The Magical Mystery Tours

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It has not always been easy to support the Bangladesh cricket team, their interesting mixture of astounding wins and dumfounding defeats has collectively given the nation a bad heart. This year was chalked out to follow a familiar pattern, yet just when you least expected it the team turned their performances around, mind you that only happened after we embarrassingly lost to Ireland at the World Twenty/20 in England. I guess the sweet would not taste so good without the bitter.

After the loss to Ireland one felt there was not much lower the team could go. Morale was down and key players never seemed to get their acts together in the same match. Both as a captain and as a batsman Mohammad Ashraful had failed and the selectors made the right decision and finally replaced him as skipper while still keeping him in the team. It was a big step down for the man who single-handedly represented Bangladesh cricket both in failure and in success. Appointing Mashfaree Mortaza as the new captain was an easy choice, but the real question was what he could do with talented yet under performing players. His fist assignment was to lead the team to the West Indies where Bangladesh actually has a decent record. On their last tour there they drew the first test and pushed the home team hard in all the One Day Internationals (ODIs), so people were looking at this team to match their previous performances and possibly go one better and even win a match.

The expectations hit fever pitch as a pay dispute in the West Indies led to the entire first team withdrawing from the tour of the eve of the first test. The West Indies Cricket Board then rummaged together a team of misfits and youngsters to try and test the Tigers. While expectations soared in Bangladesh there were others who viewed the series as a litmus test for Bangladeshi cricket. If they could not beat the C team (in any case it was more like the Z team) then their test credentials could quite rightly have been questioned. Overnight we turned from the underdogs into the favourites and with that tag came the responsibility to win, and win well. This is the type of pressure our team has never been under, yet they tackled it with flair and finesse.

With all eyes on them they managed to ease past the home team in the first test with time to spare. The only problem was that the sphere head of the attack and the new captain Mortaza hobbled off the field with what looked to be a long-term injury. Then one rookie captain replaced another as Shakib al Hasan so effortlessly stepped into Mahsrafee's shoes one could have been



A job well done

fooled into believing he was captain all along. With seven players from the West Indies making their debuts, no one was calling this the real team, yet after it was all said and done it was a real match, and every match counts. Bangladesh did more than just win the match, in a way they got a monkey off their back, by winning their first overseas test as well as doing so after conceding a first innings lead. Tamim Iqbal's perfectly measured century was worth its weight in gold and the new boy Mahmudullah's bowling was just about perfect. It was the real team performance that everyone had been praying for and most importantly it gave the team much needed momentum.

The second test proved to just as easy, but the most remarkable aspect of it was the quiet assured captaincy of Shakib. He was not just a canny skipper, moving peo-