

Shakib loses the plot

SPORTS REPORTER

Is there any scope for a professional cricketer to relax at any stage of a match? You will get interesting answers if you take the words of Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan, who came up with self-contradictory statements in almost every question during the post-match briefing after his team's surprising surrender on the fourth morning of the second Test against India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

After the press conference it was hard for many to believe whether Shakib was the same man who has always been a portrait of confidence even at the age of only 22. Did one bad defeat make him fickle? At one point he said that he was not sure about the reasons behind the sudden collapse, then again he came up with some explanations, though funny.

Believe it or not, according to the young skipper, his batsmen were in a relaxed mood in the dressing room when Mohammad Ashraful and night-watchman Shahadat Hossain were batting and that actually caused the dramatic collapse.

And after the debacle the realisation was that the Tigers were not mentally strong enough to cope with the pressure. "We were laughing in the dressing room when the two overnight batsmen were batting because we thought that the wicket was very easy to bat on. Every one of us was thinking of going out in the middle and start whacking the ball," was the surprise

answer from the Bangladesh captain, who started his innings with a six before mistiming a sweep against left-arm spinner Pragyan Ojha to reach the safe hands of Gautam Gambhir at square leg.

Then wasn't there someone in the team management, or particularly the coach, who could warn them? Shakib now took a U-turn by saying that: "Zaheer [Khan] bowled really well and got the reverse swing to cause the damage. We were also nervous, as most of the top-order batsmen except Tamim were not in good touch."

And it was also his observation: "The wicket was very good to bat on, but we could not apply ourselves properly. Our game plan was not correct."

"Actually our mind-set was wrong. And what I believe is that we are not mentally strong enough to cope with this kind of situation," he also added.

India's master batsman Sachin Tendulkar visited the Bangladesh dressing room after the presentation ceremony to give some advice, but no advice will be enough if the problem lies in your basics.

SCOREBOARD

Complete scoreboard on the fourth day of the second and final Test between Bangladesh and India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Wednesday:

BANGLADESH: First innings 233 (Mahmudullah 96 not out; Sharma 4-66)

INDIA: First innings 544-8 decl (Tendulkar 143, Dravid 111 ret'd hurt, Dhoni 89; Shaiful 3-86)

BANGLADESH: Second innings (over-

night 228-3)

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India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni holds the trophy after their victory against Bangladesh in the two-match Test series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

'Indispensable' Ashraful!

BISHWAJIT ROY

The general sentiment after Mohammad Ashraful's down the wicket antics in the first innings of the Mirpur Test was that this heavy-weight underachiever should be thrown out of the team.

It was not because people hate him. It was because of the extreme callousness that he has shown time and again much to disbelief of the country's cricket lovers. Many had expected that the selectors would come hard on the self-destructive batsman while announcing the Bangladesh squad for the New Zealand tour.

But the selection panel headed by Rafiqul Alam gave the impression that Ashraful is 'indispensable' while retaining him in the 15-member squad for the series down under. The inclusion of Ashraful also gave a wrong message to other players that 'you can commit as much crime as you wish and you won't be punished'.

"First of all we didn't want to make too many changes because there are signs of improvement in the team. Yes, Ashraful's performance was not up to the mark but he looked in good touch. He got starts in the last few innings but unfortunately he could not carry on. We are hopeful that he will get good scores very soon," said Rafiqul after announcing the squad yesterday.

The chief selector certainly sparked a lot of humour by saying that Ashraful's dismissals were 'unfortunate'.

But the harsh reality is that he is a kind of a batsman who often throws his wicket and has never learns from his mistakes. After playing for so long he has now established that he has little chance to improve his averages from a

mare 23 in both versions of the game.

A prodigy might be for Rafiqul. But the fact is that Ashraful did not even score a half-century in his last ten Test innings since his hundred against Sri Lanka in Mirpur in December 2008.

The chief selector is perhaps one of those who are ready to tolerate further Ashraful comings in the hope of once in a blue moon performance. It is however remains to be seen if Rafiqul stays on that hot seat till that day.

But if our cricket has to progress we must punish the irresponsible. Coach Jamie Siddons said after the first Test against India 'irresponsibility' in batting was the cause for concern of the team. And definitely the decision to get Ashraful aboard the New Zealand-bound plane would not help the cause of the team.

Hockey team's losing practice

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national hockey team went 2-1 down to mighty Pakistan in a practice match ahead of the South Asian Games at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Despite having dominated the first-half from the word go, the visitors could manage only a 1-0 lead by the breather.

After the break, Bangladesh regrouped to step up the attack for the equaliser and found it soon when defender Mamunur Rahman Chayan converted a penalty corner.

But Pakistan had the last laugh through a last moment goal.

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Straight Drive

SUNIL GAVASKAR

A familiar story of Bangladesh

India wrapped up the Test and with it the series in fine style by beating Bangladesh by 10 wickets. There was stubborn resistance from night watchman Shahadat Hossain and Mohammad Ashraful for almost 100 minutes in the morning but what happened thereafter is a familiar story of Bangladesh cricket. How many times has Bangladesh floundered after getting a good start is pretty well known in cricketing circles so even as there was plenty to cheer about the magnificent innings of Tamim Iqbal and his partnership with Junaid Siddiqui and then later on the stay put batting of Ashraful and Shahdat there was the awareness that it was too good to last.

They avoided the innings defeat and that will be a small consolation but the fact remains that unless more players show the same resolve then Bangladesh will continue to disappoint its many followers in their country and those outside who believe there is potential in their team.

The batting of Tamim and the solidity of Junaid Siddiqui shows that the skill and application is there and haven't we seen from Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah the same attitude and determination. It is however the seniors who need to put their hands up and be counted. If Ashraful played a horrible shot in the first innings it was skipper Shakib who seemed to be in a needless hurry in the second innings. These two have it in them for better deeds but unless they combine patience with their strokeplay they will be inconsistent and not the contributors that Bangladesh need. India showed plenty of patience as they knew that Bangladesh self-destructs most times and even if there is a huge stand the others will bat as if they were already more than a century and thus perish.

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Mashrafe on board

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is all set to make his comeback to international cricket after seven months as the pace spearhead has been included in the 15-member squad for the coming tour of New Zealand.

The country's leading paceman, Mashrafe, who has been out of action since July last year after he suffered a knee injury during the first Test in the West Indies and had operations on both knees again in Australia, will however be available only for the lone T20 and three one-day internationals.

"I'm really excited about the prospect of returning to international cricket," responded Mashrafe when

SQUAD

Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Mushfiqur Rahim (vice-captain), Tamim Iqbal, Imrul Kayes, Mohammad Ashraful, Rokibul Hassan, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shahadat Hossain, Shaiful Islam, Rubel Hossain, Nayeem Islam, Aftab Ahmed, Abdur Razzak and Nazmul Hossain.

asked about his inclusion in the team.

Sadly enough, fortune didn't favour the 'braveheart' cricketer to lead the Tigers on his first assignment and the fit-again Mashrafe was not ready to take the helm from Shakib Al Hasan at the moment either as he has requested the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) not to

consider him for captaincy.

"It's a great honour for someone to lead his country but what I think is it would not be wise to take the responsibility from Shakib because he is doing well. And you know right at the moment I am not thinking about Test cricket because I want to see how things are going on in limited-

overs cricket," explained Mashrafe, who was also included in the preliminary squad for the tri-nation Idea Cup tournament but finally kept away as a pre-cautionary measure.

"I'm now fully fit but I am always at risk with my injury, so it's better not to consider myself for the demanding job. And it's not good that you keep someone (Shakib) in an uncertainty, rather I believe it will be better for Shakib if he knows that the job is permanent for him for a certain period of time," he added.

Chief selector Rafiqul Alam also believes that it's better to appoint Shakib as captain permanently.

"I think Shakib is doing well as a captain and under his captaincy the team played good cricket in the last few months. It will be better for the team if we continue with him as captain," was Rafiqul's suggestion.

