

SPORT



Shikib Al Hasan (L) was a shining light in an otherwise forgettable Bangladesh performance as the top all-rounder in ODIs scored an innings-best 48 against South Africa in the first ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



'Never even dreamt of this start'

NAIMUL KARIM

On the field Kagiso Rabada was a menace. His sharp line and length, combined with the odd bouncers and lethal yorkers, almost single-handedly dismantled Bangladesh's batting line-up.

Off the field, his excitement and animated yet gentle replies to the journalists' questions at the post-match press conference reminded everyone that this pacer is just 20 years old.

In just one match, the youngster broke two long-standing records. His figures of 6 for 16 are now the best by a South African and are also the best bowling figures in an ODI on debut. Rabada perhaps best

described his own achievement saying, "I couldn't even dream of a start like this."

"When I was bowling in the warm-up I felt a good rhythm, so I was itching to get on. And the wickets just came. I was not planning for this," he added.

It was his hat-trick that put the hosts on the back-foot right from the word go.

"I didn't know where to bowl. I was like... yorker, bouncer, normal length delivery. Then I went for the yorker and missed it by miles," laughed Rabada when asked what was going on in his head as he was running up to bowl the hat-trick delivery.

While he may have achieved remarkable figures in yesterday's match, his plan was simple.

"The wicket looked like it had a bit more grass on it than the T20Is which encouraged me a little bit. I was just going in there and

trying to execute good length, line and varying it with some bouncers and yorkers that we have been working on in practice sessions," said Rabada, adding that he enjoyed getting Tamim Iqbal's wicket the most.

Seated next to Rabada was the calmer and more composed Hashim Amla. He may have seen it all in his career, but he too couldn't stop breaking into spurts of laughter every now and then, while observing his younger compatriot.

"No I didn't," Amla remarked when asked if he expected such a comprehensive victory.

"Obviously Bangladesh have had some good series over the last couple of months. You kind of expect a team to perform at that level all the time. And obviously you have to give credit to KG [Rabada] and our bowlers. They bowled exceptionally well."

"I didn't expect the victory to be as comprehensive as it was, but we will take it and we are happy to go out on Sunday 1-0 up. It will be great if we can clinch the series there," said Amla.

While the South Africa skipper congratulated Rabada on his achievement, he also put emphasis on the fact that there were still two more ODIs to go in the series.

"Anybody taking six wickets in an ODI is surprising. It doesn't happen that often. Many congrats to him. But as I said, Sunday is another game. The way we look at it is he had a great game today."

"But he is not the kind of person who is going to back down and say 'Oh, I just picked up six wickets and I am going to try and live my life off it.' He works very hard and we are blessed to have him," said Amla.

THE NUMBERS

Rabada's figures of 6 for 16 are the best ever by a bowler on debut, beating West Indian Fidel Edwards's 6 for 22 in 2003.

Rabada also beat Makhaya Ntini's 6 for 22 to post the best ever bowling figures by a South African in ODIs.

Rabada also became the second person, after Tajjul Islam, to take a hat-trick on debut.

Shakib Al Hasan became the first Bangladesh batsman to score more than 2000 runs in any venue yesterday. He currently has 2034 runs in Mirpur.

Soumya Sarker got out in the 20s for the sixth time in his 14-match long career yesterday.

Batting in the doldrums

SPORTS REPORTER



At the end of the 20th over of the Bangladesh innings yesterday, Mushfiqur Rahim played his favourite shot against JP Duminy, slog-sweeping the off-spinner in an attempt to up the ante. But unfortunately for Mushfiqur and the thousands of fans who had braved the rains to come to the stadium, the shot only resulted in a simple catch at long-on.

That very moment perhaps best describes the kind of struggle the wicketkeeper-batsman, and Bangladesh's batting order in general, is going through. Just a few months ago, a slog-sweep from the bat of Mushfiqur was almost bound to go over the ropes. It's a shot that he often tends to use in order to relieve the pressure, and at times to keep up with the run-rate. However, things haven't been going according to plans for the Bangladesh stalwart ever since the India series.

The last two matches saw him get out against the flow of the game. There was a good partnership going on with Shakib Al Hasan at the other end yesterday as the partnership had just crossed the half-century mark. However, just like in the second T20I, Mushfiqur's sudden urge to clear the ropes led to his downfall and accentuated the collapse.

Sure enough, Mushfiqur isn't the only person to blame in this scenario. In fact Mushfiqur's bad run just goes on to show how dependent Bangladesh's middle order has been on him since the World Cup. Issues at the top order for



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal once again started the parade back to the pavilion. His dismissal was followed by two more on the trot as Kagiso Rabada completed his hat-trick on debut.

PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh have been common in the last couple of years. Tamim Iqbal's inconsistency, Anamul Haque's lack of foot movement or Mahmudullah Riyad's lack of form are concerns that have frequently come up. However, there was always a sense of assurance whenever Mushfiqur had walked out to the middle. That assurance, at the moment though, seems to be wavering. With the top order underperforming yet again, and Mushfiqur unable to remain as consistent as has been over the last two years, Bangladesh's batting order seems to be in dire straits.

There is no doubt that there is plenty of fire in this Bangladeshi batting line-up, but unfortunately not all of the batsmen have managed to be as consistent as Mushfiqur.

Soumya Sarker, despite all his graceful shots, yesterday lost his wicket in the 20s for the sixth time in 14 matches. Tamim has seemed uneasy ever since his record-breaking performance against Pakistan in the Khulna Test, while Bangladesh's number three conundrum continues.

