

Relieved but not resting

BISHWAJIT ROY

It was not a victory to celebrate. It rather came as a relief for Bangladesh when they handed a six-wicket defeat to Zimbabwe in the second game of the three-match series 1-1 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Anything other than a victory would not only have awarded the series to Zimbabwe but also deepened the crisis for Mohammad Ashraful's men, who suffered two consecutive defeats against the bottom-ranked side to frustrate the cricket fans in the country.

The Tigers attack led by brave-heart Mashrafe Bin Mortaza continued their inspiring show to restrict Zimbabwe for 160-9, thanks to Nazmul Hossain who initiated the initial damage to pick up three wickets for 28.

But the refreshing fact was that the top order did not crumble like the previous encounters and carved a comfortable victory with Rokibul Hasan (52 not out) and Mehrab Hossain (43) batting sensibly.

There was a good chance for Ashraful to calm his critics but the right-hander once again failed to take the opportunity while chasing a moderate target as the Bangladesh skipper was dismissed for five. The much-needed victory, however, gave the under

pressure batsman some space to breathe.

"It was an important match for us and I am just feeling good. It could have been more convincing but we won the match and are now looking forward to the last game," said Ashraful when asked whether it was a relief or joy.

When asked to comment on an obvious question why Bangladesh tend to win when they absolutely have to or when their backs are against the wall, as it was seen in the tri-nation series, Ashraful said that every player tries to give their best in every match. "There is no doubt about that," he added.

"I think that my decision to bat first in the first match was a wrong one and we also batted badly in that match," he explained adding that the wicket was better than the one used on Monday where they suffered a two-wicket defeat after being bundled out for 124.

"We all looked at the wicket first and then decided that if we win the toss we would field first. The wicket was also better than Monday and I think even if we batted first on this wicket it wouldn't have been a problem. Our batters and fielders were also good today," he disclosed their yesterday's plan.

The question was also raised about why they repeatedly failed to maintain the early momentum and let Zimbabwe off the

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PHOTO: STAR
 Bangladesh middle-order batsman Rokibul Hassan executes a late cut during his match-winning knock of 52 not out in the second one-day international against Zimbabwe at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.



Did U Know?

Sheffield FC is recognised as the oldest soccer club in all over world that was established in the year 1857.



Irfan Pathan

(India pacer)
 "I will look to become a permanent fixture in the Indian squad. But practically speaking, apart from Sachin (Tendulkar) it is difficult for anyone to retain his place in the team for too long."



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 Australian Open
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ESPN
 Sportscentre India
 Sports News
 Live at 8:30pm



Citycell B. League
 Arambagh v Rahmatganj
 Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
 Time: 4:00pm

FEDERER SETS UP SAFIN CLASH Serbs dominate

AFP, Melbourne



A dominant Roger Federer set up an Australian Open third-round clash with Marat Safin Wednesday as top seed Jelena Jankovic and defending champion Novak Djokovic showed glimpses of their best form.

The tennis big guns were joined in the next round by Serb glamour girl Ana Ivanovic and Russian third seed Dinara Safina, but 10th seed David Nalbandian was a high-profile casualty, crashing to unheralded Taiwanese Lu-Yen-Hsun.

Swiss great Federer, who is seeking a record-equalling 14th Grand Slam title here, let loose with some instinctive shot-making as he beat Russian qualifier Evgeny Korolev 6-2, 6-3, 6-1.

"I'm happy the way it went. He was also a good opponent to play against and there were a lot of good shots," Federer said, before looking ahead to the Safin clash.

"We go way back. Him, of course, being a former number one, same for me, former Grand Slam champion, it's an intriguing

Happy Mirza crashes out

AFP, Melbourne

Indian icon Sania Mirza crashed out of the Australian Open Wednesday but said she was just happy to be back after a painful six months on the sidelines.

Her 6-3, 6-2 loss to Russian 10th seed Nadia Petrova was only her second match back and even winning once here was good enough for Mirza, who shoulders the hopes and expectations of a sports-mad nation.

But the 22-year-old vowed to bounce back as she works to once again to match her career-high of 27 after recovering from a serious wrist injury.

"I'm just happy to be back and doing what I love doing, playing tennis and competing," she said.

"There was a big crowd out there and I haven't played like that for six months.

"Of course I'm disappointed at losing but I will try and take positives from this.

"I will try and get into the top 30, of course, but the last five or six months have taught me to live for the moment so I don't want to get ahead of myself."

On her game against Petrova, she conceded she was simply outclassed by a better player.

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PHOTO: AFP
 THE COMEBACK IS ON: Jelena Dokic of Australia is ecstatic after upsetting Anna Chakvetadze of Russia during their Australian Open match in Melbourne on Wednesday. Wildcard Jelena Dokic won 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3 to extend an emotional Grand Slam comeback before her home crowd.

