

SPORT



The Export Leader



Bangladesh batsman Mominul Haque plays his trademark cut-shot on way to his tenth consecutive 50-plus score in Test cricket, at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

A desired Tigers day in office

AL-AMIN from Khulna

For someone who has been associated with Bangladesh cricket for a long time and wishing for a near flawless approach from the Tigers to start a Test match, that wish to some extent has been fulfilled at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium here yesterday.

The score-line 236-4 at the end of the opening day's play of the first Test against Pakistan hardly tells how well the Tigers have played to the true essence of the five-day game. The run-rate may not be impressive, but the application on a slow and low wicket where the ball stopped was a sight to behold.

From Tamim Iqbal to Mominul Haque, the last batsman out on the penultimate ball of the day, not a single batsman has thrown his wicket away. The opening pair of Tamim and Imrul Kayes withstood the early pressure, ducking the odd short balls from Wahab Riaz and carefully leaving those zippers on the off-corridor.

The first hour of play saw Bangladesh score just 23 runs in 15 overs and by time the umpires called for the lunch break the score was 60-1. It was 150-2 at tea and the day could have ended in a more befitting fashion had Mominul not missed that arm ball from left-arm spinner Zulfiqar Babar.

But by the time the tiny Mominul led all the men in white out of the ground he has racked up yet another half-century, his tenth in as many matches. Mominul was out after scoring a composed 80, the highest on the day.

When the left-hander arrived at the crease in the 27th over after Tamim (25) was smartly caught by Azhar Ali at short leg, it was like cometh the man tailor-made for Tests. He struck eight boundaries in his 162-ball vigil, including two superbly executed cuts off Mohammad Hafeez. Mominul, not convinced whether the ball had hit his pad in line, asked for review which was eventually turned down. He was earlier given a second life on 17 by Babar, who failed to take a tough return catch.

And in the process Bangladesh lost one of their two first innings reviews against Pakistan's none. Pakistan had asked for two reviews and both were unsuccessful.

Imrul played the best shot of the day -- a hook against Wahab down to the square-leg boundary -- to complete his 50 off 130 balls with a boundary off Hafeez. But he got out to the same bowler in the same over while attempting a flick, managing only a leading edge for a tame catch back to the bowler.

WORLD WILL SEE WHEN SILK ADORNS YOUR LIFE

'Felt like a 100-year effort'

SPORTS REPORTER from Khulna

When compared to his previous knocks, Mominul Haque's 80 at Khulna yesterday wasn't exactly the smoothest.

The batsman himself perhaps best described his innings after stumps yesterday: "I may have scored just 80, but it felt like I batted for a 100 years."

However, it was the sort of innings that the diminutive batsman needed under his belt in order to regain confidence. Having gone through a difficult World Cup campaign and failing to find a place in the ODI side for a while, Mominul needed to brush aside the lean patch and start afresh in a format that he averages a mammoth 63.90 with the bat in. "I try to

stay mentally positive. I don't listen to what is being said. I will do what I have to do and not worry about the consequences," Mominul told reporters in the post-match press conference with regards to the difficult last few months.

"I am playing a Test match after four months. I try to remember the routines of the previous game and follow it. If it goes haywire, it becomes difficult," he added.

There were times when the left-hander looked streaky on the two-paced wicket at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna. He was dropped a couple of times. He looked comfortable when he merely defended the deliveries on the back-foot. However, it was the acceleration that was the problem.

In a bid to up the run-rate, the left-hander was compelled to even

Mominul Haque became the seventh batsman to score ten consecutive 50-plus scores in Test matches.

The 95-run stand between Mominul and Mahmudullah is Bangladesh's second highest for the third wicket against Pakistan.

wickets had we forced the issue. It is better to stay at the wicket, which will be good for the team," explained the left-hander.

"We can get wickets if we bowl stump to stump. I think 300 runs is enough, if you look at the wicket. Today they gave very few bad balls. Each and every bowler was hard to tackle," Mominul added.

The top-order batsman, who was dismissed with the last ball of the day, said he had a lapse of concentration.

