

## Rain cannot dampen a job well done

### Series drawn 0-0

BISHWAJIT ROY



The threat of overnight rain and continuous drizzle in the morning could not stop the fans from turning up in their numbers at the ground as they were desperately looking for some action on the fifth and final day of the second and final Test at Mirpur. But the whole day's play was ruined by rain to ensure a draw in the second Test as well as the series; the first such result achieved by the Tigers against top-ranked and full-strength opposition. The draw was the odds-on result after the fourth day's play but still the last day held the promise of much drama with the Tigers bouncing back in stirring fashion on Thursday.

But the sizeable crowd was denied the opportunity to even cheer for their beloved Tigers during the presentation ceremony, which was held indoors in the media room of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium because of the persistent rain. Skipper Mushfiquir Rahim however was not at all an unhappy man while sharing the trophy with his New Zealand counterpart because his side showed a lot of maturity in the two-match series. It was not possible for the Tigers to create history by winning their first series against a top-ranked side because of the batting-friendly pitches, but it was a tremendous sign of improvement in the longer version as Mushfiquir's men played consistent cricket in both Tests. They had the upper hand in the first Test while in the second Test there was much to cheer about the way they applied themselves in the second innings after the reckless effort in the first essay.

Rain spoiled five sessions in the second Test but still it had enough life before the fifth day's play was called off soon after the tea break. The rain also caused Mominul

Haque to miss an opportunity, by just three runs, to topple Habibul Bashar's record for aggregate runs in a series by a Bangladeshi batsman, though Bashar had made 379 in a three-match series against Pakistan.

Still, the nonchalant cricketer from Cox's Bazar was the real hero in the series with 376 runs and two hundreds in four innings as the left-hander gave some solidity to the Bangladesh top order. He might surrendered the man-of-the-match award in the first match to Shohag Gazi, who set a world record by hitting a hundred and taking six wickets with a hattrick, but the spotlight finally fell on the little man yesterday as he received both the player-of-the-match and player-of-the-series awards.

Mominul tends to speak as quietly as possible but without any doubt his bat spoke loudest in the series. The left-hander's impressive batting in his first Test series in Sri Lanka might not have gotten enough attention under the shadow of Mushfiquir's and the banned Mohammad Ashraful's heroics but he showed in this series how steadily and quickly he is progressing.

This series has also shown that Bangladesh's list of performers has grown beyond the usual dependence on Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal although both proved in the second Test how important their role is in the side.

Newcomer Marshall Ayub might not have contribute much as far as the scoreboard is concerned but he did display a willingness to bat long periods which might make him a long-term occupant of the number three position. The team think-tank, however, must look long at opener Anamul Haque before their next Test assignment at home against Sri Lanka in January next year.

With a job truly well done in the Test series, the focus will now shift to the three-match ODI series which will start on October 29 at Mirpur.



**Bangladesh captain Mushfiquir Rahim (L) shares a light moment with young batsman Mominul Haque, who became player-of-the-match and player-of-the-series, after the fifth day of the second Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium was washed out due to rain yesterday.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## The little big man

NAIMUL KARIM



Let's face it, with a height ranging roughly around the five-feet four-inch mark and a voice so soft that it has often led to him being asked to 'speak-up' during press conferences, Mominul Haque at a first glance does not look imposing.

That is, of course, unless you put a bat into the bashful 22-year-old's hands; that's when -- as the entire country witnessed this month -- Mominul wields his magic.

The circumstances during which Mominul scored his centuries in the last two Tests depict his ability to handle pressure. In Chittagong, he scored 181 after coming in at 8 for 2 and at Dhaka his century helped the hosts overcome a 100-run deficit.

Consistency seems to be another one of his assets. In his first five Tests, Mominul has scored 548 runs, the most by any Bangladesh batsman. He is also Bangladesh's highest run-scorer in Tests this year.

In terms of statistics there are a num-

ber of other tests that the player has aced - becoming the second player to score two centuries in a series or scoring the most number of runs in a series -- but the major aspect to focus on here is the player's professionalism and his hunger for runs.

It was portrayed best during the third innings of the second Test match, which he batted throughout with a fever. Coach Shane Jurgensen went on to describe it as the 'gutsiest innings' that he has ever seen.

"Yesterday's innings was by far one of the gutsiest I have seen. He was on the floor after every break, on the ground, getting treatment from Vib[hav Singh (physio)]. You know he was sick and to come through the way that he did is a true test of his character; that's how he prepares for the games and that's fantastic," said Jurgensen.

It was a sort of performance that received acclaim from the visitors as well. Brendon McCullum actually admitted to being a 'little bit' surprised by the way Mominul batted.

