

Tigers roar to the tune of 2-0

BISHWAJIT ROY

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After the convincing victory in the first match, there were not many who did not think that Bangladesh would seal the series yesterday, and by winning the second match and the series the Tigers showed how well-directed their belief was. As the Tigers galloped on their lap of honour, no one could have grudged them their unassailable 2-0 lead as it was achieved through a consistent display of dominance over their opponents.

The tenacious Tigers consolidated their ODI supremacy over New Zealand by clinching yet another series victory last night at their much-loved Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Mashfiqur Rahim's men vanquished their favourite opponents by 40 runs in the second ODI and scripted a rare feat by winning consecutive series against a top-ranked side. Now another 'Banglashed' is a real possibility.

The easy sail in the second match did not come through any magical display like Rubel Hossain's breathtaking bowling in the first match; rather a concerted effort from 'Team Tigers' buried the Black Caps' chance of coming back into the series. Mashfiqur's young brigade proved that they are a much improved and matured side since their 4-0 success three years ago. It was not the same, favoured slow and low surface, but still the home team showed their strength and steady progress by winning two consecutive games, confirming their sixth straight victory against the Black Caps.

Pre-series talk centred on the strength of Bangladesh's slow bowlers, but pacers Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Rubel Hossain deserved special praise for the achievement. There was surprise over Bangladesh's decision to bat first in the day-night match and a batting stutter stymied hopes further. Many doubted whether the total of 247, achieved through

Tamim Iqbal's patient half-century, would be good enough but the home side's bowling, led by the inspirational Mashrafe, did not give the opposition any chance to bounce back.

Mashrafe started the carnage by removing Hamish Rutherford, who inside-edged into the stumps, and finished the job by taking the last wicket of Tim Southee to finish with figures of three for 43. The game was however all but over when Brendon McCullum departed with the score 130 for five. Occasional left-arm spinner Momink Haque trapped the Kiwi skipper in front and left Ross Taylor to do a Houdini act, but the home bowlers, supported by athletic fielding, never let up.

First-match hero Rubel went wicketless but contributed heavily during his first spell (3-1-9-0) to set the tone with Mashrafe. The spinners also did their part with disciplined bowling. Off-spinner Shohag Gazi, the player-of-the-match, was the most success-



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ful spinner with three wickets after contributing with the bat -- 26 off 24 balls.

Earlier, debutant Shamsur Rahman along with his flamboyant partner Tamim made a cautious start and shared a 63-run opening stand. The top-order batsmen laid the foundation but failed to capitalise to the full, for which New Zealand's bowlers' accuracy and control deserve some credit. However, recovering from 173 for six in the 39th over to post a competitive total underscored Bangladesh's growing belief.

The total, although seeming just below par at the break, proved more than enough



Bangladesh's pace bowling talisman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza roars with delight after taking one of his three wickets during the second one-day international against New Zealand at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Unexpectedly refreshing

SAKIB SUBHAN



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The match started with a seeming shocker. At Mirpur -- the ground known for its problems with dew during day-night matches -- skipper Mashfiqur Rahim won the toss and elected to bat. Those at the ground, in the press box, were gape-jawed in disbelief. Mashfiqur had seemingly sold his spinners down the river and condemned them to bowl with a wet ball. But, unbeknownst to all pundits, professional or armchair, the Tigers knew the turf on which they had beaten their opponents in all of their five previous encounters.

This tour so far has seen much talk of progress from Bangladesh, but yesterday's performance, the planning and execution behind it shows that Bangladesh have truly matured as a ODI unit. There was a time -- as recently as Zimbabwe in April-May -- when the toss would take on a more than proportional importance. It betrayed a defeatist mentality through which the team

would be on the back foot on the mere toss of a coin, before even a ball was bowled. But yesterday's decision to bowl second revealed a team that is adapting to its changing strengths and also one that is more ruthless in its appraisal of its opponents.

The dew has not been as big a factor as during last winter's ODI series against West Indies -- the team management recognised that and went with the strategy that would best enable them to pull off a memorable series win. In Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Rubel Hossain -- who took a hattrick in the previous game to crush the Kiwis -- they saw a means of attack beyond their traditional strength of spin. And so it turned out that Mashrafe bowled a tight spell in the opening overs before finishing up with three for 43. Spin of course played a part as Shohag Gazi took the man-of-the-match award for his 3-34 and crucial innings of 26.

