



A young boy, wearing an oversized mask of a tiger, flutters the national flag during the fifth and final ODI between Bangladesh and West Indies at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

SPORTS REPORTER



If anyone was hibernating for the past week and a half and just woke up yesterday night, they might be excused for thinking that the Bangladesh cricket team somehow cheated Armageddon. Before the five-ODI series against the West Indies started, all opinion surrounding the series pointed to a batting domination by the West Indies. It was only natural to think that about the tourists, because they had won the ICC World Twenty20 in Sri Lanka as recently as October, and the world was in thrall of their big-hitting prowess. 300-plus totals, utter domination of Bangladesh's bowlers was on the cards.

Asia Cup the Tigers regularly restrained the strong batting line-ups of Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan for below-par totals.

This series is merely a continuation of that, and more heartening because the team overcame two major hurdles -- the absence of their talismanic allrounder Shakib Al Hasan (the man of the tournament in the Asia Cup) and the new ODI regulations dictating that only four fielders could be outside the inner circle at any time. The latter was thought to be especially disadvantageous to the Bangladesh spinners, but discipline and mental steel brought them through with flying colours.

What began in Khulna with the dismissal of West Indies for 199 became a recurrent trend in the series, even in the

any of the innings -- Gayle had gotten after Mashrafe each time, but the Narail express struck back each time with the big wicket.

The secret, in opposition captain Darren Sammy's words after the second ODI in Khulna, was that Bangladesh's bowlers were not put off their lines by an assault. Gayle was tied up outside the off stump, tried to break free and even succeeded momentarily, but the balls he was trying to hit were good ones bowled to fields set for that mode of attack. Mashrafe did the job in the first four matches, and it is good news for Bangladesh that when he missed out with injury yesterday Shafiul Islam continued the good work, getting Gayle after tying him down in similar fashion.

Bangladesh's bowling success was down



(L-R) West Indies star Chris Gayle walks back to the pavilion after yet another failure while Bangladesh off-spinner Shohag Gazi (R) exults after dismissing West Indies opener Kieran Powell.



PHOTOS: STAR

But at the end of West Indies' innings in the fifth ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, West Indies had scored only 217 all out. This followed scores of 199, 132, 228 for six and 211 for nine in the first four ODIs -- far removed from pre-series forecasts. But when the dust settles on the series, people will look back on this and the Asia Cup in March as two series where the Tigers became a team in the true meaning of the word, and that is most apparent in the bowling. In the

two matches that Bangladesh lost. To attribute their bowling success to spinning pitches would be to miss the bigger picture and also do a grave disservice to Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, the Tigers' lion-hearted fast bowler whose contributions in the series is much greater than his numbers suggest.

Near the start of the series, both Bangladesh's interim coach Shane Jurgensen and Mashrafe himself talked about the importance of starting well. In that regard thoughts were certainly translated into action as the opposition's most feared batsman, opener Chris Gayle, was made to endure a torrid series, scoring just 72 runs at an average of 14.4 -- his third-worst returns in a five-ODI series. Mashrafe got the big Jamaican three out of the four times he bowled at him. It was not one-way traffic in

to them getting good starts with the ball in every match. The spinners were the difference as each innings wore on. Shohag Gazi has been a revelation on this tour, and opened the bowling effectively in all matches except the first. The drying up of runs at the start softened the batting up for Bangladesh's spin arsenal. It worked every time -- even when Marlon Samuels scored a century in the third game and Pollard hit 85 yesterday, the rest of the batsmen were tied up in knots by the spinners.

This series showed that Bangladesh's true strength lies in their bowling, and the source of that strength is the team ethic that found clear expression in the Asia Cup. It is that source which will give supporters most heart, because after a long wait the team are no longer dependent on individuals.



STAR Sports

India v England
Third Test, Day 5
Live from 9:30am

ESPN

Primera Liga
Levante v Mallorca
Live from 5:00pm

English Premiership
Man City v Man United
Live from 7:30pm

West Ham v Liverpool
Live from 9:00pm

STAR Sports

English Premiership
Everton v Tottenham
Live from 9:00pm

Primera Liga

Atletico Madrid v Deportivo
Live from 12:00am (Monday)

Real Betis v Barcelona



National Cricket League

(Four-Day Match; Day 3)
Rajshahi v Khulna
Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium, Bogra

Sylhet v Dhaka Metro
Venue: Rangpur Cricket Garden

Chittagong v Rangpur
Venue: Sylhet Divisional Stadium

Barisal v Dhaka
Venue: Shaheed Kamruzzaman

Torres at the double

AFP, London



Fernando Torres claimed a brace as Chelsea ended a run of seven Premier League games without victory by prevailing 3-1 at Sunderland on Saturday in their last game before the Club World Cup.

The Spaniard had not scored in the league since October 6 but he found the net twice in the mid-week thrashing of FC Nordsjaelland in the Champions League and was in unforgiving mood once again at the Stadium of Light.

He opened his account in the 11th minute, guiding Eden Hazard's cross into the top-left corner with a fine volley to end a 770-minute goal drought in the league.