The strategy to use slow and low wickets against South Africa may have had a negative effect on the batsmen. They have been playing on sporting tracks ever since the World Cup and a sudden change in the nature of the wicket may be causing them some problems.

That concern has been evident especially in the approach shown by the top order batsmen. The aggressive stroke-play at the top

made it seem as though the players were yearning for the kind of wickets they played on in the series' against Pakistan and India.

With two more ODIs to go, Bangladesh batsmen continue to face the odd task of re-adjusting to their slow and low home conditions.

U-19s suffer first defeat

SPORTS REPORTER



A change of venue saw Bangladesh's under-19 outfit crash to their first defeat of the tour against their South African counterparts at the City Oval yesterday.

The junior Tigers, who prior to the match yesterday led the seven-match youth ODI series 2-0, went down by seven wickets.

Batting first, the visitors were bundled out for 165 in 49.2 overs. Off-spinner Dean Foxcroft scalped three wickets, while pacers Wiaan Mulder and Conor McKerr took two each to run through Bangladesh's batting order.

In reply, the hosts, courtesy of an unbeaten 89 from Liam Smith, raced to their target in 37.5 overs. Smith hit 13 fours and a six in his 113-ball innings and ensured

that he stayed till the end in order to get his side's first win.

Bangladesh's batting order fired in the first two matches. However, the pacers got the better of them yesterday. After opener Saif Hassan was run-out in the fourth over, the rest of the top-order batsmen were deceived and the visitors found themselves in a precarious 66 for 5 at the end of 23 overs.

They didn't manage to recover from there. In fact, had it not been for a 42-run stand for the last wicket between Mosabbek Hossain and Saleh Ahmed, it could have been even worse for the visitors.

Mosabbek top-scored for Bangladesh with 29 runs, while Mohammad Saifuddin accompanied him with 25.

Earlier this year, the South Africans had lost a 7-match youth ODI series in Bangladesh 6-1.

'We didn't bat well'

SPORTS REPORTER



There was no need to use a microscope to find out the reason behind the Tigers' eight-wicket defeat against South Africa in the first ODI of the three-match series at Mirpur yesterday. It was crystal clear to everyone as it was to Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who understandably blamed poor batting behind his team's failure to maintain their good run in ODI cricket.

"I would say that we didn't bat well. I didn't see even one ball that swung. We are just not batting well," said Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe. He also defended his decision of batting first saying, "We thought it was going to be a good batting track. There was no reason to not take batting."

"Some batsmen got out after getting set in the middle. It's very difficult to explain the reason behind that; only the particular batsman can explain it. But we have to work this out and come out of this scenario. I hope that those who are



starting and getting runs will finish their job. We need to turn things around from here. Maybe we can't change much after one day's practice," he continued, adding that the top order batsmen should play long innings.

Despite a 2-0 defeat in the T20I series against the Proteas, Mashrafe was not at all in a dejected mood; but he was altogether a different man yesterday while explaining the reasons behind the defeat in post-match press conference. However once the question was raised about the challenge of leading a team in bad times, he summoned his natural spirit.

"It's always a challenge to captain a side. It becomes challenging when a team gets into a losing rut. But I am still not worried about this. I have faced worse challenges in my life so I am not worried about this challenge as much. Maybe the players are not going through good times now, but they will get it later," said Mashrafe.

Mashrafe felt that it could have been a different ball game had Mushfiqur Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan extended their innings a bit more and had his side taken the score between 200 to 220 runs.

He said that South Africa are a really a good team, but that doesn't mean that they shouldn't have played better. He was also hopeful of a turnaround from here.

BD-SA SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH				R/B	4/6	Duminy	8	0	28	1
Tamim b Rabada	0/13	0/0				SOUTH AFRICA				
Soumya c Duminy b Rabada	27/27	4/0				De Kock c Sabbir b Nasir	35/41	5/0	5/6	4/6
Liton c Behardien b Rabada	0/1	0/0				Amla c Mahmudullah b Mashrafe	14/18	2/0		
Mahmudullah lbw b Rabada	0/1	0/0				Du Plessis not out	63/75	7/0		
Shakib lbw b Tahir	48/51	5/0				Rossouw not out	45/53	5/1		
Mushfiqur c Tahir b Duminy	24/38	1/0				Extras: (lb-6, w-1)	7			
Sabbir b Morris	5/13	0/0				Total: (For 2 wickets in 31.1 overs)	164			
Nasir b Morris	31/44	3/1				Did not bat: Miller, Duminy, Behardien, Morris, Abbott, Rabada, Tahir.				
Mashrafe c De Kock b Rabada	4/12	0/0				Fall of wickets: 1-22, 2-6,				
Jubair b Rabada	5/9	1/0								
Mustafizur not out	0/11	0/0				Bowler	O	M	R	W
Extras: (lb-5, w-10, nb-1)	16					Mustafizur	6	2	15	0
Total: (All out in 36.3 overs)	160					Nasir	7	1	28	1
Fall of wickets: 1-17, 2-17, 3-17, 4-40, 5-93, 6-104, 7-120, 8-133, 9-140.						Mashrafe	6	0	36	1
						Shakib	5	1	27	0
						Jubair	5	0	31	0
						Mahmudullah	2	0	17	0
						Sabbir	0.1	0	4	0
						Result: South Africa won by 8 wickets.				
						Player-of-the-match: Kagiso Rabada.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W						
Abbott	6	0	41	0						
Rabada	8	3	16	6						
Morris	6.3	0	32	2						
Tahir	8	1	38	1						