



A TIGER-LIKE EFFORT: Bangladesh fast bowler Mashrafe Bin Mortaza goes airborne to take a catch off his own bowling to dismiss dangerous Sanath Jayasuriya during the Grameenphone tri-series match against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Marvellous Mashrafe

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza stood at mid-on and produced a slight chuckle. Old-timers say that mid-on is the best place to judge a bowler's pace and what Mashrafe saw was a young fast bowler tearing into the batsman, bending his back and dishing out one bouncer after another.

Almost like he does day in, day out. The man who leads the Tigers' pace attack did not just stand there. By the time Rubel Hossain came in for his second spell and bounced every Sri Lankan on strike, Mashrafe bowled an impeccable length and a spotless line to take three top-order wickets.

His very first ball was a huge appeal and then in his third, Upul Tharanga played all around a delivery that dipped into his pads very late; hence Mashrafe's customary first-over wicket.

His late movement into Kumar Sangakkara fooled the left-hander who yorked himself and after the world's most experienced one-day player had blasted a half-century, Mashrafe took a tumbling return catch to get rid of him; Sanath Jayasuriya, who made 54, mistimed a slower off-cutter. Whether the Tigers win or lose, give more than 300 or less than 200; whether his new-ball partner supports him or not, Mashrafe gives his all. He bowls the late inswinger, the big outswinger, reverses the ball, bowls a range of slower balls and is an envy of the new generation of international pacemen bereft of a real idol.

But the Narail Express Mashrafe is Rubel's

hero. Narail being on the north of Khulna and Bagerhat on the southeast makes this hero worship almost a natural advent. And after yesterday's impressive debut, Rubel can count himself lucky to be in the same playing sheet as Mashrafe a few more times.

The Bagerhat lad ruffled a few feathers in the

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DAZZLING DEBUT: New Bangladesh pacer Rubel Hossain (R), who grabbed 4 for 33 in his first one-day international, is ecstatic after seeing the back of last Sri Lanka batsman Ajantha Mendis yesterday.

Salma, Ayesha shape wins for Khulna, Dhaka

SPORTS REPORTER

Salma Khatun's sparkling all-round display gave Khulna a crushing 235-run victory over Sylhet while Ayesha Khatun was in top form in Dhaka's five-wicket defeat of Barisal in yesterday's Women's National Cricket League.

Salma smashed 81 off 93 balls in Khulna's massive 285-9 before capturing five wickets for nine runs to bowl out Sylhet for 50 at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium.

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Azad Rahman new FIFA referee

SPORTS REPORTER

Azad Rahman was awarded a FIFA referee badge for 2009, confirmed Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday.

Tayeb Hasan and Abdul Hannan retained their status as FIFA referees while Tofazzel Hossain Bachchu and Aminul

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BISHWAJIT ROY



Bangladesh added another feather in their cap when they beat Sri Lanka by five wickets in a curtailed-

overs match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The victory definitely gave some relief in the gloom of repeated defeats at the highest level of the game, especially after their disappointing 38-run loss to Zimbabwe.

So what was more refreshing in the Tigers' second achievement against the Lankans? Definitely the emergence of Shakib Al Hasan as a genuine match-winner.

The fact that Mohammad Ashrafur played second fiddle in the victory was encouraging for Bangladesh cricket in a way. It was something unique and definitely exciting and now one can easily think beyond Ashrafur. It is a definite good news for the team.

The saying usually goes 'Ashrafur can only win the match on his day', but Shakib's magnificent 92 gave the clear indication that there is another man among the ranks who can win the match on his own right.

Shakib had also showed his mettle in the first match against Zimbabwe but his half-century went in vain as he failed to bat through the innings but he had overcome it yesterday to take him to a new level. He not only challenged the versatile Sri Lankan

bowling attack to script the famous victory but also finished the game which was a rare effort from the left-hander.

And it would definitely put off the pressure from Ashrafur who can now play his own game.

Sri Lanka made 147 in 30.3 overs in the 31-overs-a-side affair but the Tigers did it in just 23.5 overs to secure the bonus point for getting a place in Friday's final against Sri Lanka.

The Tigers made a disastrous start by losing three wickets for 11 runs and then the focus turned to Ashrafur as everybody had the belief that

only this little man can make the miracle.