"We would have been in a better position had I not been dismissed. But I still feel we are in a good position. A wicket at this late stage is a bonus to them. I played that ball quite poorly. Maybe I was a bit casual. Sometimes the mind wanders when you are out in the middle for a long time. I think I got out because I had a lapse in concentration," said Mominul.

WE KEEP OUR PROMISE

ANWAR CEMENT

Mahmudullah also played obdurately for his 49 off 123 balls, but got out to a superb delivery from Wahab, who squared him up with an angled ball that the batsman could only nick behind the wicket where wicketkeeper Sarfraz Ahmed took a diving catch. It was a spectacular effort from Sarfraz in a Pakistan fielding, which was again not up to the mark. The butter-fingered fielders dropped Tamim while he was on 17, Imrul at 12 and on 30.

But Pakistan bowled a disciplined line and length and hardly allowed the Tigers, apparently on first gear, to score easy runs. With Shakib Al Hasan at the crease on 19 and captain Mushfiq Rahim to join on the second morning, it now remains to be seen how the two best Bangladesh batsmen negotiate the morning session before stepping up the gear.

SUPERCRETE CEMENT

SUPER PERFORMER OF THE DAY

Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd.

MOMINUL HAQUE

At the end of the first day of the first Test in Khulna, the visitors Pakistan will probably be the happier of the two sides for having taken four wickets on a placid wicket. Despite dropping a few catches, Pakistan will be especially happy with the wicket in the 90th over of that of Mominul Haque, who has a knack of scoring big runs in the longer version of the game. The diminutive batsman didn't play the most attractive or composed knock of his life but he made sure he got a fifty-plus score for the tenth successive Test. His 80 runs contributed to three important partnerships. Mominul's choice of reviewing the lbw decision might not have been the wisest one, but given his young age it is expected that the southpaw will learn from his mistakes.

Zim series in limbo

AGENCIES, Lahore

Pakistan Cricket Board and Zimbabwe Cricket have agreed in principle for the latter's tour to Pakistan but final clearance will be given by a Zimbabwean security delegation, visiting Lahore on May 5.

A PCB official wishing not to be named said that there is no visible hurdle in the tour as both boards had agreed but the final decision can only be made public when the Zimbabwe security team clears it.

Dispelling the impression given in the media that Zimbabwe cricketers are reluctant to tour Pakistan on security fears, the official said no such thing was happening but in fact some international cricket bodies are not happy over the development and so negative news are being spread.

Logically illogical

AL-AMIN from Khulna

The Tigers have certainly extended their purple patch to yet another day at Khulna yesterday. A resolute and disciplined batting at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium put them at par with Pakistan if not in pole position after the opening day's play of the first Test. A score of 236-4 is more than satisfying on a slow and low wicket where playing shot was a tough proposition for any damn good batsman.

The batting approach was arguably not defensive. But it is unfortunate to address that the mindset was defensive, especially after the Tigers coach and captain's pre-match remarks of 'starting the Test with a win at the back of their mind'.

To be precise the playing eleven sans leg-spinner Jubair Hossain gave ample evidence that safety first was the first concern for the team management instead of trying to take 20 Pakistan wickets. Jubair was left out to accommodate off-spinner Shuvagoto Hom, who is

actually more a batsman than a right-arm finger-spinner. And it won't be an exaggeration if Shuvagoto, who is certainly a very good batsman, is bracketed with any other average off-spinner playing in domestic cricket.

There was no official comment from the team management about what was the logic behind dropping Jubair, the only leg-spinner in Bangladesh's horizon to have impressed in the last series against Zimbabwe. There is a notion that the young leggie has hardly played in domestic cricket and might not be able to bowl long spells. The second thinking was, with Shuvagoto in the side, the Tigers will enjoy more depth in the batting.

If the second notion is what the team management had entertained then the word 'a win in the back of their mind' was just eyewash.

While Jubair was left out, opposition Pakistan not only have drafted in their leg-spinner Yasir Shah but also tried everything in their power to make him fit for the Test after he was injured at the start of the ODI series.