Bangladesh fly out for New Zealand tonight to play one T20,

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FIXTURES

Feb 3: T20 at Hamilton
Feb 5: 1st ODI at Napier
Feb 8: 2nd ODI at Dunedin
Feb 11: 3rd ODI at Christchurch
Feb 15-19: Only Test at Hamilton

The best of Zaheer

SPORTS REPORTER

India's premier paceman Zaheer Khan produced a fiery spell to crop off Bangladesh's lower-order with four wickets in nine balls. He caught the batters flat with sheer reverse swing and almost single handedly destroyed the Bangladesh batting.

"It was reverse swinging, the wicket was slow and I thought it would be better to bowl round the stumps. It was a tremendous collective effort in the last Test, this Test there wasn't much help for the spinners. So, we [the pacers] had to take the responsibility," said Zaheer as he took both the man-of-the-match and man-of-the-series awards for his outstanding efforts.

Zaheer's seven wickets in the second innings took his tally to ten for the match, his first ten-wicket haul in Test cricket and the bowler was proud with his achievement.

"This was my first. It feels very good. Lot of things come with experience. The time away from international cricket helped me to work on things. The injuries then worked in my favour," said a man who had spent most of the last year out of the squad with injury and only returned in the preceding series against Sri Lanka.

Zaheer didn't have it all his way initially yesterday when Shahadat Hossain and Mohammad Ashraful were batting but then suddenly everything changed.

"Once it started to reverse I knew. It's the same way a batsman feels. You kind of go into a zone and relax. You are in control of your mind and body. My mind and body get in complete sync in those moments," said the pacer.

Though expressing his surprise at the last hour debacle of the Tigers, Zaheer gave them some credit for the way they performed overall.

"Surprising to see them get out like that.

They could have batted longer, but it's still early days for them. Credit to them the way they fought."

However, the man from Baroda was not going to rest on his laurels.

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India pacer Zaheer Khan (R) swaps a high-five with a teammate after taking yet another Bangladesh wicket on the fourth day of the second Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Performers participate in the final dress rehearsal of the 11th South Asian Games' opening ceremony at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

BOA receives SA Games torch

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) officially received the 11th South Asian Games torch, which was ignited at the Adam's Peak in Colombo, yesterday, two days before the start of the biggest sporting extravaganza of the region.

BOA president and Army Chief General Abdul Mubeen received the torch from Sri Lanka's acting high commissioner to Bangladesh C Munasinghe at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS). Later the BOA president handed it over to the chairman of the ceremonies committee Major General (retd) Amin Ahmed Chowdhury.

The torch will be taken to Meghna Ghat today where a brief programme regarding the relay of the torch towards the BNS will take place, with Finance Minister and chairman of organising committee

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Dave offers assistance

SPORTS REPORTER

FA Premier League chairman Sir Dave Richards promised assistance for the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) after having met with the federation's president Kazi Salahuddin at the BFF Bhaban yesterday.

"Your president is a great guy and a great personality who wants to develop something and we can help. Salahuddin has a vision of youth development with academies," said Richards at the press conference.

He hinted at the idea of creating role models in Bangladesh. "The first player I take from Bangladesh to England will be a star in England and he will be a superstar in Bangladesh," said Richards, the former chairman of English club Sheffield Wednesday, an expert on English football.

On how Bangladesh's football can develop, Sir Dave talked about a vision and to run with the vision. He wants to bring Premiership Skills to Bangladesh where English coaches will teach Bangladeshi counterparts how to coach youngsters.

"In England we have a system called 'Premier Skills' where coaches are taught how to coach."

Talking about football academies, Richards was forthright that an academy requires third generation astro-turfs as well as grass pitches. There should also be changing rooms and a computer centre. The kids in the academy will be fed, clothed and educated besides being taught

how to play football. And this is not all as it is very important on how the academy is staffed.

Richards was ready to help with the designing, management and tutoring of the coaches

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English Premier League chairman Sir Dave Richards addresses a press conference at the BFF Bhaban in Motijheel yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR