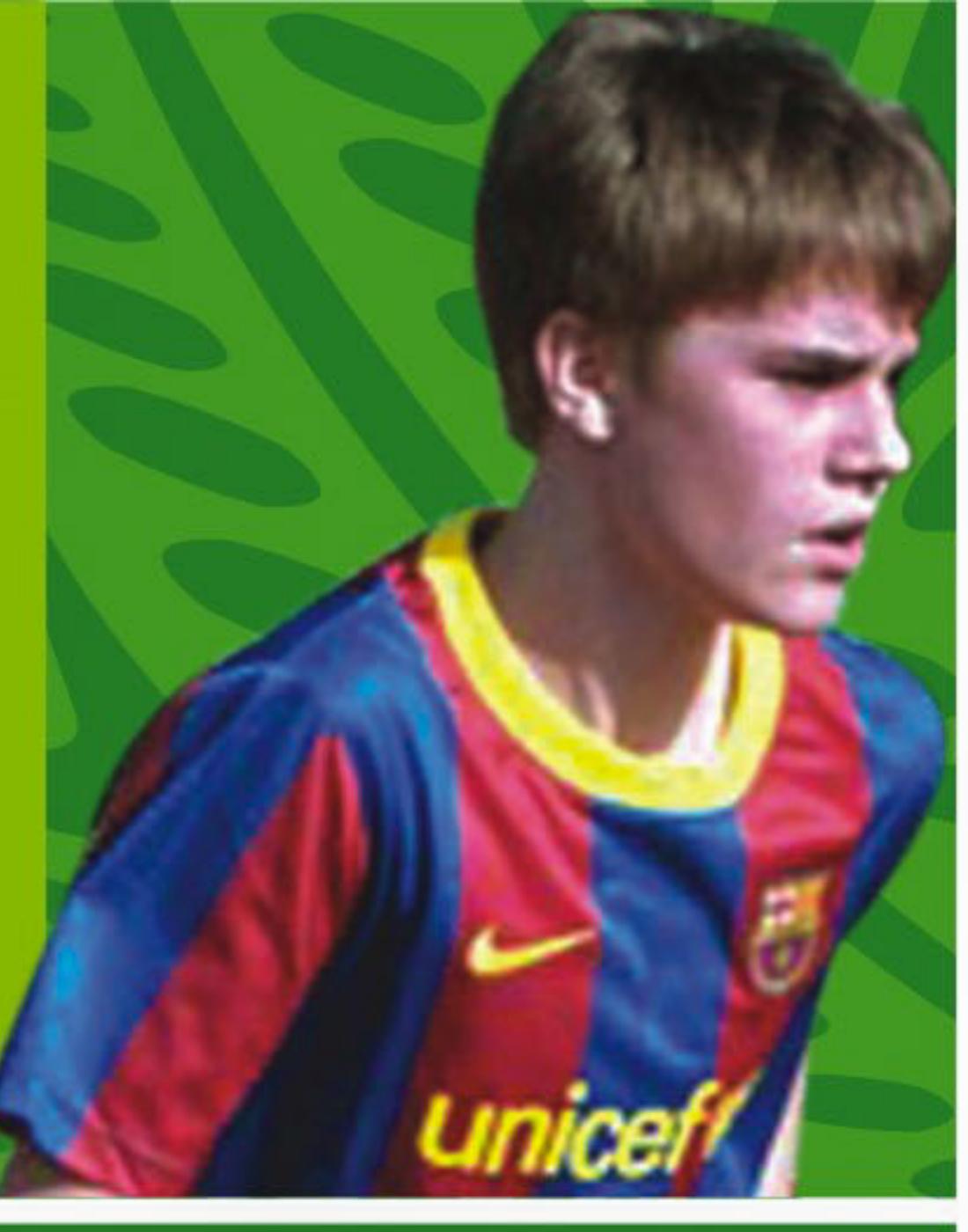


It was a less than subtle hint, but when teenage pop sensation Justin Bieber bravely wore a Barcelona FC kit in the heartland of Real Madrid territory, the Catalonian team took note. The Spanish soccer giants were quick to invite the 17-year-old to train with them on Saturday, fresh off the back of their UEFA victory over Shakhtar Donetsk on Wednesday night. The win makes it all the more likely that Barcelona will face their most hated rivals Madrid in the quarterfinals of the competition.



## Ghosts return for a day

MOHAMMAD ISAM

**Ultra**  
AUSTRALIA vs BANGLADESH  
ODI SERIES 2011

Had this 210-5 come sometime during Bangladesh's disastrous 47-match losing streak between 1999 and 2003, the batsmen would have been lauded for showing the patience to bat out 50 overs.

But it is not, say, 2002, when

despite labouring to 153-7 while chasing 203 against Pakistan in Chittagong. This is 2011 and today, the Tigers are expected to fight and win against big teams. They have been doing it for quite some time now and slowly the bad old days (when one-day matches were over before you could find a good seat) are fading from memory.

But beneath all the Kiwi-washes, Zimbabwe bashings and comebacks in the World Cup, there lies a deep-seated discomfort.

From the Tigers' middle-order woes to the Bangladesh Cricket Board's mismanagement of the middle word, the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium gives off an uneasy air, something between danger and carelessness.

Though it is hard to find the right word here, some shots, many decisions and certain conversations tell you more than you want to know.

As Mahmudullah Riyad and Mushfiqur Rahim walked singles with the run-rate climbing every ball, the crowd began booing. The public have been taught losing for several years but the last few have been refreshingly different.

But it seems that even in 2011, the Tigers are happier to have participated than fought.

And more nate is hostility is meted out conference rooms and not cricket pitches.

Here's yesterday's exchange between a journalist and Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan, the latest episode in the world's No 1 ranked all-rounder's short-tempered conduct at the mere mention of anything that doesn't go down too well with him or he doesn't agree with.

Question: Do you remember after how long Bangladesh had already lost the game before it was over?

Shakib: You're thinking in the wrong way because we didn't give up. I said it before that if Tamim and I could bat till the 40th over, we could take it from there...

Question: Tamim got out in the 30th over, so did you give up then?

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**CAPTAINS SHOW THE WAY:** The Bangladesh and Australia captains played contrasting innings to match the contrasting fates of their respective sides in the first ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. (L) Shakib Al Hasan struggled his way to a scratchy 51 while earlier (above) Michael Clarke was all flow and grace during his match-winning 101.

PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN



## Shakib's perfect approach surprises Clarke

SPORTS REPORTER

**Ultra**  
AUSTRALIA vs BANGLADESH  
ODI SERIES 2011

Mortaza half-tracker in the final over of the Australian innings to reach his century. It was not his first as a captain but certainly his first after getting the job full-time, and his cry of delight and punching of the air said as much about its significance.

Mashrafe, who was evidently making a reluctant return in Bangladesh colours, had lost his shape by then, leaking 25 runs in his final two-over spell. But Shakib decided on him despite the paceman looking completely out of his depth.

Australia made 270-7 and on a dead Mirpur track, the Tigers batsmen were always

climbing up the wrong escalator, and their vigilance smelled more like trepidation.

"When we lost wickets early, our target was to play all the overs. When I was batting with Tamim (Iqbal), we wanted to bat till the 40th over and then take it from there. But that didn't happen," said Shakib in what turned out to be a heated post-match press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Shakib went on to blame bowling in the slogs and overall fielding but it was quite simple: recent history had tied them down.

"It wasn't just those two (58 and 78 all out in the World Cup) but because we didn't perform with the bat in the World Cup overall. I think everyone was conscious of that.

"This is the right approach but I think if we could have scored 15, 20 or 25 more runs, it would have been perfect," he said.

