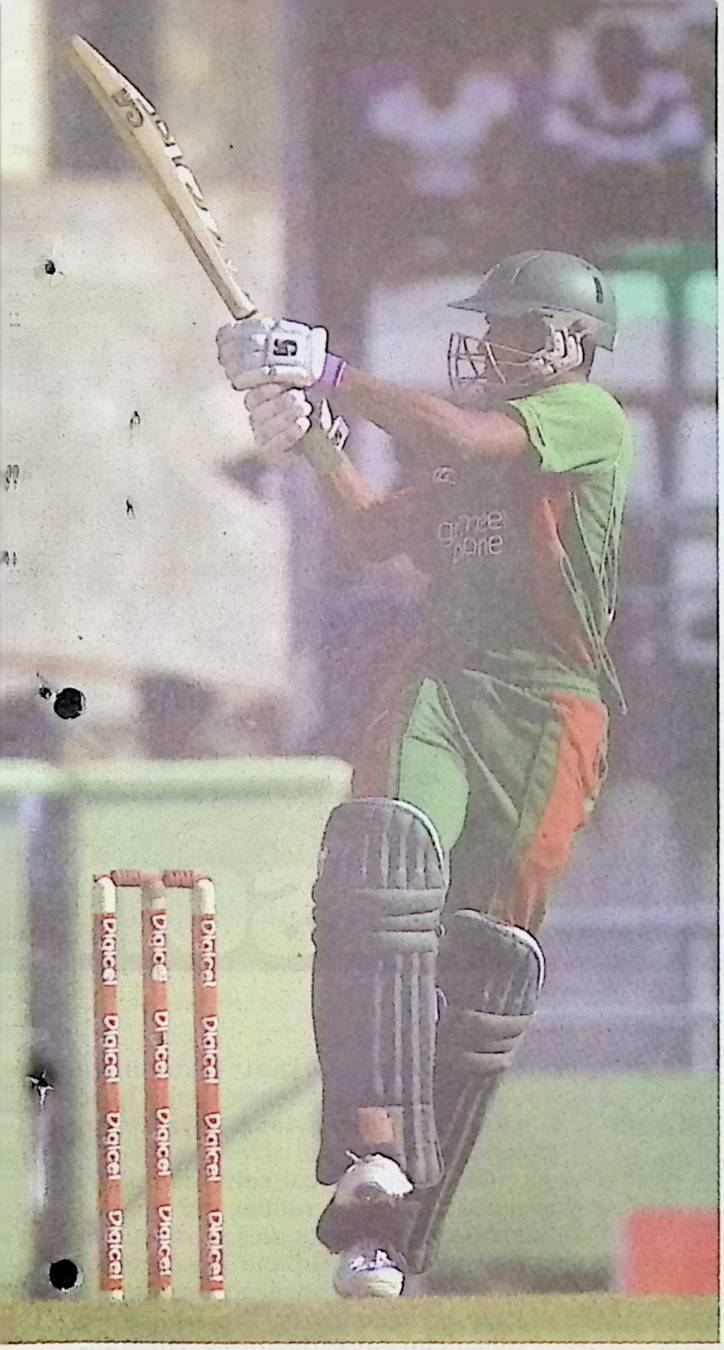


Shakib executes his favourite pull shot.

ing 7/36 against New Zealand, which remains the best bowling figures by a Bangladeshi player to date. His test batting also improved with a couple of fifties and he was agonisingly out for 96 against New Zealand in an innings that should have marked his first test century. Shakib soon became the team's linchpin, his bowling was getting better as his batting came into form as well and then came the moment no one expected. One sleepy week at the beginning of the year the ICC player rankings came out and Bangladesh's own Shakib al Hasan was sitting in number one position.

Finally he was getting the recognition that he so richly deserved and for the first time the most consistent performer of the team, stepped out of the shadows. While he still remained quiet and reserved, the ICC recognition turned him into a name and a face that the entire nation could associate with, but he was still short of being considered a super star and that is where the recent series against the West Indies comes into the equation.

Most people predicted that the series in the West Indies would be like any other, Bangladesh would play inconsistently, challenge the opposition at times but would eventually lose. But the contract crisis in the West Indies turned into a bookmakers nightmare and Bangladesh's dream as the West Indies Cricket Board was forced to select a C-grade team to play against Bangladesh as the main team refused to take part in the series. Against a severely depleted team of journeymen and youngsters Bangladesh started out as the favourites, but a loss to this team would force people to ridicule our continued test status. The first test was close, but going into the final day the new captain Mashrafee found himself injured and it was up to the rookie Shakib to lead the team in his absence. With the maturity of a seasoned professional he shook the team up with his penetrating bowling and quiet efficiency as Bangladesh managed to bowl out the West Indies in less than 80 overs to win only their second test match.

With Mashrafee injured he took over the reigns for the second test and together with his gritty batting and probing bowling managed to help Bangladesh to their second consecutive win and first away series win ever. His outstanding counterattacking innings of 96 not out off 97 balls iced the cake on what was now being called Shakib's series. He picked up both the man of the match and the player of the series award as he was catapulted to superstar status. The ODI series continued in the same vein as he helped pull off another series victory and was now being talk of as the new captain and saviour of Bangladeshi cricket. While that talk may have come a little too soon, it is easy to see why people across the country are calling for him to take charge of the Tigers permanently. His cool head and calm demeanour, makes him a good choice as captain but he also possesses that ability to bring the team together simply under the weight of his own performances. While he is shying away from the topic, the truth is that he took his opportunity with two hands and now looks like the real deal.

Khulna has long been known as the land of the Sunderbans and shrimp, now it is known as Shakib's birthplace. His move from 'Magura to Number One' as Utpal Shuvro wrote in his profile of the player is as remarkable as his performances and has made the country proud. His string of great performances and the ability to keep his cool when everyone else loses theirs will stand him in good stead, because Bangladeshi cricket can frustrate like no other. He is the man of the moment and most importantly one for the future. ■