

'We need to bat longer'

SPORTS REPORTER



The weather was brilliant yesterday as the sun shined all over. And when Bangladesh vice-captain Tamim Iqbal came to meet the press ahead of the second and final Test against South Africa before training at Mirpur, he added even more shine while talking about his side's chances in the last game of South Africa's tour.

He was well aware of the reality that his side still had a long way to go in the longer-version of the game, but he believed that the success in the ODI series followed by the performance in the first Test in Chittagong gave his side the momentum.

"In Tests maybe we haven't achieved anything big, but we are definitely playing better than before. At least we are competing," said the experienced opener, exuding confidence.

Bangladesh made a brilliant comeback in the second session of the first Test, but Tamim still emphasised that a good start was needed in the second Test to keep the momentum. Most importantly, he pointed out that the players need to convert their starts into big knocks. The batsmen's failure to convert their starts despite a good batting approach was the only flaw in an otherwise wonderful performance from the hosts in the first Test.

"In Chittagong the wicket was easy to bat on, but hard to score on. Riyad bhai [Mahmudullah Riyad], Shakib [Al Hasan], Litton [Das] and I were set and it was our responsibility to make the innings a big one, but we couldn't do that. Had we managed to do that, we could have been in a better position.

"The most important thing is to score the first 20 runs and get set. The next 40 runs are not that difficult to score. So in the Dhaka Test we will be targeting that. If someone gets a start, he should stay and convert it to a big score. It will make things easier for the others," the left-hander said.

Tamim also gave his perspective on the sweep shot which ended his watchful 57-run knock in the first Test.

"I think, in the entire innings, that was the one shot I shouldn't have played. I don't think I made any other mistakes in those 130 balls, but you need just one ball to get out. At the end of the day, I need to play my shots and when I do that, there will be a bit of risk. If I get out playing my best shot, I won't have any regrets."

The Chittagonian also reminded that the task at Mirpur will be tougher, as the formidable South Africa may get more advantage than they did in Chittagong.

"They are all quality bowlers. To be honest, Chittagong offered very little to the fast bowlers. Here [Mirpur], maybe they will get a little bit more help."

The Tigers have gone through a long season, but according to Tamim they are enjoying every moment.

"I think tiredness is a mental thing. If you are tired mentally it will affect you. But our trainers and team management are working so that we don't become mentally exhausted. They are making us do something different in every practice session. So we are learning to enjoy every session, every meeting. I think that's a good thing, because if you enjoy something you are bound to do well in it."



Bangladesh vice-captain Tamim Iqbal (2nd from R), who has scored more than 1000 runs in all formats this year, enjoys a light moment with coach Chandika Hathurusingha (L) during training in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO:
FIROZ AHMED

Mushy's time to step up

SPORTS REPORTER



It's been a while since Mushfiquur Rahim last scored a half-century in Tests. To be more precise, he hasn't scored a 50-plus knock in his last 10 innings. The last and only other time that happened was in 2008, barely a year and a half after his debut.

While the statistic doesn't necessarily mean that he is going through one of the worst patches in his career, it can build a bit of pressure.

In fact, the skipper himself admitted that he was a bit irritated for not being able to convert his starts recently.

"I am very much aware... and I am not liking it," the captain had said at the end of the first Test, in which he had scored a good-looking 28, before getting trapped in

front by a fierce Dale Steyn delivery.

"But the good part about it is that I am hitting the ball well and I am confident that I can come back soon. Had it been anything else, I would have been a lot more concerned. Now that I play just as a batsman, it's a lot more important that I score runs," he added.

The fact that Mushfiquur is taking this drought very seriously is obvious from a number of factors. He has been running those extra laps, batting those extra deliveries in the nets and has also been to speaking to his childhood coach.

Of all the aspects though, the fact that Liton Das has taken over the keeping gloves is a sign that Mushfiquur really wants to concentrate on his batting.

Wicket-keeping has been Mushfiquur's forte ever since he entered the national team. There have been times in the past when he defied all odds and injuries to don those

gloves -- an example of which was witnessed during the Pakistan series. And so, when Mushfiquur had readily admitted that he wasn't fit enough to keep prior to the first Test, it took quite a few analysts by surprise.

Nazmul Abedin Fahim, who coached Mushfiquur during his BKSP days and was seen speaking to the player during training on Monday, didn't sound that worried.

"I have been observing him and I think that he doesn't have a technical problem. He is looking good. Maybe he is just under a bit of a pressure. I personally feel that he is just one innings away from a comeback. He just needs to enjoy the game again," Nazmul told The Daily Star yesterday.

For the sake of Mushfiquur and Bangladesh's fans, one would hope that Nazmul's prediction proves true in the upcoming Test against South Africa, because the hosts need their most consistent batsman to step up again.



