

SPORT



TIME TO SOLIDATE



The Export Leader

CROWN CEMENT



Shakib Al Hasan drives one inside-out at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday during his 68-ball 52. He was one of the three local half-centurions of the match yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'I always keep my cool'

NAIMUL KARIM



At no point of the match yesterday did Mustafizur Rahman let the batsmen dominate him. When Rohit Sharma pulled him for a six in the early stages of the match, he came back with his off-cutter to produce an edge in the very next ball.

A collision with Mahendra Singh Dhoni could have knocked anyone unconscious, Mustafizur, though had different plans. While he did leave the field temporarily, he came back to complete a superb five-wicket haul.

When he was brought on in the Powerplay overs as a replacement for Rubel Hossain, Suresh Raina greeted him with an astounding six over covers. Any other debutant would have probably found it difficult to even stick to a right line after that hit. But Mustafizur came back with yet another off-cutter to uproot Raina's stumps. He followed that with Ravi Ashwin's wicket with the next ball.



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

outfoxed one of the best batting line-ups of the world on a batting-friendly pitch.

"The fact that I was playing with India in itself was very exciting. The five-wicket haul felt good," said Mustafizur.

Despite a relatively quiet press conference, Mustafizur did manage to reveal the secret behind his off-cutters.

"When I bowled in the under-19 level I could swing the ball. Then one day [Anamul Haque] Bijoy bhai asked me if I could cut the ball. I tried doing that and surprisingly, got him out with that delivery," laughed Mustafizur.

A rare left-arm pacer in Bangladesh's cricket, the 19-year-old only began playing first-class cricket a year back. In fact, only four years ago, he used to travel 40 kms every day from his village in Tetulia to Satkhira on a scooter with his brother, in order to play for a club there.

It was his brother Mogleshur Rahman, who first asked him to take part in an inter-district pacer hunt in Satkhira, which initiated his career.

"I want to thank my brother for all that he has done. I want to thank my entire family actually," Mustafizur quietly muttered.

A fan of Pakistan's Mohammad Aamer, when Mustafizur was asked if he used any special tactic to stay calm on the field, he merely answered the question in one line: 'I always keep my cool.'

He also played down the collision that he had on the field with India captain Dhoni. "I was standing in the line when that happened. We talked later and sorted it out," he said.



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There were few players on the field that had to deal with the amount of brunt that Mustafizur went through yesterday and yet, at no point of the match did he seem uncomfortable. He was as calm as ever; almost as though he had found a new home to live in.

However, the moment Mustafizur stepped outside the field, a different shade took over him. He was shy and barely looked in control during the press conference.

Some of the questions were answered in one line, whereas the others were met with an innocent face. By the end of the press conference, he was helplessly looking at his captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and BCB media manager Rabeed Imam for some help.

The journalists though didn't mind. Those may have been one-line answers, but they were gold, considering the fact that this young man had almost single-handedly



WORLD WILL SEE WHEN SILK ADORNS YOUR LIFE

FEW FIRSTS BY THE TIGERS

Bangladesh posted their highest ever total against India, 307, yesterday

The 102-run stand between Soumya Sarkar and Tamim Iqbal was Bangladesh's highest opening partnership against India

Bangladesh reached 100 runs in 79 balls yesterday; their fastest against any top-eight ranked side

Both Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal scored their 19th half-centuries in Bangladesh yesterday

Batting delights

AL-AMIN

When England the other day proved that even a score of close to 400 was not safe, what about Bangladesh's total of 307 at Mirpur yesterday? Will India romp past that mark? This was a puzzle that was to be answered later Thursday night, provided that rain stayed away during the Indian innings under lights.

But if you are a Tigers fan and want not to be bothered about what to follow then the home side's first innings total beyond 300, a first for them against the mighty Indians in the shorter version, was something to behold.

One may say that Bangladesh

might have scored 50 odd runs short on a brilliant batting wicket. The argument could be that the Tigers should have carefully avoided India's best bowler on the field Ravichandran Ashwin after that rain break. But despite that, a collapse after an hour of rain interruptions, it was one of those rare days the Tigers dominated a better side.

Seventy-nine runs in 10 overs and 100 on the board in the 13th were how openers Tamim Iqbal and Soumya Sarkar went about a serious business against a vaunted Indian attack. It was however not the runs but the manner in which those were scored. Everybody is aware of what Tamim is capable of with his brute power. But it was the other left-hander, who for a change

dominated even an on-song Tamim with his elegance and pristine touch.

Soumya made a good impression in the World Cup and against Pakistan last month. But his 38-ball half-century yesterday was a class apart. His effortless pull on the back foot and exquisite square drives were a treat to watch.

It took India a certain degree of luck to break the menacing pair with Soumya being run out after failing to back up while chasing a non-existent single. Rain poured soon after and a witty journal quipped that it brought more relief to the Indians than the hosts.

Tamim struck a fluent run-a-ball 50 before holing out in the deep while trying to force Ashwin.

Mushfiqur Rahim and debutant

Liton Das also fell to Ashwin with the former unnecessarily trying the aerial route.

With four wickets down at 146 Bangladesh suddenly looked out of sorts. But a new-look Tigers, who have now made it a habit of turning things around, found a wily Shakib Al Hasan and along with him another young prospect Sabbir Rahman. The pair added 83 runs for the fifth wicket before Sabbir departed for a fine 41. Shakib struck his fifty but suffered a soft dismissal when he was about to cut loose.