But Shakib came up with courage not only to rewrite everything but also overshadowed his stylish partner. Ashrafur's effort during the 91-run fourth wicket partnership certainly played an important role behind the victory but without any doubt Shakib was special on the day.

It was one of the best innings by any Bangladeshi batsman if we take the situation into consideration. The way he charged after losing three wickets was fantastic and something rare. His effort not only released the pressure but helped me to play a differ-

ent role," said Ashrafur.

"His (Shakib's) consistent performance has also been rare in our cricket and it would be a different team if two-three players can contribute like Shakib is doing for the team," he added.

Shakib also proved that he is the real all-rounder in the team as there was no exception to his left-arm spin. He conceded just 24 runs in six overs in a very crucial period of the match.

Nobody can now disagree with coach Jamie Siddon's claim that the young man from Magura is a world-class

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UP WHERE HE BELONGS: Bangladesh batsman Shakib Al Hasan enjoys a ride on the shoulders of his teammates after beating Sri Lanka yesterday.

Ash silences critics

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammad Ashrafur got only a muffled laughter at the post-match press conference after the upsetting loss to Zimbabwe last Saturday. So after the Tigers blazed to a victory over a

strong Sri Lanka yesterday, he slammed his detractors.

"Some of you laughed at me when I said that we would go to the final after the Zimbabwe loss and that felt really bad," said Ashrafur to the waiting journalists at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium after the five-wicket win.

"We always remained positive and knew that if we played at our best, we can do anything. I will say the same for the final (on January 16) as I said after the Zimbabwe game," said Ashrafur.

He rated the victory in Mirpur as good as their miraculous win over Australia in Cardiff in 2005 and their brilliance against South Africa in the 2007 World Cup in West Indies.

"We won both those matches against the odds. We faced a lot of criticism before those wins and we turned the tide.

"Here too, we did the same when our ability was questioned after the loss to Zimbabwe," observed Ashrafur.

Ashrafur had high praises for his pace bowlers Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and debutant Rubel Hossain.

"Rubel's action is a bit different so we planned to use it against their tail and it worked. We often give away unnecessary runs to the tail-enders and that proves vital.

"But he did what was asked of him but it was all down to Mashrafe's good work. He set the tone for us," said the captain

who made a patient 26 off 41 balls with just one cool boundary over extra cover.

He was shaky to start with and somewhat took the blame for Tamim Iqbal's run out. Bangladesh were reduced to 11 for three after only 3.5 overs so it was down to him to resurrect the innings. Ashrafur saw as left-hander Shakib Al Hasan tore into the Sri Lankan attack, especially spin wizards Muttiah Muralidaran and Ajantha Mendis.

Ashrafur's counterpart Mahela Jayawardene, who suffered his second ODI loss to Bangladesh, also praised Shakib's innings.

"I thought Shakib played a matured innings and kept us under pressure even though we got the three wickets up front. They batted really well to come out of that situation," said the stylish right-hander.

"You have to give credit the way they

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Alfaz boosts Russel

SPORTS REPORTER



Alfaz Ahmed came out of the bench to inspire Sheikh Russel's 3-1

win against Arambagh with a pair of goals in yesterday's Citycell B League.

The veteran national striker, who was reserved for the fear of suspension ahead of Russel's mega clash against fellow title contenders

Mohammedan, struck in the 73rd minute and in stoppage time and also had a hand in Moroccan recruit Samir Omari's opening goal after a barren first half at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Arambagh, who defended doggedly for over an hour but finally gave up under pressure, reduced the arrears through Turjo in the 90th minute.

Russel, who had beaten Arambagh 1-0 in the first-leg, continued their pursuit of the title with 30 points from 14 games with nine wins, two adrift of leaders Abahani, while Arambagh stayed third from bottom with 11 points.

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Justin Langer

(Former Australia batsman)
 "He's the best opener we've produced statistically and for his influence on the game."
 On Matthew Hayden.



National Cricket League
 (One-day match)
 Khulna v Chittagong
 Venue: BKSP
 Sylhet v Barisal
 Venue: Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium
 Dhaka v Rajshahi
 Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
 Citycell B League
 Farashganj v Khulna Abahani
 Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
 Time: 4:00pm

বাহু হয়েই নামতে হবে, আরো একবার
 যেন ওদের কঠিন স্মৃতি ফিরে আসে বারবার- যে, খেলাতে হয়েছিল একদল বাবের সঙ্গে।

Kool
 SPIRIT WITHIN