No goals in B. League

SPORTS REPORTER

Khulna Abahani finally put an end to their miserable run in the Citycell B. League with a goalless home draw against Chittagong Mohammedan yesterday.

Khulna Abahani, who began the fray with a 3-1 win against Muktijoddha in September last year, lost the next 14 games in a row to stick to the bottom of the table.

The draw at the Khulna Stadium did not change their position in the 11-team table but their first point at home this season took their collection to four points.

The visitors, who had won the two sides' first-leg clash 2-1 in Chittagong, suffered a blow in the final minute of the game when defender Pradip Barua was sent off for his second bookable offence.

Chittagong Mohammedan still remained at fifth place with 24 points after 15 games.

The other match of the day between Chittagong Abahani and Farashganj also ended 0-0 at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong.

Mohammedan unhappy

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club have demanded the punishment of referee Azad Rahman as well as cancelling the result of their B. League match against Sheikh Russel.

The two title contenders drew 1-1 on Tuesday but Mohammedan have asked the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) to declare them winners due to 'biased refereeing'.

Both sides scored from penalties but in a letter submitted to the BFF on Tuesday night, Mohammedan claimed that Russel's penalty was illegal as 'one of the Russel players dived to win the decision'.

The local giants' letter, however, had a contradictory claim as it said in the next line that 'the referee was under influence of a certain quarter to award the penalty following a simple tackle'. It added that the given decision of the penalty was pre-planned.

Mohammedan also suddenly showed disrespect to the B. League fixture and demanded to reschedule Saturday's Abahani-Mohammedan match at the end of the competition.

"If the Abahani-Mohammedan match is being held on schedule, it will kill the excitement of the competition."

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Lanka level in style

Cricket

Sri Lanka came back strongly with solid batting and bowling to thrash Pakistan by 129 runs in the second day-night international here Wednesday.

Spinners Muttiah Muralidaran (3-19) and Ajantha Mendis (3-29) capitalised on an early double strike by Nuwan Kulasekara as Sri Lanka bundled Pakistan out for 161 in 34.5 overs after setting the home team a target of 291.

Tillakaratne Dilshan (76) and Thilina Kandamby (59) made solid contributions in Sri Lanka's total of 290-8 in 50 overs before bowlers pulled up their socks to help their team level the three-match series 1-1.

Pakistan won the first match by eight wickets here Tuesday. The final match is in Lahore Saturday.

Pakistan were wobbling from the start of their innings. They lost opener Khuram Manzoor (one) in the first over, before Younis Khan (four) and Misbahul haq (one) fell by the fourth over with the score at 17.

Salman Butt, who hit a match-winning 100 Tuesday, rescued Pakistan through a 108-run stand for the fourth wicket, raising hopes of a home team win but both fell in successive overs.

Malik hit five boundaries and a six during his 52-ball knock. He fell to a miscued cut off Muralidaran in the 24th over. Five balls later Butt too miscued a drive off Sanath Jayasuriya and

was caught at covers.
 Butt hit six boundaries off 87 balls.

Pakistan lost their last seven wickets for 36 runs as Sri Lankan spinners ran amok.

Earlier Dilshan and Kandamby 59 rescued the visitors' during their 99-run third wicket stand after Sri Lanka were sent into bat by Pakistan.

Sri Lanka had raced to 43



PHOTO: AFP
 On-song Sri Lanka batsman Tillakaratne Dilshan flays one over midwicket during his fine knock of 76 in the second one-day international at the National Cricket Stadium in Karachi yesterday.

Captain urges players to take responsibility

Cricket

New captain Andrew Strauss said he wanted England's players to "think on their feet" as he outlined his vision for the team ahead of their tour of the West Indies.

English cricket was plunged into turmoil a fortnight ago when a personality clash saw Kevin Pietersen forced to resign as captain and Peter Moores sacked as coach.

The ensuing fall-out, there was much debate about the roles of the captain and the coach.

But Strauss said the biggest burden for results ought to fall on the players themselves.

"We want to get back to do what we best, playing cricket and winning Test matches,"

Strauss told reporters at England's Gatwick Hotel here Tuesday, on the eve of their departure for the Caribbean.

"My belief is we want to see players think on their feet out in the middle, takes responsibility for the situation and don't leave it to someone else," the Middlesex opening batsman, who led England to a series victory over Pakistan in 2006 when Michael Vaughan was injured, added.

"The only way we can do that is to give them more responsibility off the field as well. I'm challenging my players to start thinking a bit more about what they need to do in terms of preparation and I'm giving them a lot more flexibility to do that."

England will travel to the West Indies without a head coach, with former Zimbabwe batsman Andy Flower -- Moores's assistant -- leading the remaining backroom staff.

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