As the bowling displayed a team reading from the same page, so did the batting. Tamim Iqbal scored 58 off 86, a slower effort compared to his usual fireworks and one, like his 218-ball 70 in the

second Test, tailored unselfishly to the needs of the team. Bangladesh recognised early that it was not a 300 pitch, and so focused on keeping wickets in hand for the final charge. Naeem Islam and Mashfiqur started an offensive after the 35th over, hitting two sixes and a four in the next two overs, but that was followed by their swift dismissals. With Nasir Hossain's dismissal at 173 for six in the 39th over, Bangladesh had left themselves with too much to do. But then came the familiar scenario of unlikely hands being lifted to suit the needs of the hour as Mashrafe, Gazi and Abdur Razzak all biffed important runs to take them to a competitive total.

Yesterday's unexpected decision at the toss, and the subsequent execution of plans shows that Bangladesh are a team now capable of devising new strategies to win games. It is a credit to the think tank that they can look beyond the formulaic 'spin or no win' approach. Bangladesh's strategy has finally caught up with their skills and as the Kiwis can attest, they are stronger for it.

BD-NZ SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH	R	B	45	65
Tamim b Anderson	58	86	5	1
Shamsur Latham b McCullum	25	54	0	2
Mashfiqur Latham b Neesham	31	28	1	2
Naem Latham b Mills	16	19	1	1
Nasir b McCullum b Neesham	3	6	0	0
Mahmudullah & b Anderson	21	26	1	0
Gazi Devich b Anderson	26	24	1	1
Mashrafe b Neesham	14	8	2	1
Razzak not out	4	4	0	0
Rubel b Neesham	2	7	0	0
Extras: (b-5, lb-1, w-4, nb-2)	16			
Total: (All out in 49 overs)	247			
Fall of wickets: 1-63, 2-110, 3-136, 4-169, 5-171, 6-173, 7-221, 8-240, 9-194.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Southee	2	45	0	
Mills	10	1	47	1
McCullum	8	0	42	3
Neesham	10	0	53	4
Anderson	9	1	40	4
Elliot	2	0	10	0
NEW ZEALAND	R	B	45	65
Devich & b Gazi	19	44	2	0
Rutherford b Mashrafe	1	3	0	0
Elliott b Razzak	14	32	0	0
Taylor b Mahmudullah b Gazi	45	82	2	1
Anderson & Mashrafe b Mashrafe	37	40	5	1
B McCullum bb Momink	14	18	1	0
Latham run out	0	1	0	0
Neesham & Naeem b Gazi	8	11	1	0
NMcCullum & Mahmudullah b Momink	25	23	0	2
Mills not out	27	25	1	2
Southee b Mashrafe	0	1	0	0
Extras: (b-1, lb-1, w-6)	17			
Total: (All out in 46 overs)	207			
Fall of wickets: 1-5, 2-45, 3-45, 4-106, 5-130, 6-131, 7-143, 8-157, 9-194.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mashrafe	8.4	0	43	3
Gazi	10	0	34	3
Rubel	9	1	47	0
Razzak	9	0	35	1
Mahmudullah	6	0	24	0
Mominul	4	0	13	2
Result: Bangladesh won by 40 runs and lead the 3-match series 2-0.				

The Mashrafe factor

NAIMUL KARIM

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As soon as Bangladesh won their second consecutive series against New Zealand at Mirpur yesterday, analysts started discussing the vital factors that led the hosts to the triumph. The newfound ability to handle pressure, an increase in the number of performers and the visitors' lack of experience on sub-continental conditions were the foremost factors that were talked about.

But beneath all that remains a factor that has sometimes been overlooked, but it played a major role behind the wins: The influence of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

He definitely has not been a game-changer but many believed that the kind of influence the 30-year-old brings to the dressing room is something different all together.

Just ask Shohag Gazi, the player-of-the-match yesterday, and he will explain it all. "He [Mashrafe] is just a different kind of person all together. Whenever there's a wicket

he is the first one to go all crazy and excited and that charges us up. For him to bowl that beautiful spell after returning from an injury, that's just amazing," said Gazi.

The weight of his effect can be seen through statistics which show that whenever Mashrafe takes three or more wickets in a match, there's a 70 per cent chance of the team winning. It was something that was seen yesterday as well when he ended with figures of 3 for 43.

At the end of the first ODI win, Mashrafe took a diving catch to end the innings and was visibly the most excited player on the field. His reaction at the end of the second game -- when he bowled Tim Southee -- was a little different.