Yasir not only bowled well on the opening day at Khulna, but also looked a more threatening bowler for the Bangladesh batsmen in the middle. Leg-spinners are always exciting. They can purchase you wickets. The wicket at Khulna is not turning that much now. But come the fourth day and the fifth day, a leg-spinner will be the one a captain, desperate to win a game, will turn to even than a pace bowler.

The Tigers may end up well even without a leggie, but that will not solve the crux of the problem, a problem of imposing ideas that belies logic. We are not sure whether the Tigers team management is working in harmony with the selectors. If that is the case then the selectors should not have picked Jubair even in the Test squad.

The Jubair issue reminds us of those early days of our cricket when personal or group agenda played a big role in the selection of a player in the national team. We want to believe that we are not backtracking at a time when the cricketers are moving forward in the middle.

DAN CAKE

THE FINE ART OF BAKING

BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH: First innings/B 4s/6s

Tamim c Azhar b Yasir	25/74	3/0		
Imrul c & b Hafeez	51/130	6/0		
Mominul lbw b Babar	80/162	8/0		
Mahmudullah c Sarfraz b Riaz	49/123	6/0		
Shakib not out	19/53	2/0		
Extras: (lb-5, nb-7)	12			
Total: (For 4 wickets in 89.5 overs)	236			
To bat: Mushfiq, Soumya, Shuvagata, Taijul, Rubel, Shahid.				
Fall of wickets: 1-52, 2-92, 3-187, 4-236.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Junaid	16	2	40	0
Riaz	19	5	40	1
Hafeez	15	5	38	1
Babar	21.5	3	55	1
Yasir	18	1	58	1

PAKISTAN: Hafeez, Aslam, Azhar, Yousif, Misbahul, Shafiq, Sarfraz, Riaz, Yasir, Junaid, Babar.

Toss: Bangladesh

Umpires: N Llong (England) and REJ Martinez (Sri Lanka)

TV umpire: P Reiffel (Australia)

Match referee: J Crowe (New Zealand)

Taylor to lead England?

AFP, London

James Taylor could find himself captain of the England ODI side when the team to play Ireland is announced Tuesday.

England's fixtures mean that none of the players selected for the third and final Test against the West Indies will be available for the match, as the squad are only due back from the Caribbean the previous day.

While it is possible that players currently in the West Indies who were not for the third Test could be released early to join the ODI squad, England will still need a new captain.

Eoin Morgan's absence will mean Nottinghamshire batsman Taylor is in line to lead the side, although his career is only 4 years old.

'Still in the balance'

SPORTS REPORTER from Khulna

Pakistan vice-captain Azhar Ali believed that Mominul Haque's wicket at end of day one yesterday put the match in balance. Some disciplined bowling from the visitors restricted the Tigers to a run-rate below three on day one, however, it was their fielding which let them down yet again.

"I think it's quite even at the moment. The wicket is very good. I don't think it got away from us. I think it evened the day. The last wicket was quite good for us. We could have had six to seven wickets to end today, but it did not happen. But we would have liked two more wickets," said Azhar at the post-day press conference yesterday.

"I think they [Bangladesh] played well, the ball wasn't coming on to the bat. It is a slow track so it was difficult to take wickets and it was definitely difficult to score runs as well," he added.

Azar believed that the late wicket of Mominul would drive the visitors on day two and help them make a better start. "We were looking for it [the wicket] and it was a good time to get it. Obviously when you finish the day on a high, it lifts the team's spirit. And when we come back tomorrow it will help us.

"As a bowling unit you have to believe that you can take those wickets and we have that belief. We will come and try hard to take the remaining wickets tomorrow," he added.



Pakistan leg-spinner Yasir Shah took the prized wicket of Tamim Iqbal, but his day was spoilt as he failed to hold on to Imrul Kayes' shot. PHOTO: STAR

Holder a doubt

AGENCIES, Grenada

A late decision will be made on Jason Holder's fitness for the third and final Test against England, starting Friday.

The lanky bowler injured his left ankle after tripping during his delivery while bowling during the second innings of the second Test. He was stretched off the field and did not return.

The only concern is the player's ability to handle a heavy workload in the upcoming Test, with a decision to be made late Thursday or Friday morning.