

SPORT

THE NUMBERS GAME

224: The opening stand is this year's highest so far. It also beats Bangladesh's previous best of 185 at Lord's in 2010. This is also the fourth double century stand for Bangladesh.

1523: Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes are now the most successful batting pair for Bangladesh, having scored 1523 partnership runs, overtaking the pair of Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan.

Opening 100s: This is the first time that both Bangladesh openers have scored centuries.

383: Bangladesh faced 383 balls yesterday before losing a wicket, which is the second highest for the team, following Javed Omar and Nafees Iqbal's 498-ball stand against Zimbabwe in 2005.

6: Tamim scored his sixth century and is now the joint-highest centurion for Bangladesh along with Mohammad Ashraful.

130: This is Kayes's highest Test score.



Imrul Kayes (L) and Tamim Iqbal, the two left-handed openers, laid the foundation for a probable big first innings score as the hosts ended Day One of the Chittagong Test against Zimbabwe on 303 for two. Both openers got out, but not before cracking hundreds on a day of records. PHOTOS: ANURUP KANTI DAS

'I'm still not established'

SPORTS REPORTER from Ctg

Despite bagging his second century in his last three Tests, Imrul Kayes believes his position in the side is still not certain.

Kayes made his return to Test cricket in February against Sri Lanka after a gap of nearly three years and made an immediate impact as he scored 115 in the second innings of the Chittagong Test. While many had hoped that to be the start of a new beginning for the left-hander, things did not go as expected.

A torrid time in the West Indies compelled the selectors to drop Kayes from the first two Tests of this series. But as Shamsur Rahman failed to justify his inclusion, Kayes was given another chance in the third Test.

"Honestly speaking, I did not expect to get a call in this series. And so once I did get the call, I told myself that I needed to do everything to get a set position in the side. And that's why I wanted to make the most of my innings today," said Kayes at the end of the first day's play yesterday.

"I don't think I am established yet. You always have to perform to stay in the side. If you have one or two bad games, then the pressure is on you again. So no matter what opportunity I get from now on, I'll try to give my best," he added.

This was the left-hander's second century in Chittagong this year. In February, he scored a century while batting at number three, a position which he claims is quite complex to bat at.

"Playing one-down is a little bit of a problem for me because when you sit wearing the pads you tend to feel anxious about going to the middle. That was a bit of a problem in the West Indies, but I guess I can adjust.

"Chittagong has always been a lucky ground for me. I played well here during the World Cup too. I hope the streak continues," said Kayes.

Record Tamim-Kayes stand

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong

Just to get some perspective, until Wednesday morning Bangladesh's openers had managed just four century and 18 half-century stands in their 87 Tests. Such has been the dire state of their opening combination that the Tigers have had to employ eight different opening pairs since 2011.

As a result, Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes's record-breaking 224-run stand at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday will be one that the hosts will treasure for a long time. While Tamim scored 109, his second century of the series, Kayes notched a career-best 130 to help the Tigers finish on a commanding 303 for 2 at the end of Day One of the third and final Test against Zimbabwe.

It was a day that started with the Tigers winning a crucial toss and saw records tumble on a placid pitch. This was only the fourth double-century stand for Bangladesh and it beat their previous best opening partnership of 185, which belonged to the same pair. This is also the first time that both openers notched up centuries while at the crease together.

Both Tamim and Kayes batted with a mixture of patience and aggression for most parts of their innings. They

were helped with some wayward Zimbabwe bowling. The visitors bowled wide and short, and to top it all, they dropped Kayes at square-leg when he was on 19.

While Tamim was not as defensive as he was in Khulna, he selected his scoring shots with precision. When the rare ball was pitched in the corridor of uncertainty he tucked his bat behind his right pad. The wide deliveries were patiently watched through to the keeper. The full deliveries however were punished throughout the field. The 14 fours that he hit featured delicate drives back past the bowler, powerful punches through the covers and effortless strokes down the track to the spinners. It was a similarly watchful single through point that brought up his half-century in the 33rd over.