His use of the word "perfect" sounded misplaced as the Bangladesh chase never took off. One would think that losing three quick wickets would peg back the batsmen but present at the crease in that crucial stage were Bangladesh's best. Shakib and Tamim's fourth wicket stand of 67 runs came at 3.90 runs an over and regardless of Shakib's insistence on pointing out the nature of the Mirpur wicket (and how slow it got later in the day), those two batting nightmares still had its effects on the Tigers who only seemed to score freely when the opposition had wrapped up the game.

It was actually Clarke who first expressed his bewilderment at Bangladesh's approach with the bat. "I was very surprised that they didn't have more of a go at the end there. They might have played a few more shots; they had a few more wickets in hand."

"To me I'd rather have everybody get out than have five wickets and fall 70 runs short so that surprised me more than anything else. You have to ask the Bangladesh captain what they were thinking," said Clarke.

The first one-day against the Tigers was shaping to be an even more testing time for Clarke, who recently turned 30, but his manoeuvring of the spinners and squirming out of tight spots (90 for three, 138 for four) showed how responsibility can enhance performance. Though Australian captains are not judged by winning three-match one-day tours, if one were to draw comparisons with the home captain (and some of us are likely to fall into that trap given Shakib Al Hasan's regular tiff with the media), it was a serene ride for Clarke.

Of course it was all his doing. He batted beautifully throughout his 111-ball 101, ham-

mering six boundaries and tonking two sixes in the process but his method of pacing the innings was eye-catching.

"Anytime you make a hundred it is very nice. More important for me was the way we played today. As I said yesterday (Friday), our goal is to win every game we play here, improve in all areas," said Clarke.

After reaching the ton, Clarke was expressive enough to bring back some memories of his debut century in Bangalore where he famously donned the baggy green as he approached the three-figure mark. When asked, he shrugged aside any cause to remember that day. "Bangalore was a long time ago. Like I say, it is always nice to make a hundred, anywhere in the world, if you make a century and playing well and for your country, it is very special. But it is hard to compare," he said.



### Bangladesh A crumble to huge defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A suffered a heavy 272-run defeat to South Africa A in the tour-opening four-day match at Senwes Park in Potchefstroom yesterday.

The second string Bangladesh team surrendered inside three days as, like in the first innings, their batting was found wanting in the second innings. In chase of a huge target of 458, Bangladesh A were bundled out for 185 runs in 37.5 overs in their second essay.

Nafid Chowdhury was not out on 70 off 77 balls with eleven fours while Nazimuddin (16), Shamsur Rahman (7), Junaid Siddiqui (16), Mohammad Ashraful (4), Mehrab Hossain (0), Sahagir Hossain (5) and Nasir Hossain (20) returned to the pavilion cheaply.

Medium pacer Craig Alexander, who captured three wickets for 18 runs in the first innings, claimed five



**FLOGGING A CRIPPLED HORSE:** Bangladesh paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is encouraged by his teammates as he struggles manfully to put in a decent display against Australia in the first ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. Mashrafe is still suffering from his knee injury, but was played in the match despite himself saying that he was not fit.

### STRUGGLING FOR CONTEXT Independence Cup from today

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The hastily arranged Independence Cup football tournament has been sandwiched between two legs of the Bangladesh League, which will likely lead to table-topping teams of the league to use the tournament more as practice and testing ground to gauge new recruits and finalise an ideal playing eleven for the second leg.

The tournament, starting today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, had been inserted into the BFF calendar after the deferment of the second leg of the Bangladesh League.

After the completion of the first leg of the professional football league, Mukti Joddha Sangsad lead the table with 28 points followed by Abahani's 26 and Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club's 26.

"For the tight schedule of the Independence Cup, the clubs and players will suffer more before the start of the second leg of the Bangladesh League, and certainly we are more focused on the league rather than the tournament," said Mukti Joddha Sangsad coach Maruf Haque yesterday.

However, he set his target to reach the quarterfinals of the Independence Cup and then would think match by match.

"The tournament will help us finalise a combination after the inclusion of new foreign players as we are looking forward to clinching the Bangladesh League," said Sheikh Jamal's

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