He stood at the middle of the pitch for a moment, as if recalling the last ten months' worth of hard work that he had done to return from injury, and then returned to his jovial, celebratory mood as the team took a lap of honour. Going by his medical history however, one only hopes that he remains injury-free, because the Mashrafe factor, no matter how small, does matter.

Tamim now top scorer

SPORTS REPORTER

Opener Tamim Iqbal's 58 off 86 balls yesterday may not have been his most fluent innings in international cricket, the half-century though has helped him overtake Shakib Al Hasan as Bangladesh's highest run-scorer.

Tamim has now scored 3,702 runs in 124 innings in 124 matches, whereas Shakib has scored 3,688 from same number of innings but played 129 matches. Tamim's half-century yesterday was the 25th in his career, equaling Shakib's record for the most number of half-centuries by a Bangladeshi.

Shakib, who was diagnosed with dengue on Monday, will not be available for the ongoing series.

'We should've scored more'

SPORTS REPORTER

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When a seemingly content Mashfiqur Rahim fronted up to the television cameras for the presentation ceremony after Bangladesh secured the series against New Zealand with a match in hand, it would have been natural for the skipper to heap praises on an admirable team performance.

But one of the first things he said was that they were 20 runs short. More than anything else, this attitude of looking for improvements even from wins has driven this Bangladesh team from strength to strength.

Much can be said about their latest success, but perhaps it may be time to take a cue from the captain. Gushing about every win has started to seem a bit hackneyed -- this Bangladesh team now not only expect to win ODIs, but they demand certain standards of themselves that cannot be compromised even if the outcome is victory. Besides, a glance at the scoreboard says it all -- such was the spread of performers that the player-of-the-match was anyone's guess.

Shohag Gazi took the honours for his three for 34 and crucial 24-ball 26, but it could have been Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (three for 43) or Tamim Iqbal (58).

"I think the team has become such now that each player is responsible for his department," said Gazi during the post-match press conference. "There is no dependence on anyone. Now we are playing as a team -- someone or the other will perform."

Gazi came in with the side on 173 for six in the 39th over, and was the ninth wicket to fall with the score on 240 in the 48th. "Everything's for the team. Today the team needed me to score runs. I was able to do something, and that is why I have gotten the match award," he said.

In the euphoria of the series win it was almost forgotten that the Tigers achieved the feat without their best player Shakib Al Hasan, who is out of the series with dengue fever. "Shakib bhai is not in the team; if he was he would have done what he can do. We have not let ourselves feel his absence -- we have tried our best to do his job."

"It is a special feeling to have won the series. There is still one match left -- we will try to accomplish the whitewash. Whether or not it happens, it is certain that we will try our best. We will try to keep the winning combination and I will try to ensure that I contribute meaningfully to a win," said Gazi.

The Kiwis however, did not much to smile about. "Every time we tried to build a partnership, we lost a wicket. Ross Taylor and Corey Anderson and then Brendon McCullum and Taylor got a partnership going but we lost wickets there. It let us down a little bit," said Kiwi pacer Kyle Mills after the match.

Mills however hoped for a turnaround in the final game. "It is a tough challenge here to play in these conditions. We want to end ODI series on a high. Everyone will be up no doubt."

Bets on Sachin to go thru' roof

CNN-IBN, Mumbai

Bets on Sachin Tendulkar are expected to go through the roof in his farewell series, with figures likely to touch Rs. 800 crore in each of his last two Tests at Kolkata and Mumbai - The Economic Times has reported.

The estimated figure will be the highest since the 2011 World Cup final as punters get ready to bet on India's favourite batsman, who will exit the game at his home ground the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai.

But odds are against Tendulkar scoring heavily in his 199th Test - the first in the two-Test series against West Indies - at the Eden Gardens that begins November 6.

Ishant retained, Zaheer ignored

PTI, Mumbai

Off-colour pacer Ishant Sharma was surprisingly retained even as senior bowler Zaheer Khan was ignored in the 15-member Indian cricket squad announced on Thursday for Sachin Tendulkar's farewell two-Test series against the West Indies in November.

Zaheer had made a case for his selection by picking up five wickets in Mumbai's Ranji Trophy opener against Haryana but the selectors thought otherwise and decided to stick to Ishant.

SQUAD

Mahendra Singh Dhoni (captain), Shikhar Dhawan, Murali Vijay, Cheteshwar Pujara, Sachin Tendulkar, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, Ajinkya Rahane, Ravi Ashwin, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Pragyan Ojha,