

Riyad run continues Ash's batting raises the old question

BISHWAJIT ROY

It was once again the tale of the tail-enders and it was once again the story of Mahmudullah Riyad, who rescued Bangladesh from complete embarrassment on the first day of the second and final Test against India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Many may suggest that Riyad is not a tail-end, but his position in the batting order goes to show that he is one. Some other may also raise the question how it is possible that a batsman like Mohammad Ashraful is batting at number four with such a poor approach while Riyad comes in at number eight.

Without any doubt Riyad was the hero of the day in the Bangladesh's pathetic top-order collapse with his missed maiden century as the right-hander remained not out on 96, but it was Ashraful and captain Shakib Al Hasan who got the attentions most, and definitely for the wrong reasons. If most of the top-order batsmen were exposed in early morning condition with their lack of ability then the two batsmen committed crime, especially the way former skipper Ashraful got out which raised the same old question: Is there any chance this batsman will learn from his mistakes? One can't be blamed if he or she thinks that the right-hander hasn't learnt anything during his nine years in the international arena.

It was not all about 'inconsistency' as his

coach Jamie Siddons said after the first Test at Chittagong rather it was 'irresponsibility' which caused the real concern for the batsman. One can't even imagine that an experienced batsman like Ashraful comes down the track to charge left-arm spinner Pragyan Ojha when his team is struggling with four wickets down before fifty runs on the board.

Does he deserve to be aboard the plane for New Zealand after committing this kind of a crime? The answer should be in the negative even if he comes up with a big score in the second innings because everybody knows that one good innings from him means he will go into a long hibernation.

On the other hand, time has also come for Shakib to work on his batting after the way he chased the ball way outside his off-stump to nip the rebuilding process in the bud.

In the top-order ruins the innings of Riyad however came as some sort of refreshment. The right-hander, who also played a well-composed 69-run innings to help his side reach a respectable total in the first innings of the first Test, showed rare brand of consistency in his batting since he started it in the tri-nation one-day tournament.

His technique and ability to build up an innings by pushing for single was something which is rare in Bangladesh cricket. And although he missed a maiden century by a whisker, his valiant effort earned praises from none other than the Indian players on the field.

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN
WHY SHOULD I TAKE SO LONG TO SCORE? Bangladesh batsman Mohammad Ashraful (in the foreground) goes for a wild swing as India wicketkeeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni catches him short of his crease off the bowling of Pragyan Ojha (not in picture) on the first morning of the Mirpur Test yesterday.

U-19s reach Plate semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19 cricketers have qualified for the semifinals of the Plate Championship in the ICC Under-19 World Cup in New Zealand after beating Hong Kong by four wickets in their quarterfinal clash at McLean Park in Napier yesterday.

Having won the toss, Hong Kong put up 156 runs before being all out in 49 overs, with the highest contribution coming from middle-order batsman Nizakat Khan (56 not out). Leg-spinner Shaker Ahmed was the most successful Bangladesh bowler with figures of four for 26. The other leg-spinner Shabbir Rahman and pacer Kamrul Islam took two wickets each.

Chasing this small total, Bangladesh too had a few hiccups of their own, but made it in the end with a few handy contributions scattered through the order. Middle-order batsman Mominul Haque got 35 runs while opener Anamul Haque (23), skipper Mahmudul Hasan (21) and Shabbir (22) chipped in with useful contributions to

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SUNIL GAVASKAR

Helped by some truly inept batting by Bangladesh, India overcame the disadvantage of losing the toss and restricted the home team to a total that should not pose a big challenge to them. The manner in which Bangladesh's batsmen threw their wickets away was staggering to say the least and it brought into question their temperament once again. The shining exceptions were two batsmen who batted well in the Chittagong Test too. Mushfiqur batted stubbornly once again and it was a lovely delivery from Ishant Sharma that trapped him in front of the stumps. The other shining light for Bangladesh was Mahmudullah who must be the best number 8 batsman in the world. That he and Mushfiqur continue to bat at number 7 and number 8 boggles the mind. Cricket is a form game and when a team has two batsmen who have just come fresh from a fine outing then it makes sense to send them in early so that they can translate that confidence into another performance. That did not happen and so Bangladesh found themselves in the situation that they did.

They left out Shariar Nafees but retained Rokibul which was baffling too. Rokibul looked ill at ease in the Chittagong Test and simply did not belong even in the first innings here. He would be better off batting in Mahmudullah's place where he will not have to cope with the pressure of batting when early wickets have fallen. Coming in to bat when the top three batsmen are back in the pavilion has not helped and his body language when he comes in shows how nervous he is.