Champion bowler Dale Steyn, who is one scalp away from getting 400 Test wickets, goes through a few routine stretches during training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO:
STAR

'Time to show why we're number one'

SPORTS REPORTER



South Africa pacer Morne Morkel sent a warning to the Bangladesh dressing room yesterday and indicated that the Proteas were ready with a different plan for the second Test, which begins Thursday.

"We're really excited to get this Test match underway. There are eleven hungry Proteas in the changing room.

"We haven't bowled so many overs as a unit before [the first Test year] so it's nice to get that in Chittagong. Hopefully the weather will be good and the conditions will be fair so we will have a good Test match," a confident Morkel told reporters in Mirpur after practice yesterday.

Morkel -- who jokingly said that some of the players in his side were suffering from 'cabin fever' as a result of the immense time that they have been spending inside the hotel due to the downpour -- believed that the visitors had a better idea about the hosts after the first Test.

"I think the one thing we have discussed, especially considering the humidity, is that we cannot afford to waste any deliveries. We need to be clearer and more on the money with our plans for certain batsmen.

"We need to go for three dismissals instead of one. It's time for us now to step up a bit and show why we are the number one team [in Tests] in the world," said Morkel.

"We have had a look at their batting line up again and we are going to go with different plans. Hopefully that will work for us in the second Test," added the fierce pacer.

The one factor that Morkel repeatedly spoke about was the humid conditions. The pacer hoped that the sun would come out during the period of the Test and keep the ball hard.

"In Chittagong, the little bit of the rain we had made the ball wet and soft quickly. It was tough for us to keep the ball dry because of the humidity as well. So we are hoping that we can, as a bowling unit, take the heat. We hope the sun comes out and conditions are a bit dry so that we can execute our skills well.

"Once the SG ball is wet, it's quite difficult to dry it again. I think Simon Harmer especially struggled to grip the ball. As a seam bowling unit, to get one side shined up and the other scuffed up in these conditions was next to impossible," recalled Morkel.

"Even the Bangladeshi bowling attack struggled with that. You didn't really see the traditional sort of reverse swing that you get in the subcontinent. Hopefully we can see it in this last Test," he added.

Morkel's bowling partner Dale Steyn is one wicket away from becoming only the second South African to take 400 wickets and Morkel had a few special words reserved for him.

"Dale's been unbelievable. He is like a good red wine and is going to get better with age. I think it's going to be special when he gets his 400th one, but I think there is plenty more left in the tank for him."

Third Ashes Test starts today

AFF, Birmingham

Joe Root is confident England's latest collapse against an Australia pace attack led by Mitchell Johnson won't still haunt them come the third Ashes Test at Edgbaston starting on Wednesday.

Left-arm fast bowler Johnson took 37 wickets at 14 apiece as Australia thrashed England 5-0 on home soil to regain the Ashes in 2013/14.

While Johnson went wicketless in the first Test, it was a very different story in the second Test at Lord's, where Johnson had match figures of six for 80 during Australia's crushing 405-run win that levelled the five-match series at 1-1.

England captain Alastair Cook may be in better form than Australia counterpart Michael Clarke but that counted for little as the hosts, with Johnson taking three cheap wickets, slumped to a humiliating 103 all out in their second innings.

But a defiant Root said of Johnson: "It's wrong to single one man out. You look at Cardiff and he only got two expensive wickets so it's about putting him under pressure."

England have responded to their drubbing at Lord's by dropping Gary Ballance and promoting the experienced Ian Bell to Ballance's position of number three, with Jonny Bairstow coming into the side at the expense of his Yorkshire colleague.



Bangladesh's next home series is against Australia. The Aussies will arrive in the last week of September this year, to play only two Tests against the Tigers. Every fan however feels that it would be fantastic if ODI matches were also included in the series since Bangladesh has been performing wonders in the 50-over version, especially at home and under the leadership of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

Nazmul Hassan Papon was no exception and that's why the BCB boss will talk with his Australian counterpart on the sidelines during next month's ICC meeting in Dubai.

"At this moment, it would not easy to include anything in the FTP, but I will talk with Australia during the ICC meeting in Dubai about whether they are interested in playing at least one ODI match during the tour.

"We have a very good relationship with Australia and I believe they will not say no if there is any chance for them. But I cannot settle it through e-mail or telephone, so I have to wait for the meeting in Dubai,"

Papon told Maasranga Television, before leaving for Saudi Arabia on Monday.

However, when contacted, BCB's chief executive officer Nizamuddin Chowdhury was not ready to make any comments about this issue. Instead he said that he could only comment after discussing the matter with his president.

Papon also said that he would also talk to his Indian counterparts about including ODI matches during Bangladesh's tour to India next year, while discussing the possibility of settling a series with his Sri Lankan counterparts as well.