived some torrid moments to post a timely 59 and Amla chipped in with an unbeaten 30.

Ponting showed his inflexibility on the fifth morning by ignoring Mitchell Johnson, Australia's best bowler by the size of the MCG, in favour of the injured

Brett Lee and the novice Peter Siddle. Lee is heading for foot surgery and in his third over the pain of his injury showed as he hobbled and winced.

Johnson was also fielding while Australia bowled six overs late on the fourth day and he was eventually called to replace Lee, who then came on for Siddle. Lee seemed in so much pain he must have wondered if he would ever be able to bowl again.

Only Ponting's use of Hauritz worked as the home side slumped towards demoralising back-to-back defeats. There was nothing Australia could do either side of lunch and Matthew Hayden's poor match continued when he split McKenzie on 49 when he edged to first slip.

The Australian injury epidemic -- Andrew Symonds has a knee problem and Shane Watson will be out for up to six months with back stress fractures -- will ensure a new-look team will walk out in Sydney. Australia is learning how the

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'We are not chokers'

PTI, Melbourne

Architect of South Africa's historic win over Australia, pacer Dale Steyn said if the Proteas continue to play with the same zeal they would soon get rid of the 'chokers' tag.

"I just feel so relieved or privileged I am not sure exactly how I feel to be part of a team that has come down here and been successful," said Steyn, who scalped 10 wickets besides scoring a half-century in the second Test here which the Proteas won by nine wickets to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

"This side is a young side with its AB de Villiers, JP Duminy, Hashim Amla and Morne Morkels who are mostly playing their first Test matches here and they are going to carry on playing Test cricket for a long time."

"We don't have that kind of history that word chokers keeps on coming up and if we

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'SA's greatest year'

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Graeme Smith has hailed a shift in the power-balance in world cricket after what he described as the greatest year in the South African team's history. Smith entered the tour calm and composed and aiming to be the first man to lead South Africa to a series victory in Australia; it has taken barely a fortnight to complete the task and it rounds off a remarkable 12 months.

"It's got to be the best," Smith said when asked where 2008 ranked in the history of South African cricket. "No disrespect for anything that's gone before us, we're very respectful of the history of our game, all the people who have had opportunities before us and who have never had opportunities."

"But I think for us it's got to be the most incredible season South African cricket has ever had, to sit here with the results we've got. I don't think anyone could argue with that."

Over the past two years South Africa have built such a strong outfit that they have not lost a series since they visited Sri Lanka in 2006. This year they have beaten England in England and kept India to a drawn series in India, and with one more victory against Australia in Sydney they can jump to No. 1 on the ICC's Test rankings.

"I think the balance of power is evening out in world cricket," Smith said. "Credit to Australia, they've dominated world cricket for a decade. I think they've obviously enjoyed that time. It doesn't mean that they're going to be beaten in future tours and be easier to beat. But I think the balance has evened out a little."

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MOMENT OF THEIR LIVES: South Africans (L-R) Morne Morkel, captain Graeme Smith, Mike Procter and man-of-the-match Dale Steyn savour their maiden series victory over Australia at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Tuesday.

Kiwis target Gayle

First NZ-WI ODI today

Cricket

AFP, Queenstown

West Indies captain Chris Gayle looms as the most influential figure in the one-day cricket series against New Zealand which opens here Wednesday.

New Zealand view the tall left-hander as the one player they must dismiss cheaply if they are to be in with a chance, while the West Indies see their skipper as laying the foundation of their performance.

Depending on how the series pans out, New Zealand can either rise to fourth or tumble to eight in the world rankings.

The five matches should also deliver an overall series winner after the first half of the West Indies tour resulted in two drawn Tests and a win apiece in the two Twenty20 fixtures.

New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori said Gayle's influence could not be overstated.

"We view Gayle like they

probably view Brendon (McCullum). If they can get him early or we can get him early, that changes the momentum of the game," Vettori said.

Gayle was instrumental in dictating the outcome of two of the four internationals played on tour so far.

In the second Test, his 197 runs in eight-and-a-half hours at the crease stymied New Zealand's second innings run chase, and he belted 25 off Vettori in the match-winning over of the first Twenty20 clash.

But when he was out in just the second over of the second Twenty20, the West Indies fell 36 runs short of their target.

"When you come across sides with a guy playing so well, if you can get him out early it sort of deflates the rest of the guys in the team," said New Zealand fast bowler Kyle Mills.

"He's a big player for them, he's probably the most in-form batsman going around at the moment. He's a big wicket, so is (Shivnarine) Chandernagore and (Ramnaresh) Sarwan."

Gayle averages 40.06 in one-day cricket, although that

drops to a less than spectacular 26.07 against New Zealand.

Either a 5-0 or 4-1 series win will lift New Zealand past Pakistan and into fourth place behind Australia, South Africa and India.

If the results go the other way, a 5-0 win to the West Indies will lift them to seventh and New Zealand will fall to eighth.

A 3-2 win to the West Indies would push New Zealand below England to sixth place.

Player rankings indicate the West Indies have a batting edge with Chandernagore (fifth), Gayle (sixth) and Sarwan (13th) all well ahead of the top-ranked New Zealander Ross Taylor, who is 29th.

But bowling strength rests with New Zealand. Left-arm spinner Vettori is ranked second in the world, Mills is fifth and Jacob Oram is tied in eighth place with the best of the West Indies bowlers, Jerome Taylor.

Both sides have made changes for the one-day matches.

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