

SPORT



The Export Leader



Shakib Al Hasan has endured a gruelling Test match against Pakistan so far, failing to perform with either the bat or ball. The vital question for Bangladesh is whether he can turn it around today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

WORLD WILL SEE WHEN SILK ADORN YOUR LIFE

Not just like Shakib

AL-AMIN from Khulna

Cricket is a cruel game. And it was crueler for even one of its best exponents. You are dominating one day, but you can easily find yourself as ordinary as anybody else on the next day. Looking for example? Look at Bangladesh's champion all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan in the first Test against Pakistan at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna.

At the end of third day's play on Thursday, the bowling figures of the left-arm spinner were 31 overs 3 maidens 122 runs and nothing in the wicket column. This is a kind of statistic that hardly goes with his performance in his 38 Tests.

With no malice intended it just doesn't match the champion bowler who took a ten-wicket haul at this very ground when

Bangladesh played against Zimbabwe six months ago.

If anybody wants to suggest that Zimbabwe are not Pakistan, who are a very good Test team, this is for their understanding that let us reflect on what Shakib did when Bangladesh last played against Pakistan in Dhaka in 2011.

He scored a brilliant 144 in the first innings and took six wickets -- he had a match haul of seven -- in that Dhaka Test that Pakistan won by seven wickets.

Shakib is the kind of player you can't take your eyes off of whenever he is out in the middle. He is by far the top performer for Bangladesh. Unfortunately, the last two days have been about struggle that he has hardly been associated with. He scored a struggling 25 runs and when it was his turn to prove his words "our bowling is better than Pakistan's" right, he failed to live up to his billing.

The left-arm spinner also went

on record by saying that what he needed was to find his rhythm back and the sooner the better. Sadly though, he was not in any sort of rhythm and was duly punished whenever he erred his line and length. And his inability to put any kind of pressure played a big part in the performance of other bowlers.

An ineffective Shakib has certainly provided plenty of pleasure in the opposition camp and his rival Mohammad Hafeez made that no secret while speaking at a press briefing.

"Shakib is the most important player in the Bangladesh team. We had a plan against him that we have executed well. And I have attacked him whenever I got the opportunity," said a beaming Hafeez, whose strike rate against Shakib was 85.7 compared to his overall strike rate of 67.46. He scored 57 runs off 67 balls against Shakib.

It's true that Shakib was not in any sort of rhythm with the ball and to be honest he has not been that deadly even in the preceding one-day series. He has actually not been playing the longer version cricket for the last six odd months, which perhaps played some part in his bowling performance. He refused to accept this the other day, but it will be wise for him to review his own assessment for his own sake in particular and for the Tigers in general.

There might be one more good reason of 'mental and physical fatigue' in Shakib's case that captain Mushfiqur Rahim wanted to address, but we want to believe that he will come back strongly, as he did against the same opponents four years ago.

His previous worst bowling figures of 41.5-7-121-0 were against Pakistan in Chittagong in 2011. And everybody knows what he did next in Dhaka.

Hafeez lifts Pakistan as Tigers' misery on

AL-AMIN from Khulna

The good news for Bangladesh cricket fans is that the Tigers are now ranked eighth pushing Pakistan in the ninth position on the ICC ODI rankings. But the bad news is that Pakistan continued to reign supreme in the longest version of the game against Bangladesh in Khulna.

At stumps on the third day, the visitors piled up a massive 537 for 5, a first innings lead of 205 runs already, thanks to a magnificent maiden double-hundred by opener Mohammad Hafeez.

Hafeez, who resumed the day on 137, surpassed his previous best of 197 against New Zealand earlier this year with a couple down to square leg. The Professor, fondly called by his teammates, was eventually out after scoring 224, which is also the highest innings by a Pakistani against Bangladesh after Mohammad Yousuf's 204 not out and Younis Khan's unbeaten 200.

healthy run-rate of 3.6 was evident even after their captain Misbah arrived at the crease following the dismissal of Younis, who paid the penalty for playing on the back foot against a delivery from left-arm spinner Taijul Islam that turned and bounced before kissing the off-stump.