Once the half-century was reached, Tamim was subdued briefly for a few overs. However, he shifted gears once Brendan Taylor employed spin from both ends. He smacked Natsai M'Shangwe for three fours in the 42nd over and then thumped Sikandar Raza for a six to reach 96. A clip down the leg-side off Shingi Masakadza in the 55th over brought Tamim his first century in his hometown.

The left-hander, reminiscent of the previous match, threw his wicket away in the last session, when he miscued one in the 64th over.

Kayes, having been dropped after scoring a century earlier this year, had a point to prove and he began his 'second return' this year with a stylish tuck to the square-leg boundary. He then beautifully caressed a fuller delivery from Elton Chigumbura -- who had earlier bowled three wides in his first over -- through the covers for a four.

Kayes however looked a bit more vulnerable when compared with Tamim. Apart from the dropped catch, Zimbabwe's decision not to review an lbw appeal ended up costing them as, according to the DRS, the ball was hitting the stumps. He did manage to regroup himself after the close calls and reached his half-century off 123 balls with a sweep in 38th over. An over later he smacked M'Shangwe through long-on for a six. He played the same shot for the same result on 92 and edged one through the slips in the following over to reach three figures.

However, Kayes, like Tamim, seemed to be tiring and started playing shots away from his body. It was one of those hard flashes that eventually got him caught, roughly an hour before the end of the day's play.

Mominul Haque, who scored 46, and Mahmudullah Riyad, 5, shared a 31-run stand and watched out the rest of the deliveries.

'I have learnt to be patient'

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong

There wasn't a celebratory swing of the bat or an exciting punch in the air; yet Tamim Iqbal's gentle smile revealed just how important yesterday's century was to him. It was his first hundred in his hometown, and while it was long overdue, it finally arrived.

"I have been repeatedly telling the coaches for a while now that I really want to score a century at this ground. Everyone wants one in their home ground and now I can finally say that I have one here too," exclaimed Tamim at the post-day press conference in Chittagong yesterday.

Prior to this series, Tamim had scored his last hundred in England back in 2010 when he smashed consecutive hundreds in Manchester and Lord's.

He achieved a similar feat now with centuries in Khulna and Chittagong, and yet there is a stark contrast between those knocks. While he lashed out against the English, his recent approach was more calm and cautious.

In fact, it's an approach that the player has developed in the last 16 months or so. His strike-rate since 2013 has been hovering around 40; prior to that the left-hander batted at a strike-rate of 60.15. It's an approach that the opener adapted to over-

come his rough patch in the last 12 months.

"When you are not having a good run, it's obvious that you are making mistakes. I for instance tried to attack right from the start when things didn't go my way. After I failed at that I thought of sticking to the basics and spending as much time as possible in the middle, I did that and now that's paying off," explained Tamim.

"The innings in Khulna was the first time I batted for a whole day. I could never imagine batting for an entire day and scoring just 75 runs. I have learnt that in cricket you have to be patient," added the left-hander.

He further said that the century in Khulna, which saw him face more than 300 deliveries, was the most difficult of his six centuries.

The series has been a relief for the left-hander who has been criticised for most of the year. He thanked captain Mushfiqur Rahim and coach Chandika Hathurusingha for his revival.

"After I scored the century I went to the dressing room and thanked him [Mushfiqur] first because he backed me when my days were not good; the coach as well. He said a number of things to motivate me and that worked.

"He also showed me old videos where he spotted my mistakes and helped me rectify them. It's because of those reasons that my shots are flowing," said Tamim.

Fans feel fulfilled

Now wait for the first win at this venue

MINHAJ UDDIN, Chittagong

Tamim Iqbal's maiden Test century in his hometown yesterday gave the spectators hope for a first Test match win at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. Though Tamim had previously scored five centuries in Tests, none of them came at his local ground. His previous best Test score here was 86 against England in 2010. Beside that he scored two half-centuries in the port city -- against India in 2010 and against West Indies the following year.

