

SPORT



TIGERS DOWN UNDER

Shakib's time to shine

NAIMUL KARIM

With tears in his eyes Shakib Al Hasan got off from his glittering rickshaw and made his way to the grand stage created to honour the captains of the 2011 World Cup at Mirpur.

These were the shoulders that carried the hopes and aspirations of millions of people, for they had suddenly found someone they could look up to; someone who rose up the ladder at a pace that surpassed everyone's expectations; to them he was the unbreakable.

That sentiment, however, took a brief hiatus when Shakib shed those tears in the opening ceremony; it was at that moment that everyone realised that he was just 23; perhaps the proudest 23-year-old of the nation at that point of time.

Four years on and the expectations from the ace all-rounder remain the same. He may not be leading the team this time around, but he owes the Tigers a special performance in the mega event; it only goes with the way his career has panned out thus far.

From winning the Indian Premier League to bowling the world's second best T20 figures in the Caribbean, from becoming only the third player to do the double after Ian Botham and Imran Khan to consistently topping the all-rounder's rankings, he has felled many barriers since the last World Cup.

While these achievements will remain mile-



stones in Shakib's career, a superlative performance in the biggest cricketing event however has the potential to surpass them all.

Take Sachin Tendulkar's joy after winning the World Cup in 2011 for instance. The legend had broken almost every possible cricketing record before that and yet the elation that he displayed on the shoulders of his teammates in Mumbai was incomparable.

The same theory applies for Lionel Messi's despair in Brazil last year. His failure to lead

Argentina to a World Cup win has been termed by sporting pundits as the most important miss of his career.

It will be too far-fetched to compare Shakib to either of these two legends, but what these contrasting emotions do depict is the value of a world event.

The Tigers are yet to cross the most basic of hurdles in World Cups. A Bangladeshi cricketer is yet to score a century or take a five-wicket haul in the mega event; and when it comes to overcoming obstacles; Shakib is the player to go to.

He displayed that in 2010 when he led a captain-less Bangladesh to a 4-0 win over New Zealand and he showed that again last year when he overcame multiple bans to put in one of the best performances in world cricket.

Shakib is currently Bangladesh's highest run-getter in World Cups. He has scored 344 runs in 15 matches at an average of 26. With the ball he has taken 15 wickets and falls second only to Abdur Razzak, who won't be featuring in this World Cup.

While these may represent the best figures by a Bangladeshi, if you compare them to his normal career graph, you can consistently keep pushing them to a corner; a trend followed by every other Bangladeshi cricketer's stats.

At 27, having played all over the world and matched many sought-after cricketing records, the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand could be the perfect opportunity for the ace all-rounder to change that trend.

'Leg-spinners in Australia are very effective'

SPORTS REPORTER



Days after the BCB president revealed that coach Chandika Hathurusingha wanted young leg-spinner Jubair Hossain in Bangladesh's World Cup squad, the Sri Lankan explained his stance.

"I would love to have Jubair in the team because leg-spinners in Australia are very, very effective. From my experience in Australia in the past four years, I have seen that every state team tries to get a leg-spinner because they are wicket-takers in those conditions.

"It's true that I was asking for him and he was in our plans as an attacking option to get us wickets, but in the end he is not in and we will try to do what we can with the players we have," said Hathurusingha in his first interaction with the media since he returned to Dhaka after his break.

Bangladesh selectors have picked two left-arm spinners, Tajul Islam and Arifat Sunny, apart from Shakib Al Hasan. Hathurusingha stated that he wanted a bit more variety in the attack.

"Since Shakib is there it's very unlikely we will play all three [left-arm spinners] in a match. It's a tough decision since the two selected left-armers are very good players, but I would have loved to have a different option," said the Lankan, adding that he would have 'loved' to see Jubair play more than just one game in the Dhaka Premier League.

He further said that it would have been 'helpful' if he had a say in the selection.

"As a coach you have plans with the other coaches, senior players and captain. In most of the cases selectors communicate with the coaching staff and have a discussion. In that sense you have a say in the process and it can be helpful. But then again it's the communication that you need," said Hathurusingha.

Despite not having Jubair on the team, the Sri Lankan was happy with the overall balance of the side.

"I am happy with the players that we have got. As a coach you don't get all the players you want. Generally there's a discussion and you are happy if you have 12 or 13 players that you want. And then you can formulate a game plan. There can be different opinions but we have got a really good mix," he explained, adding that his target was to take the Tigers through to the second round of the World Cup.