Mohammad Ashraful has been Bangladesh's blue-eyed boy for a long time and that is understandable for when he gets going he is a joy to watch but his approach in the three Test innings so far as well as in the earlier tri-nations brings his commitment or the lack of it to the fore. He got out to a horrendous shot and banging his bat on the pads after that is not going to help soothe the anger and disappointment that Bangladesh's supporters would have felt. He has been an underachiever for all the talent he has and must have a serious look at his attitude if he wants to do justice to it.

Shakib Al Hasan, the skipper, also was guilty of throwing his wicket away when he had done all the hard work and looked good for a big score. The team was not safe when he chased a wide one and was caught behind. Thankfully for Bangladesh there was Mahmudullah who was superb as he farmed the strike and added valuable runs to take Bangladesh to a score of some respectability. He played shots all round the ground but most impressively he played them to the right balls and did not try to play above his limitations.

For India it was good to see Ishant Sharma regains his rhythm. He ran in well and bowled some quick deliveries and moved the ball both ways. Zaheer gets better every day and these two form a potent opening attack. Ojha was steady without looking dangerous and Harbhajan has had better days than the one he had.

India are in the driver's seat but they had plenty of help from their opponents to be there.

Asif's signs of improvement

SPORTS REPORTER

It seems that shooter Asif Hossain Khan has put behind his bad patch when he scored 597 in practice at National Shooting Range on Saturday.

Ahead the South Asian Games, beginning on January 29, such kind of a performance will definitely work as a tonic for the Commonwealth gold medalist, whose best score was 595 in the National Championships last year.

Coach-cum-manager Hasan Reza, however, said Asif has no consistency in the practice though he was scoring over 590 regularly in the 10m air rifles.

Asif, also a gold medalist in the Islamabad Games in 2004, has been having a lean patch for long despite having received higher training in Germany last year and he was dropped from the squad for the Asian Air Gun Championship last year for his poor performance.

Reza also said that Abdullah Hel Baki, who will team up with Asif and Shovan Chowdhury in the team's 10m air rifles in the SA Games, was also doing better with his scores between 593 to 595.

However, SA Games gold medalist Sharmin Akhter is

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Selectors inconsistent too

ATTIQUE ANAM



After the highs of 2009, the Year 2010 started for Bangladesh with a downhill trend. They lost all four of the one-day matches in the triangular series and have lost the opening Test against India in Chittagong. As expectations from the cricket team have peaked, so has the pressure on them to perform at a very high level. Pressure is there not only on the players but on the selectors as well as all the decisions are closely monitored and evaluated not only by the board but also by millions of fans worldwide.

And with that weight of expectations, they seem to be making crucial mistakes by not reading much into the consequences. Some of the selection choices for the triangular series were widely criticised. Now, there is a new one that has the critics on their feet once again. Yes, we're talking about the decision to take Shariar Nafees in the first Test after almost two years of absence and then chopping him the next game, and who knows for how long.

Nafees looked uncertain outside the off-stump in both innings in Chittagong, didn't get much of a chance in the first as he was dismissed off a peach of a delivery from Ishant Sharma. His return to Test and

international cricket lasted only three balls.

If that was a sorry return then his exit, as it seems for at least some time, was marked by very embarrassing and discomfiting 27 balls. He looked completely out of sorts in that one-hour stint in the second innings, played and missed a couple of times, offered two healthy edges to VVS Laxman in the slips only to be dropped to aggravate his misery. Finally he was put out of his misery by Sharma who made him edge to Virender Sehwag at gully.

His stay at the wicket was a nightmare to say the least, a nightmare for him to bat against the likes of

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PHOTO: STAR

GAVASKAR'S BEST NUMBER 8 BATSMAN: If consistency is the key then Mahmudullah Riyad is the most consistent Bangladesh batsman despite the fact that he bats at number eight. Here he reverse sweeps the ball during his fabulous unbeaten knock of 96 on the opening day of the second Test against India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

CORRECTION

In our yesterday's article 'Best is just not good enough', the author Architect Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed wrote 'Khudiram' instead of 'Surya Sen'. He regrets the inadvertent mistake.

Sports Editor



- BTV & NEO Cricket**
- Bangladesh v India
- Second Test, Day Two
- Live from 9:30am
- STAR Sports**
- Australian Open
- Quarterfinals
- Live from 6:00am
- STAR Cricket**
- Pakistan v West Indies
- U-19 Cricket World Cup
- Semifinal
- Live from 3:30am
- ESPN**
- Sportscentre India
- Sports News
- Live at 8:30pm



- Idea Cup Test Series**
- Bangladesh v India
- Second Test, Day Two
- Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur
- Time: 9:30am

Mission 100 Medals

SPORTS REPORTER



Taking inspiration from the fact that all the athletes have had uninterrupted training for one year, hosts Bangladesh are confident of winning 100 medals including 17 gold when the 11th South Asian Games gets underway at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on January 29.

Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) vice-president and chef de mission of the Bangladesh contingent Mizanur Rahman Manu made the bold assertion of winning a century of medals at a press meet at the Olympic Bhavan yesterday.

Contrary to the fact that they won a maximum of 64 medals including 11 gold when they hosted the sixth edition in 1993, Bangladesh are now looking forward to turning the tide in their favour with the home advantage 16 years after that.

The BOA is expecting gold medals from athletics, archery, boxing, cycling, golf, handball, judo, women's football, judo, karate, shooting, swimming, taekwondo, weightlifting, wrestling and wushu.

But when the BOA has set its target on the medals, it is off the target when it comes to preparing the venues. Manu also accepted this. "Yes, except for a couple of venues, all are ready to host the events and our athletes have already started training there to get used to them and it would have been better had they got it earlier," he said.

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Del Potro sent packing Nadal, Henin advance

AFP, Melbourne



Defending champion Rafael Nadal set up a blockbuster Australian Open quarterfinal with Andy Murray on Sunday while Justine Henin's fairytale comeback stayed on track.

But the tournament ended for US Open champion Juan Martin del Potro and French Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova.

Zheng Jie, meanwhile, rewrote the history books by becoming the first Chinese player to reach the last eight in Melbourne.

Spain's second seeded Nadal was put to the test by big-serving Croat Ivo Karlovic, who slammed down 28 aces, before he muted the challenge 6-4, 4-6, 6-4, 6-4.

It ensured an enticing last eight showdown with in-form fifth seed Murray after the Scot tamed another big-server, American John Isner, 7-6 (7/4), 6-3, 6-2.

"Murray is one of the more dangerous players on the tour, he can play aggressively and defensively," said Nadal, who has not won a tournament in eight months after being hampered by injury.

"I will have to play as well as I can and use my

forehand."

Murray will be competing in his first Australian quarterfinal and is the first Briton since John Lloyd in 1985 to get this far.

He showcased his exciting strokeplay against Isner and has yet to drop a set in his four victories at the year's opening Grand Slam.

"I'm playing well. No question about that," said Murray, who lost to Nadal in five sets in the fourth round of the 2007 Australian Open.

"I just need to play like I have been and maybe a bit more if I want to win the tournament."

The pair have played each other nine times with Nadal winning seven.

Henin's successful return to tennis after an 18-month retirement continued full steam when the seven-time Grand Slam champion beat fellow Belgian and world number 16 Yanina Wickmayer 7-6 (7/3), 1-6, 6-3.

"It's a great feeling to be back, everything is going so well," said Henin, who is playing her first Grand Slam since the Australian Open in 2008 after being handed a wildcard by organisers.

"Physically, it's tough as I didn't play for two years, but I love being back on court."

Her victory matched the best performance by a wildcard here in the Open Era -- Martina

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Form makes Ishant happy

SPORTS REPORTER



Lanky paceman Ishant Sharma said that it was a good toss to lose for India that enabled them to wreak havoc in the Bangladesh top-order by capitalising on the early morning moister.

The 21-year-old got back his rhythm in the series against Bangladesh, which has been refreshing for him ahead of the big challenge against South Africa in coming home series.

On the back of the five-wicket haul in the first Test in Chittagong, the right-arm paceman used the conditions brilliantly on the first morning of the second Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday to shatter the Bangladesh innings with four for 66 runs.

"The first hour was really helpful for the bowlers. The wicket was really very damp. I think it was really a good toss to lose. We bowled very well against them."

"The plan was to create pressure. The wicket was a bit damp. So we bowled in the right areas. That was our plan," he said when asked about the Bangladesh's top-order debacle in the morning session.

"You need to be patient in Test cricket. Mahmudullah played very well, but our bowling was even better. We needed to take those wickets and that's what we have done," he added.

Ishant was also excited as he returned to form at the right time and he believes that patience is key for a player who is going through a bad patch.

"You need to be patient about that [coming back]. For me it was really big challenge to perform at that time. I was really desperate to perform at that time because I have never seen such hard time in my life. For the last three years I was up, and up, and up. I think you need to have that kind of setback in your life. You need to be patient in your life and bowling as well," said Ishant.

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PHOTO: AFP

Justine Henin of Belgium celebrates after beating compatriot Yanina Wickmayer in the fourth round of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. Henin won 7-6, 1-6, 6-3.