The other innings in the nine Tests he played in Chittagong were unimpressive. Still, the opening batsman has always enjoyed strong support here, in spite of all his not-so-impressive performances. Yesterday was also like any other day as fans from different areas came to support the Tigers, especially their local hero Tamim.

Jubair Hossain, a student and an ardent fan of the left-hander, came all the way from Chandanaish upazila to support Tamim.

"I like the way he bats. His aggressive style brings excitement to the fans whenever he is on the pitch, be it a one-day or a Test."

The fans' desire materialised yesterday as Tamim scored his maiden century at his home ground in his tenth Test here -- he has played 36 matches since his debut against New Zealand in 2008.

Rubel Das, a young cricketer from Hlishahar, who watched the match from the stands said, "Though both the centuries were good, Tamim's one was special. He fluently scored runs with his aggressive style of playing."

Saiful Islam, a resident of Kazir Dewrey, the neighbourhood from where Tamim hails said, "We were waiting for Tamim's century in Chittagong for a long time. Thankfully we have got it today."

While the long wait of supporters for a century from him was fulfilled yesterday, spectators are now awaiting the Tigers' first Test match win at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

Mahmud Hasan, a master's student of the Government Commerce College, said he watched almost every Test match Bangladesh played in Chittagong from inside the stadium since 2006, but he is yet to witness a win at this ground.

Though Bangladesh's first Test match win came in Chittagong in 2005, it was at another venue -- the MA Aziz Stadium. Since Test matches started at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in 2006, Bangladesh played a total of twelve Tests before yesterday's game. Of those, the Tigers drew four while lost the remaining eight.

Now Mahmud as well as all others are hoping that this trend will come to an end.

'We understand each other's game well'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes don't exactly follow a similar batting approach. While Tamim tends to ride more on his flowing drives, although he has been on the quieter side in the last year, Imrul prefers to graft his way through.

However, when you put the two together, you have Bangladesh's most successful batting pair. Yesterday's 224-run stand not only beat their previous record of 185 scored at Lord's in 2010 but also took their total number of partnership runs at the top.

They have now scored 1,523 runs in 34 innings at an average of 44.79. Prior to yesterday's game, Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan with 1,404 runs topped the list. Perhaps the more gratifying fact here for the Tigers is that it's the openers, who traditionally have done quite badly for Bangladesh, who

have scored.

That Kayes and Tamim are the only opening pair to have scored more than a 1,000 runs itself explains the dire state of Bangladesh's openers. It's a state that has compelled selectors to experiment at the top. The last three years have seen them use eight pairs of openers, all of whom they seemed to be dissatisfied with. The return of Kayes however gives hope.

Both Tamim and Kayes admitted yesterday that they tend to understand each other's game well and as a result feel confident at the crease.

"I understand his game and he understands mine, so if we can talk in the middle and plan, it becomes easier, so batting with him [Kayes] is very enjoyable," said Tamim at the post-day press conference yesterday.

"We don't remember the stats when you bat. What's important is that you know that your partner is there to calm you down whenever you might have a

rush of blood. For instance, today while batting between scores of 55 and 63, I think I was being too aggressive and that's when he helped me," he added.

Kayes shared a similar sentiment.

"We talk a lot in the middle so that makes things easier. We can solve our problems. Today before the start he told me what to expect from [Elton] Chigumbura and that made it easier for me," said Kayes.

While the pair does look comfortable now, nothing however can be said about the future. The selectors for instance dropped Kayes for the first two Tests after one bad series in the West Indies.

However, if the two can sustain the pressure and reignite the glory days which they shared before 2010, it would do plenty of good for the Tigers who have been struggling to find a stable opening pair for the last four years or more.

3RD SAFF C'SHIP

BD women play Afghans today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national women's football team begin their campaign in the 3rd SAFF Women's Championship when they take on Afghanistan at the Jinnah Football Stadium in Islamabad, Pakistan today.

The match will start at 3:30pm Bangladesh time and will be telecast live on PTV (Pakistan Television).