"He has got a nice demeanour about him at the crease. He is very unassuming and goes about compiling runs. He is a real prospect and I am sure

that he will get all the accolades he deserves because he was a standout performer," said McCullum.

Buoyed by his performance, Mominul has been the talk of the town. Fans and members of the cricketing fraternity, in the last month, have all been busy analysing the batsman's strengths, weaknesses, his cuts, his flicks and what not.

The batsman himself though, merely continues to follow his simple approach.

"I did not think of doing anything special actually. My plan was to go there and just enjoy and try to improve myself, did not want to do anything different," said Mominul at the post-match press conference yesterday after receiving both the man of the match and series awards.

The only time he admitted to being nervous in the second innings was when he was stuck on 99 for ten balls. "Tamim [Iqbal] bhai helped me a lot at that point of time. I was a bit nervous and I could not get enough runs. But he told me to be patient and asked me to take the single with ease," said Mominul.

For the sake of the Tigers, one would hope that his simple approach continues to reap the rewards.

## 'We played consistent Test cricket'

SPORTS REPORTER



Before the start of the New Zealand series, Bangladesh's team management looked at it as a good opportunity to gain their first series win over a full-strength top-ranked side and thereby enhance their position in the Test arena, a format that they get to see very little of.

As the last day of the final Test was washed off yesterday, ending the series as a draw, captain Mushfiquir Rahim and co did expressed their disappointment. Despite not having met his aims, the captain said that the series had seen a number of 'positive signs'.

"We definitely wanted to win the series since it was at our home and I regret the result. But honestly speaking on the kind of wicket that we played on in Chittagong it was difficult for our bowlers to pick up 20 wickets. I was happy with the way we drew in Dhaka though," he said.

"In the entire series there were small aims that were accomplished. We played consistent Test cricket despite a gap of six months, the way my players performed and played under pressure, something that Tamim[Iqbal] and Mominul [Haque] did in the second Test, was a good sign," he added.

Coach Shane Jurgensen echoed Mushfiquir's sentiments and said that the players, with through their individual performances had shown their 'true character'.

"Over the two Tests we were pretty consistent. I felt that from the West Indian series, we performed well in one test and not so much in the second, what's encouraging is that we have had two good Test matches," said Jurgensen.

With regards to the negative aspects of the Test, Mushfiquir felt that the team still lacked in the pace department.

"We needed to get early breakthroughs to put the opposition on the back foot and we lacked a bit from that perspective, we need to improve more. If we can't get wickets with the new ball, we should be able to at least reverse the old ball to put pressure on the batsmen. This is where we were weak," he said.

"But then again the wickets did not help much either. Rubel [Hossain] was unlucky -- he bowled well. The spinners did not get much help either. With the rainy conditions it was difficult to grip the ball as well. The fielding too was not up to the mark," added the captain.

The New Zealand series brings an end to Bangladesh's Test season this year, with just six matches. They do play Sri Lanka in January, but the number of matches in this format remains limited for the Tigers. It is an issue that has been brought to the fore frequently and was reiterated by Mushfiquir yesterday.

"We want to win Tests in the future, but before that we need to get the opportunity to play Tests. I request the ones who are responsible for this to let us play more Tests because if that does not happen, then talented players like Mominul or [Shohag] Gazi won't get the opportunity to perform," said Mushfiquir.

## McCullum happy with performance

SPORTS REPORTER

With the two-match series ending in a draw, the number of Test matches that New Zealand have gone without a win has gone up to nine. While the stat is disappointing for the Black Caps, the captain felt that a series draw was a fair reflection of the competition.

"We would have definitely loved to win the series 2-0 or even 1-0, but unfortunately that was not to be the case. We tried to force a result in the first Test and in the second, we lost it to the rain. So yeah, ultimately I think 0-0 is a fair result," said Brendan McCullum, at the post-match press conference yesterday.

"If you look at the way we played Test cricket in the last 12 months, we have started to become consistent and that's the first step. Hopefully we will get a win in the next series against the West Indies," he added.

There were a number of good individual performances from the New Zealanders. Kane Williamson, who scored a century in the first Test and played the spinners well throughout and Neil Wagner, who got his first five-wicket haul in the second Test, were a couple of them.

On the whole, McCullum was happy about the way his side had adjusted to the foreign conditions. "We got in excess of 400, twice, so our batting was outstanding. Our bowling attack did well too. It was a young bowling line-up. They didn't quite get the rewards but they would have learnt a lot from this experience," he said.

New Zealand gave opportunities to a couple of uncapped players in the side. Both of them -- Corey Anderson, who scored a century and leg spinner Ish Sodhi -- impressed the team management.

