

Star SPORT

DHAKA SUNDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2011, E-MAIL: sports@thedailystar.net

'Good man' Gattuso

Chelsea coach Carlo Ancelotti defended Gennaro Gattuso on Friday following the AC Milan stalwart's headbutt on Tottenham coach Joe Jordan during the Champions League this week. Ancelotti, who managed Gattuso for eight years during his stint at the San Siro, said the midfielder's behaviour in Tuesday's match in Milan was out of character. "I was obviously not happy because Gattuso is a very generous player, is a very good man," Ancelotti said. "He made a mistake. I'm very disappointed with this. "Also, he was very disappointed after the



Hold up, it's World Cup!

ZAKARIA SIMON

"Today has been declared public holiday, so it's better to stay home than to go to work," were the words from a policeman who was directing traffic movements at Shishu Mela crossing of Shyamoli area in the city yesterday morning.

A notice-banner hanged there requested the Mirpur dwellers to take the Mirpur Road instead of the Agargaon-Shishu Mela link road on World Cup match days. The road was put under barricade at around 10 o'clock in the morning and would remain so until the finish of the Bangladesh-India match.

That policeman, who did not want to be named, along with few other colleagues was doing his duty diligently, but what he could not direct was how one could get to Shewrapara or Kazipara in Mirpur.

Mujibur Rahman and her mother came to Dhaka Shishu Hospital to see his niece at around 11:00am. He looked desperate at 12:45pm as he was searching for a rickshaw to take her mother, who is well beyond 60, home in Kazipara.

Khokon and Wasim, both holding yesterday's match tickets, emerged on the road from Agargaon area for a rickshaw, which was a rarity on the day, and had to walk all the way to Agargaon bus stop. They told that they did find a rickshaw near Bangladesh Betar office, but the demand was illogical. That rickshaw-puller asked 120 taka for a ride to Mirpur Thana in Section 2. The rickshaw-puller's argument was he would have to snake to the destination instead of a straight ride on the Rokeya Sarani. So they opted for going to the stadium by bus.

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Calling RIGHT, deciding WRONG

WHAT HAVE I DONE?: Despair is written across Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan's face as he appears to ponder his decision to field first in the World Cup opener. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

To get this picture email to pics11@ovi.com

MOHAMMAD ISAM

There are many theories about the toss but cricket teams usually have two sets of plans to counter its aura. The captain of the weaker side would ideally like to attack with his strength and use that momentum to bring home the win. Through cricket history, the enigma of the toss has on very few occasions been redundant. Some captains even want to lose the damn thing just to avoid the responsibility.

Of course the Tigers' think-tank had two plans and one can say with a lot of certainty that the call to bowl first on a flat Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium wicket was the result of depending too much on statistics and the team's history at the ground. With every Virender Sehwag whip to leg, slap to the covers, or his smack down the ground, Shakib Al Hasan felt the pinch (if not a firm whack to his cricketing nous).

There have been a few instances highlighted over the last two decades when captains, even the smart ones, have made a huge blunder after calling correctly in the biggest of stages. Saurav Ganguly's call to field first in the

2003 World Cup final comes to mind, his opposite number smiling all the way to the bank. Others like Mohammad Azharuddin's decision to field first on a flat track at Lord's (setting up Graham Gooch's epic 333 and 123) and Nasser Hussain's blunder to put Australia in at the Gabba in 2002 also spring to mind.

Though one can argue that this wasn't any World Cup final or the opening day of an Ashes series or even a Lord's Test, but the opening match of a World Cup, that too with so much hype, must be considered a big stage and Shakib's blunder now even bigger.

In his disposal is an excellent opening pair, an average middle-order (which he holds together) and a dodgy lower order alongside a strong spin attack and two young fast bowlers. Backed up by a fielding unit that is good in patches, it was paramount that in a game where Bangladesh have little to lose, they gather as much confidence if they have such little to do with the victory.

Without putting up his most dominant and perhaps his best resource up front, Shakib decided to give Shafiul Islam and Rubel Hossain a chance to

rescue a lost cause. Shafiul's flight from his usual length was a surprise though slightly expected since this was his first big game and it obviously got the better of him.

Shakib told Ravi Shastri at the toss that dew was the deciding factor, but can that be the clincher? The captain put India into bat, considered the best batting line-up in the world because they have batted well in all conditions, be it a turner at Mumbai or the green strips in South Africa. And at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Shakib opened the floodgates and gave the No 1 batting team in the world an all-access pass (something for the privileged few at the Mirpur venue).

The decision also did not reflect upon what Shakib and the rest of the team have been talking about over the past few weeks.

Of course the pressure they faced was due to the opponent and that match at the Queen's Park Oval. But if Bangladesh had planned to win the game, fielding first was not the right way and if Shakib wanted to play their natural game, they should have let their strength dictate terms.

Shakib sticks by decision

BISHWAJIT ROY



Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan stuck by his decision to bowl first despite his side's 87-run defeat against favourites India in the opening match of the ICC Cricket World Cup 2011 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

"I still think my decision was right," said a confident Shakib in the post-match briefing when the question of whether it could have been a different story had he batted first on a placid track was raised.

And interestingly he had on his side none other than dashing India opener Virender Sehwag -- whose career-best

175 took the game away -- who said that they would have also done the same had they won the toss.

"We were also looking to field first. Chasing 300-320 would have been fine as it is easy to chase," said Sehwag, who almost achieved his target of batting through 50 overs in the match.

Sehwag was outstanding in his batting but it was also the poor bowling performance from the Tigers which sealed the match as India amassed 370 runs for four wickets in their share of 50 overs. Shakib also blamed his team's bowling for the defeat.

Shafiul Islam was the most disappointing because the right-arm paceman was nowhere near his impressive performances of the last year. The two new ball bowlers Shafiul and Rubel Hossain struggled with their line and length which gave the momentum to the Indian openers Sehwag and Sachin Tendulkar. The spinners, who form the main strength of the Bangladesh bowling, were also unable to bowl in the right channel against the world's most feared batting line-up.

"We couldn't bowl too well. They bowled too many boundary balls and that cost us the game. The Indian batsmen did really well on the other hand and took the game away from us," observed Shakib.

"Shafiul was maybe slightly nervous but he couldn't execute the plans. He bowled too many boundary balls," he added.

The obvious question was whether the team missed the services of the country's leading paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who was the hero with a four-wicket haul in Bangladesh's five-wicket victory against India in the 2007 World Cup in West Indies.

"He [Mashrafe] is not in the squad but it wouldn't have been different even if he was. The fast bowlers did well in the

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TODAY'S MATCHES

| Match | Time | Venue |
|---------------------|---------|------------|
| New Zealand v Kenya | 10:00am | Chennai |
| Sri Lanka v Canada | 3:00pm | Hambantota |

Innings break.

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