Misbah is criticised for being a slow starter. But his first scoring shot just after his arrival at the wicket was a lofted straight drive for a six against Taijul. He struck another six and four boundaries before holing out top-edging a Taijul delivery

On a day of run-fest against a Bangladesh attack, that lacked bite due to ineffective bowling from Shakib Al Hasan, captain Misbahul Haq (59), Asad Shafiq (51 not out) and Sarfraz Ahmed (51 not out) also hit half-centuries after Azhar Ali, the other overnight batsman, was bowled by off-spinner Shuvagato Hom for 83.

But by the time Azhar was out he put on 227 runs with Hafeez for the second wicket, the second highest Pakistan partnership for any wicket against Bangladesh. Hafeez, who was then on 167, was not ready to resign without his unique double.

Hafeez struck 23 boundaries and three sixes in his almost flawless 332-ball innings, the only blemish of which was a confident caught behind appeal while he was on 15.

It was toil all day for the Bangladesh bowlers in hot and humid conditions. And the Pakistan approach of maintaining a

down to Rubel Hossain on long leg. Shafiq struck five boundaries for his unbeaten 103-ball 51. But Sarfraz was in attacking mood ever since he arrived at the wicket. The wicketkeeper-batsman cut, pulled and drove his way to a fluent unbeaten 51 off 54 balls with the help of three fours and two sixes against a predictable 5-4 field set by Tamim Iqbal, who was doing the captain's job in the absence of an injured Mushfiqur Rahim, still nursing a bruised ring finger.

As the fourth morning is in the horizon with Pakistan set to step up a gear, it remains to be seen how long they bat and what amount of lead they want. With an intention of not to bat again, Pakistan are expected to take the lead beyond 300, which is a reality.

Bangladesh, who are now in a position to think only of a draw, will definitely be up against an uphill task of saving the match in the next two days.



Mohammed Hafeez continued his rich vein of form in Tests, scoring 224 runs against Bangladesh, which laid the platform for Pakistan's 205-run lead at the end of Day 3.

PHOTO: STAR

SUPERCRETE CEMENT

SUPER PERFORMER OF THE DAY

Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd.

MOHAMMAD HAFEEZ

Mohammad Hafeez started off day three of the first Test against Bangladesh from where he had left off at the end of the second day. Resuming at 137 off 179 deliveries, the Pakistan opener made his intentions clear very early by pulling one for four in the very first over from Shakib Al Hasan. The right-hander reached his 150 from 205 deliveries and didn't slow down as he brought up his first double hundred in 286 deliveries. Hafeez's herculean ended after he had amassing 224 off 332 deliveries, when he nicked one off Shuvagata Hom to Mahmudullah Riyad at leg-slip. This was the highest individual score for any Pakistan batsman against Bangladesh and the third double hundred against Bangladesh for the Pakistan batsmen overall. This innings was just a continuation of the brilliant form the opener has been in Test cricket. His latest three Tests include scores of 96, 101*, 197, 24 and 224 since November last year, aggregating to 642 runs. His batting average has also climbed up to 40.33 from 33.16 in just the last three matches.

DAN CAKE

THE FINE ART OF BAKING

BANGLADESH-PAKISTAN SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH: First innings 332 (Tamim 25, Imrul 51, Mominul 80, Mahmudullah 49, Shakib 25, Mushfiqur 32, Soumya 33; Riaz 3-26, Hafeez 2-18, Babar 2-32, Yasir 3-28)

PAKISTAN: First Innings R/B 4/6 (overnight 227 for 1)

Hafeez c Mahmudullah b Hom 224/332 23/3
 Aslam c Mushfiqur b Taijul 20/36 2/1
 Azhar b Hom 83/177 4/1
 Younis b Taijul 33/68 4/0
 Misbahul c Rubel b Taijul 59/122 4/2
 Shafiq not out 51/103 5/0
 Sarfraz not out 51/54 3/2
 Extras: (b 5, lb 4, w 3, nb 4) 16
 Total: (For 5 wickets in 148 overs) 537
 To bat: Riaz, Yasir, Junaid, Babar.
 Fall of wickets: 1-50, 2-277, 3-339, 4-402, 5-468