"He (Sodhi) bowled well as the series progressed. His height is a big thing so that he gets a lot of bounce. I think his accuracy is the main thing. It's not often that too many leg-spinners have that level of control, for such a young guy," said McCullum.

With the one-day series starting on October 29, New Zealand are about to make a number of changes to their squad. The Kiwis are the strongest in this format, which is what they are counting on and perhaps avenge their 4-0 defeat the last time they were in Bangladesh.

## ODI tickets on sale tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

The tickets for the first ODI of the three-match series between Bangladesh and New Zealand will be available from tomorrow at seven branches of the United Commercial Bank Limited (UCBL):

The branches are -- Principal Branch (Motijheel), Corporate Branch (Gulshan), Sonargaon Janapath Branch, Nayabazar Branch, Dhanmondi Branch, Mirpur Branch and Chashara Branch in Narayanganj.

Tickets will be available at the designated UCBL branches two days prior to a particular match.

**ITINERARY**

**October 29:** 1st ODI at Mirpur (Day/Night).

**October 31:** 2nd ODI (Day/Night).

**November 3:** 3rd ODI at Fatullah.

**November 6:** Twenty20 at Mirpur.



**Ground staff keep the wickets under cover on the fifth day of the Mirpur Test. (INSET) All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan (R) peeps out of the dressing room to have a look at the weather condition.**

PHOTOS: STAR

## Siddikur up 14 places

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman climbed 14 places to 51st position after the second round of the 7-million dollar CIMB Classic on Friday.

The 29-year old grinded out a two-under-par (70) on the second day at the Kuala Lumpur Golf and Country Club for an aggregate of one-over-par (145).

Siddikur carded as many as six birdies, but also had two bogeys and a double bogey to foil the day.

American Keegan Bradley took a four-shot lead with a sizzling six-under-par (66) which took his tally to 13-under-par (131).

Overnight leader Ryan Moore battled to an even par (72) for outright second while Thai star Kiradech Aphibamrat signed for a 69 to share third place with American Chris Stroud on 136.

## It's time for action

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Hockey Federation's (BHF) decision of starting the hockey season with any number of willing clubs taking part in the scheduled Oct 29-31 inter-club players' transfer

may roll the ball on the turf after more than a year, but the decision might yet be considered a failure as the game's governing body has failed to convince clubs which have stayed away from hockey activities.

In protest of 'five biased councillors' nominated by the National Sports Council (NSC), six premier league clubs -- Mohammedan SC, Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, Wari Club, Bangladesh SC, Dhaka Wanderers Club and Ajax SC -- boycotted the June 27 polls which paved the way for the incumbent committee led by Abahani councillor Khaza Rahmatullah being elected unopposed.

Four months into power, the elected committee failed to make any noticeable move to convince the rebel clubs despite forming a special committee, which however could not arrange any meeting with those six clubs. The game's governing body,

instead, is busy with arranging the youth and school hockey tournaments, which are less important tournaments compared to the Club Cup and Premier, First, Second and Third Division Leagues -- which ensure the bread and butter of hockey players and also work as the pipeline to national team.

Without the participation of Mohammedan, Mariner Youngs Club and other mid-table clubs in the league, many top players will not get teams to play and suffer financially as some of the other clubs such as Abahani, Usha KC, Azad SC are still planning to rope in players from BKSP.

There is no doubt the Premier League will lose much of its attraction without the participation of all the 11 clubs. So far some of the top players have been paid by those rebel clubs and the absence of those players will certainly reduce the standard of the league.

The rigid stance from both parties will ultimately make Bangladesh's hockey suffer. The downtrend in hockey has already started taking place with a shamolic performance in the AHF Asia Cup following a year of high.

The situation is such that neither of the two warring parties are willing to bow to the other and it is perhaps time that the sports regulatory body, NSC, intervenes to strike a compromise between the two parties.

## Tendulkar honoured

AFP, Greater Noida

Formula One team Force India honoured retiring cricket superstar Sachin Tendulkar by displaying the Twitter hashtag #masterblaster on its cars at the Indian Grand Prix Friday.

The message was prominently displayed on the noses of both Adrian Sutil and Paul Di Resta's cars as practice got under way at the Buddh International Circuit.

"This is just a way to honour one of India's greatest cricketers and sportsmen," a team spokesman told AFP.

"Sachin is a big F1 fan and would have loved to be here, but he is busy preparing for a first-class cricket match that starts soon."

Tendulkar, the world's highest run-maker in both Test and one-day cricket and the only batsman to score 100 international centuries, is retiring next month after playing his 200th Test.