Torres had been overlooked for penalty-taking duties in the 6-1 win against Nordsjaelland, but he notched his second goal from the spot on the stroke of half-time after Sebastian Larsson slid in on Ramires.

Juan Mata made it 3-0 early in the second half, side-footing home after a Torres shot came back off the crossbar, before a fine effort from Adam Johnson gave Sunderland a consolation.

It was a first win in four Premier League games for Chelsea's interim manager Rafael Benitez, whose side closed to within four points of second-place Manchester City.

City host leaders Manchester United on Sunday, when Alex Ferguson's men will be bidding to move six points clear at the

top of the table.

Arsenal also returned to winning ways after three games without victory, beating West Bromwich Albion 2-0 at the Emirates Stadium through a pair of Mikel Arteta penalties to climb to sixth.

Both penalties carried an air of controversy.

Prior to Arteta's 26th-minute opener, Steven Reid was penalised for a foul on Santi Cazorla despite failing to make any contact with the Spanish midfielder, who collapsed theatrically.

Arteta's second arrived in the 64th minute and although there was no doubt about Chris Brunt's foul on Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, West Brom felt the England winger had committed an offence of his own in the build-up.

It was a third straight defeat for fifth-place West Brom, whose lead over Arsenal has been cut to two points.

Bottom club Queens Park Rangers remain without a win in 16 games -- a new Premier League record -- after being held to a 2-2 draw at Wigan Athletic.

QPR captain Ryan Nelsen cancelled out James McCarthy's 19th-minute opener for the hosts before substitute Djibril Cisse gave the visitors the lead from Shaun Wright-Phillips' pass in the 71st minute.

Harry Redknapp was less than 20 minutes away from a first win as QPR manager, only for McCarthy to strike again in the 74th minute, controlling Jean Beausejour's left-wing cross and then coolly prodding the ball home.

RESULTS

Arsenal 2 (Arteta 26-pen, 64-pen)
West Brom 0

Aston Villa 0 Stoke 0

Southampton 1 (Puncheon 61)
Reading 0

Sunderland 1 (Johnson 66) Chelsea 3
(Torres 11, 45-pen, Mata 49)

Swansea 3 (Michu 51, 90, De Guzman 59) Norwich 4 (Whittaker 16, Bassong 40, Holt 44, Snodgrass 77)

Wigan 2 (McCarthy 19, 74) QPR 2

Milan dismiss Balotelli talk

AFP, Rome

AC Milan don't have the money to bid for Manchester City striker Mario Balotelli in the January transfer window, the Serie A club's owner Silvio Berlusconi said on Saturday.

"There is absolutely no negotiation taking place for Balotelli, we can't allow that sort of thing anymore," he insisted in reference to the weakened financial might of his club and the Italian league in general in the current economic crisis.

Speculation over Balotelli's possible return home from Manchester City intensified on Friday a day after the striker's daughter was born in his native Italy.

The Italy international, who is enduring a turbulent season at the English Premier League champions, has admitted to supporting Milan, with domestic media also claiming that his former club Inter and champions Juve are also chasing the player's signature.

Gazzetta dello Sport carried a front page picture of Balotelli wearing a jersey with the colours of all three Italian clubs.

Jose hints at leaving Real



Football

REUTERS, Lisbon

Real Madrid manager Jose Mourinho has hinted at a move to another country, saying that sometimes a new adventure at a new club is the only way for a coach to remain motivated.

"Football is not an easy world, specially for coaches and it's hard for one to stay for many years in the same club," he said in an interview with Cape Verde's national radio.

"I am wholly Portuguese and I have a bit of the navigator, of the discoverer in me. I like different countries, different clubs, different leagues and different cultures.

"I am still not sure if in my future there is another adventure waiting for me because I need to be 100 per cent motivated and sometimes new challenges can give us this motivation".

Media speculation surrounding Mourinho's future at Real Madrid has been rife. In May he signed a two-year contract with the club which ties him until 2016 but, after winning the La Liga title last season, his side has struggled to keep momentum in the championship.

The Madrid-based sports daily Marca has said Mourinho was planning to leave the club at the end of the season.

Mourinho has been linked to big-spending Paris St Germain and Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson has mentioned him as a possible successor at Old Trafford.

The Portuguese said his future remained unclear but added that, unlike his former rival at Barcelona Pep Guardiola, he would not be taking time off between jobs.

"I still don't know about my future but I will surely continue to work because I love doing so and I prefer to work than be on holiday," he said.

Messi set to feature

AFP, Barcelona

Lionel Messi, stretched out against Benfica in mid-week, looks set to feature for Barcelona in the Spanish league leaders game at Real Betis on Sunday.

The Argentine, who suffered bruising to the left knee in Wednesday's Champions League tie, came through a training session unscathed on Saturday to leave him clear to play some part in Sunday's match.

Barcelona, in a statement on their website, reported: "After training with the rest of the team on Saturday Leo Messi will be included in the squad against Betis."

The league leaders go to Seville looking to defend a six-point advantage.



Do you think Bangladesh cricket team should tour Pakistan?

Yes (51%)
No (47%)

No Comments (2%)

Total votes: 321
Who will win the 2012 Ballon d'Or?

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