Bangladesh team's best performance so far in the regional tournament is reaching the semifinal in the first edition at home back in 2010, but this time they have set their sights on the final of the eight-nation tourney following their month-long training camp under Japanese coach Tshukhitate Nario.

The Bangladesh team had two training sessions at the Athletic ground of Jinnah Sports Complex yesterday and they are confident of a winning start, according to a statement from Bangladesh Football Federation.

Captain Suinu Pru Marma said the first match against Afghanistan, who have a few players who ply their trade abroad, is a crucial one and that they would give their full effort to win the match.

ERRATUM

In our yesterday's report headlined 'Shakib set to be fully free', it was mentioned that India would be hosting Bangladesh in a one-off Test in August next year. In fact the Test match will be held in August 2016. We regret the inadvertent error.

-- Sports Editor

BD-ZIM SCOREBOARD				
BANGLADESH: First innings				
Tamim c H Masakadza b Raza				109
Imrul c sub (Sibanda) b H Masakadza				130
Mominul not out				46
Mahmudullah not out				5
Extras: (b-2, lb-5, w-6)				13
Total: (For 2 wks in 90 overs)				303
To bat: Shakib, Mushfiqur, Shuvagata, Taijul, Shaiful, Rubel, Jubair.				
Fall of wickets: 1-224, 2-272				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Panyangara	14	1	46	0
Chigumbura	10	3	29	0
S Masakadza	15	3	50	0
M'shangwe	25	3	85	0
Raza	21	0	74	1
Chari	2	0	9	0
H Masakadza	3	1	3	1
ZIMBABWE: Taylor (capt), Raza, Chari, H Masakadza, Chakabva, Chigumbura, Ervine, S Masakadza, Mutumbami, M'shangwe, Panyangara.				
Toss: Bangladesh				
Umpires: Aleem Dar (PAK) and Chris Gaffaney (NZL)				

Abahani ease past MSC

SPORTS REPORTER

While the ardent cricket supporters were glued to television sets watching Bangladesh's batting domination over Zimbabwe, the country's two traditional rivals Abahani and Mohammedan silently played out a lacklustre match in the Dhaka Premier League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

These days the battle of the two perennial rivals hardly makes waves among the cricket fans and yesterday was no exception during their first meeting of this season. Furthermore, the match was a dull and drab affair where Mohammedan had to ride on their number eighth batsman to score 168 for

nine as captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza scored his team's highest runs, 61.

Consequently, Abahani faced hardly any problems in overtaking the total to register a five-wicket victory in 37.5 overs.

The foreigners however continued their supremacy as Sri Lankan Chamara Kapugedara smashed an unbeaten 161 off 136 balls, a knock that contained 13 fours and three sixes, as Victoria Sporting Club amassed 301 for 4 wickets. Victoria sailed to a 66-run win riding on Chamara's medium pace bowling as Prime Bank were bundled out for 235 runs at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

In the day's other low-scoring match, Brothers Union managed an eight-run victory against Kalabagan Cricket Academy.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MOHAMMEDAN: 168-9 in 50 overs (Naeem 45, Mashrafe 61; Al-Amin 2-27, Shuvashis 3-18)

ABAHANI: 169-5 in 37.5 overs (Liton 55, Rokibul 41, Alauddin 2-26)

Result: Abahani won by five wickets.

VICTORIA: 301-4 in 50 overs (Chamara 161 not out, Nadif 70; Taposh 2-43)

PRIME BANK: 235 all out in 50 overs (Soumya 43, Taiabur 77; Shuvo 3-48, Chamara 4-41)

Result: Victoria won by 66 runs.

BROTHER UNION: 153 all out in 48.1 overs (Milinda Siriwardana 57; Nabil 2-12, Jeeban Mendis 2-30)

KALABAGAN CA: 145 all out in 47.1 overs (Mahmudul 55, Sabbir 36; Asif 4-28, Rony 2-23)

Result: Brothers Union won by eight runs.