Soumya Sarkar, who played just one ODI, was the side's most surprising inclusion. Hathurusingha sees him as more of a utility batsman than an all-rounder.

"Soumya has been in the runs and the report that I am getting is that he can bat anywhere from 1 to 7 in the order while being a decent seaming option, so we are definitely looking at his batting. And then if he can contribute with the ball as well, that is a bonus," said Hathurusingha.

Furthermore the coach emphasised on ensuring the fitness levels of his pacers and said he expects them to face a difficult time in Australian conditions. He wants his players to acclimatise to the foreign conditions as soon as possible and believes Shakib's experience in the Big Bash League will come in handy.

"It's an added advantage for Shakib as well as for us. Any player who has an opportunity to go and play earlier...it's an advantage so that's why we are going to Brisbane early as well," he said.



CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA



Australia captain Steve Smith celebrates his century on Day Two of the fourth Test against India at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday.

Smith's fourth in four

AFP, Sydney

Steve Smith joined the greats Wednesday with his fourth century of the series as India hung in after the shock loss of an early wicket on the second day of the final Test in Sydney.

The Aussie skipper became only the third batsman along with Don Bradman and Jacques Kallis to score tons in four consecutive Tests in the same series as his team posted a total beyond 500 for the fourth Test running.

Smith contributed 117 in Australia's first innings declaration of 572 for seven before the tourists were rocked by the third-ball dismissal of opener Murali Vijay for a duck.

At the close, India had stabilised at 71 for one to trail Australia by 501 with Lokesh Rahul on 31 and Rohit Sharma hitting two sixes on his way to 40 not out.

Left-arter Mitchell Starc, bowling with fire and rhythm, slanted one across Vijay and coaxed a snick to wicketkeeper Brad Haddin.

Starc may get into disciplinary trouble for giving Vijay a big send-off, roaring in his face and waving his fists in a fiery opening over as Mitchell Johnson's injury replacement.

But the day belonged to Smith, who added another century to his unbeaten 162 in Adelaide, 133 in Brisbane and 192 in Melbourne in this series.

Australia passed 500 for the fourth Test of the series, a feat last registered against the Gary

Sobers-led West Indies at home in 1968-69.

Smith was out just before lunch when he was caught behind off Umesh Yadav ending his 208-ball knock spiced with 15 fours. He has 698 runs in the series at an average of 139.6, placing him third behind Bradman (715) and Ricky Ponting (706) for most runs in a series against India.

Smith is having an extraordinary purple patch and has now scored six centuries in the first innings of his last seven Tests at home.

Watson again missed out on what would have been only his fifth Test century when, on a flat SCG wicket, he had another brain snap and hoisted Mohammed Shami straight to Ravichandran Ashwin at deep midwicket for 81.

Watson has now scored 24 half-centuries but just four tons in 56 Tests, with his last Test hundred coming against England in Perth in December 2013.

He toiled for 250 minutes and faced 183 balls in putting on 196 runs for the third wicket with Smith.

Shaun Marsh added 73 to his 99 in Melbourne before he was caught behind off Shami nearing tea. Marsh batted for 116 balls with nine fours and a six.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 572 for 7 declared (Rogers 95, Warner 101, Watson 81, Smith 117, Marsh 73, Burns 58, Harris 25; Shami 5-112) INDIA: First innings 71 for 1 (Rahul 31 not out, R Sharma 40 not out; Starc 1-17)

SUMMIT OPEN GOLF

Siddikur lifts title

SPORTS REPORTER

Golfer Siddikur Rahman clinched the title of the 5th Summit Open Golf in the third and final day at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday.

Siddikur, who started the day at nine-under-par, could not repeat his overnight performance yesterday, but his performance of one-under-par 71 was enough to clinch victory.

The 26-year-old golfer played four birdies against three bogies to finish overall 10-under-par 206, while Dulal Hossain played four-under-par in the final day to finish runner-up with overall eight-under-par 208.

Nadal out

AFP, Doha

Rafael Nadal's ability to make a quick recovery from multiple ailments was thrown into doubt Tuesday as he lost 1-6, 6-3, 6-4 to Michael Berrer in Qatar.

Berrer is a 34-year-old qualifier ranked outside the top 100 who is playing the last season of his career.

NZ sweep series

AFP, Wellington



New Zealand recovered from first innings turmoil to beat Sri Lanka by 193 runs in the second Test in Wellington Wednesday and record a 2-0 victory in the two-match series.