Bowler O M R W
 Rubel 22 3 82 0
 Shahid 17 4 51 0
 Taijul 36 3 116 3
 Hom 32 1 112 2
 Shakib 31 3 122 0
 Mahmudullah 4 0 30 0
 Soumya 1 0 2 0
 Mominul 5 0 13 0

Toss: Bangladesh
Umpires: N Long (Eng) and R Martinez (Sri)
TV umpire: P Reiffel (Australia)
Match referee: J Crowe (New Zealand)
Reserve umpire: Sharfuddoula

Mushfiqur in double pain

SM ZAKARIA from Khulna

Captain Mushfiqur Rahim was in pain all day yesterday. He injured the ring finger in his right hand the day before and sat out the third day's play. The on-field proceedings at Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium did not give him any comfort either.

Pakistan reached stumps at 537 for five in the first innings on the day in reply to the hosts' 332 and the Tigers are already faced with the risk of another innings defeat in Test cricket.

The Tigers captain came out on the field after the day's play and was running from one end of the stadium to the other, may be to try and keep himself moving. A reporter then inquired about his finger and he replied: "So, so."

He then took the trouble of shaking hands with Mohammad Hafeez to congratulate him on his double-century as the Pakistan all-rounder was passing by to attend the post-day press briefing.

After another couple of sprints, Mushfiqur said about the injury that it was difficult for him to hold the bat now as he was still feeling the pain. And his subsequent words made it clearer that he was bleeding inside.

"We are already 205 runs behind with half of their side intact, thinking of a win is just unrealistic. We will have to bat out around five sessions to save the match. But impossible is nothing.

"They will try to score quick runs in the first hour tomorrow to give us enough time. But at the same time, if we can take a few quick wickets then we will be able to keep them under control," said the wicketkeeper-batsman.

But he was not all too down.

"Anything is possible on this wicket. As you can see from the first innings, scoring wasn't easy at that time. They bowled well, and our batsmen applied themselves on a par with them. Now it has eased up a little and if we can bat for five sessions that will do us a world of good."

'Not my best knock'

SPORTS REPORTER from Khulna

He was criticised after the ODI series. The way Arafat Sunny repeatedly duped him in limited overs made even his most ardent fans doubt him. However, all those fears were alleviated after the start of the Test series. The cogwheels started churning again and Mohammad Hafeez hammered his way back to form.

His double hundred yesterday took his overall tally to 642 runs in the last three Tests. He has had scores of 96, 101, 197, 24 and 224. Hafeez, who got out in an unlikely fashion yesterday -- he was caught at leg-slip while attempting a sweep off leg-stump delivery -- admitted that he was relieved after the innings.

"I was under pressure after the ODI series and I knew I had to do something to regain my confidence and I tried hard. There was a demand for the team to play a positive innings and I am happy that I was able to do the best for my side," a composed Hafeez told reporters at the post-day press conference in Khulna.

While this was Hafeez's first double hundred he didn't rate it as his best innings.

"This is not really the best one but you can say that it is one of the best I can

remember. And a double hundred is always special for any batsman in the world," he said.

"I am not here to prove myself to anyone... I know that in the past I had to prove myself after every one or two matches. But today I prefer doing the most for my team and not myself," he added.

A great planner of the game, Hafeez revealed that one of their plans was to take the attack to Shakib Al Hasan, the most threatening of Bangladesh's bowlers.

"As a team we rate him very highly, since we know that he is one of the key factors in their team. But we wanted to minimise the Shakib impact by putting pressure on him. He was trying a little bit too much so I had gone with an attacking mindset. I didn't want to leave anything and tried to cash in on every ball and that worked for me against him," said Hafeez.

"At a certain stage they bowled well, applied some good technique and we had to adjust accordingly. They bowled well in patches with planning, but I stayed positive and attacked. That helped me to score, which helped my team strengthen their grip on the game," he added.

Hafeez further said that the visitors would aim for a lead of at least 300 runs before the end of the first innings.

Hafeez has made **642** runs in his last three Tests with scores of 96, 101*, 197, 24 and 224.

Hafeez's batting average in Tests has gone up from **33.16** to **40.33** in the last three matches.