The Indian pace bowlers might have bowled with their tails up against the opposition tail, but India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni must have tried his best to hide them somewhere when the true Tigers were in full cry.

A dose of pace

NAIMUL KARIM



Eyes were blinked, heads were scratched and a sense of confusion seemed to spread across the Mirpur press box as soon as Bangladesh's team for the first ODI against India was announced yesterday.

Out of the blue, the Tigers had decided to field four specialist pacers, a decision which came as a surprise due to a number of reasons. For one, the bowler who was replaced -- Arafat Sunny -- did little wrong in the last few matches. He was, in fact, the highest wicket-taker in the Pakistan series.

Secondly, the pacer who came in place of him, Mustafizur Rahman, had played just one T20I prior to the match yesterday.

Now this wasn't the first time that Bangladesh had employed four specialist pacers in their side, but it has been a while since the home crowd got to witness such a combination.

The last time Bangladesh's pacers bowled more than 35 overs in an ODI at home was back on December 26, 2004 with Khaled Mahmud, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Tapash Baisya and Nazmul Hossain forming Bangladesh's attack against India.

Incidentally, Bangladesh went on to win that game at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

There was always a chance to use the left-handed Mustafizur as a surprise element in this series, however to go with him in the very first match -- instead of a more sedate and safe segment of the competition -- was a move that not many had expected.

But then again, expecting the unexpected had seemed to be the motto of the Chandika Hathurusingha-led team management, ever since the Sri Lankan took over in June last year.

The last year has witnessed the team management employ a number of moves that one can't generally associate with the men in green. They have been more aggressive, and the urge to win seems to have doubled.

Right from smothering the Indians with pace and bounce in June last year -- in an attempt to play to their weakness -- to stepping out of the mentality of filling the eleven with slow left-armers, there's been this conscious effort to change the look of the team.

In fact, the changed mindset was witnessed in the lone Test against India as well. Bangladesh's team management decided to field just

one pacer and four spinners -- a move that came under heavy scrutiny.

However, from the way Ravi Ashwin and Harbhajan Singh turned the ball in the latter days of that Test in Fatullah, one could say that the objective there too was to go on an all-out attack against the visitors; to go with the only tactic that could give them a possible win.

Yesterday was no different. The only reason why Mustafizur was brought in was because the management wanted to hurt India at their most vulnerable point of the series -- right at the beginning.

They decided to bring in a bowler that India had never seen before; they wanted to make the visiting batsmen pay for all those extra hours they put in against slow left-armers in the nets.

'Guess what? We just have one slow left-arter in the side. Now here's a dose of our pacers' was the message.

There's no doubt that a certain amount of risk remains in these tactics. But in circumstances like these, it's not the result that matters, but the thinking; the ideas behind the moves; an aspect that has provided Bangladesh's fans with some much-needed fresh air in the last one year.

Dhoni blames his batsmen

SPORTS REPORTER



India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni credited Bangladesh's bowlers and also blamed his batsmen for the defeat at Mirpur yesterday.

Speaking to reporters at the stadium, Dhoni praised the way Mustafizur Rahman used his variations to outfox the visitors.

"Today he bowled really well. Being a left-arter is certainly an advantage. He mixed his variations well. That was the main reason why he was so successful," said Dhoni.

"I think the key to chasing down big totals is partnerships. The bigger the partnership, the easier it becomes. We kept losing wickets in the middle, which I feel was crucial, especially on wickets that turn out to be on the slower side. The batting was really not up to it," he added.

Furthermore he praised the way Bangladesh's batsmen took on the bowlers right from the word go.

"They were successful. It's not as though we bowled bad deliveries. They went after the bowlers even when they bowled good deliveries. 308 was an achievable target but the batting was not up to it," said Dhoni.

When asked about the key aspects of Bangladesh's match that changed the game, the skipper said, "I think, their bowling and our batting. Though they bowled well, they knew the home conditions well and they knew the kind of variations that would be helpful."

Dhoni's collision with the young Mustafizur garnered plenty of attention on social media by the time the match was over last night. Mustafizur had to leave the field temporarily, before coming back to complete his five-wicket haul.

Speaking about the collision he said, "Well I thought he would move, he thought I would move and at the end both of us collided. I have to take the closest path to the crease. It was a typical street clash. Thankfully neither of us got injured."

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SOUMYA SARKAR

 There might have been a number of batsmen who got set for Bangladesh yesterday, but Soumya Sarkar's innings was easily the most dominant of them all. The manner in which the left-hander swayed his bat so delicately and found the gaps in the field almost at will, left Mahendra Singh Dhoni and company in tatters in the first 10 overs. Yes, Tamim Iqbal too was getting runs at the other end, but it was the apparent ease with which Soumya played his innings that further pressurised the opposition. He reached his half-century in the classiest of fashions; calmly upper-cutting a Mohit Sharma bouncer over the wicketkeeper for a four. That shot showed that Soumya was in it for a big knock; that yesterday could have been his day. However, the enthusiasm got the better of him as he got run out just before the rain arrived. He hit eight fours and one six in his 40-ball 54.

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