It gave the home side a vital confidence boost ahead of the one-day World Cup beginning next month in New Zealand and Australia as Sri Lanka, set a target of 390, were all out for 196.

After the tourists started the final day at 45 for one, fast bowlers Trent Boult and Doug Bracewell tore through the top order with four wickets in the morning, including master batsman Kumar Sangakkara, before the wearing wicket played into the hands of spinner Mark Craig.

Craig took four for 53 with three of the wickets coming after lunch, including Dinesh Chandimal and Rangana Herath in successive balls.

Sri Lanka had two options for the final day -- play for a face-saving draw after commanding the first half of the Test, or play for a win to save the series.

Faint hopes of a remarkable win vanished early when Boult removed nightwatchman Dhammika Prasad for six before continuing his dominance of Sangakkara to dismiss the Sri Lankan legend for five.

Sangakkara, who set up Sri Lanka's 135-run first innings lead with his majestic 203, had reason to feel disappointed with his cheap dismissal in the second innings.

The initial appeal for caught behind, not supported by wicketkeeper BJ Watling, was turned down.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 221 (Williamson 69; Pradeep 4-63, Lakmal 3-71) SRI LANKA: First innings 356 (Sangakkara 203, Chandimal 67; Neesham 3-42, Bracewell 3-93)

NEW ZEALAND: Second innings 524 fir 5 decl (Latham 35, Rutherford 40, Williamson 242 not out, Watling 142 not out; Pradeep 3-117)

SRI LANKA: Second innings 196 all out (Karunaratne 17, Silva 50, Thirimanne 62 not out, Chandimal 13; Boult 2-55, Bracewell 2-25, Craig 4-53)

Result: New Zealand won by 193 runs and clinched two-match series 2-0.

Player-of-the-match: Kane Williamson.

Clarke races against time

AFP, Sydney

Injured Australia captain Michael Clarke said Wednesday his recovery from hamstring surgery was ahead of schedule as he races against the clock to be fit for next month's World Cup.

Clarke said he had begun running since the surgery three weeks ago, after suffering the injury in Australia's first Test victory against India in Adelaide almost a month ago.

Clarke, 33, is expected to be named skipper of the 15-man Australian squad when it is officially announced on Sunday, but it is unclear when he will be fit to return to the field.

Clarke has previously said he is unlikely to be fit for Australia's opening match of the tournament against England at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on February 14.

But Clarke said he was experiencing a quicker-than-expected recovery and could yet be ready to play.

Speaking on Channel Nine's television coverage of the fourth Test against India at the Sydney Cricket Ground, Clarke said he was doing three sessions of practice daily as he ramped up his preparations for the World Cup.

Keep an eye on Sk Russel

SPORTS REPORTER



After a miserable last season, Sheikh Russel formed a strong squad for the upcoming season with the inclusion of seven current national players in a bid to repeat the feat of 2012-13 season in which they won a rare treble.

Sheikh Russel yesterday completed the registration formalities amid a festive mood as the boys from Blue and White reached the headquarter of Bangladesh Football Federation by decorated horsecarts escorted by bikes and a band party.

Sheikh Russel, who failed to retain

the services of most of their treble winning squad's players for an unfruitful last season, signed up current national players Zahid Hasan Emily, Atiqur Rahman Meshu, Mithun Chowdhury, Hemanta Vincent Biswas, Rasel Mahmud Liton and Tapu Barman this time to send a strong message to other contenders.

They also roped in national discards Wali Faisal, Rezaul Karim Reza, Jamal Hossain and Yousuf Sifat and retained the service of eight former players.

"Except the foreign players, the current squad is almost the same compared to the squad that won the treble in 2012-13 season and success depends on the collection of foreign players as we had players like Sony

Norde and Tareq El Janabi that time," said striker Emily, who returned to Sheikh Russel after playing for Mohammedan last season.

Ismat Jamil Akand, director in charge, said that they were trying to bring such quality foreigner players who can outshine the performance of its former Haitian Sony Norde.

Sheikh Russel will start their AFC Cup play-off, which is on February 10, preparation from tomorrow at the Bangladesh Kriya Shikkha Protisthan under Montonegrin coach Dragan Djukanovic, who believes Sheikh Russel will be vying for the professional football league title this season.



Sheikh Russel's foreign recruits - Bosnian defender Bojan Petric (R) and Nigerian striker Nkwocha Kingsley -- arrive at the BFF House on a horsecart to complete their registration formalities yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR