

SPORT

AFGHANS IN TIGERS' DEN



SHAKIB stands alone

NAIMUL KARIM

The moment Shakib Al Hasan trapped Afghanistan opener Shabir Noori in front off the third ball of the eighth over yesterday, the left-arter achieved a unique feat. The 29-year-old, who recently completed a decade in international cricket, became the country's highest wicket-taker in all three formats of the game.

With 65 wickets in T20Is and 147 wickets in Tests, Shakib was the highest wicket-taker in these two formats prior to the Afghanistan series. However, after he dismissed Noori yesterday, he took his ODI tally to 207 wickets and went level with Abdur Razzak. He then went ahead of the veteran left-arm bowler when he got rid of Rahmat Shah.

At this point in time there is no other cricketer in the world who leads their nation's wickets column in each of the three formats. It is quite a big achievement. But ask Shakib for a reaction, and he will give you an answer typical of him and his attitude.

"It feels good to be the highest wicket-taker in all the three formats, but it would have been better if I had been the highest run-getter in all three formats as well. This is no doubt a good achievement, but to lead with both the bat and the ball would have been great," he said when asked about the feat after the match.

It was an answer which clearly depicted his hunger for success.

"The thing is that everyone has been doing so well at the top lately that I haven't been getting chances to bat. All I can do is score 30s and 40s these days," he added with a smile.

But of course, the above statement was something that Shakib said with positive intent. After all, at the end of the day, the team's achievement is more important to the left-arter.

"Mushfiqur[Rahim] bhui, Tamim [Iqbal] and I have been scoring plenty of runs for the team. Hopefully three more cricketers will join us. Ultimately someone will be first, second or third. That's not something I am concerned or worried about. What is important for us is to see how much we can contribute to the team," said Shakib.

The left-arter, who hit a vital 40-ball 48 towards the end of the first innings and also scalped a crucial two-wicket haul, was awarded the player of the match award yesterday.

With a number of players performing their roles to perfection in the national team, the player of the match award has not come Shakib's way as often it is as it once used to.

So when asked how it felt to be awarded the player of the match, Shakib's response was a cheeky one.

"Yeah... Mustafizur is not there in the team. I got one today," he smiled.

"Any achievement feels good. But the main job is to contribute. No one becomes the player of the match just by saying that you have to try to win the award. What you need to do is contribute to the team. At the end of the day, if you contribute the most, you will win the player of the match award," he concluded.



Tigers' opener Tamim Iqbal laid the foundation for the hosts, hitting nine boundaries on his way to a controlled 80 against the Afghans.

PHOTO: STAR



Bangladesh's ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan lived up to his billing against Afghanistan in the first ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. The left-hander hit a quick-fire 48 before returning with the ball and strangling the visitors as he claimed two wickets and gave away just 26 runs in his ten overs.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

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'Match-fitness is important'

SAKEB SUBHAN

As Afghanistan's Rahmat Shah and Hashmatullah Shahidi were calmly resisting everything the Bangladesh bowlers were throwing at them during 144-run second-wicket partnership, it was hard to tell that the team doing the catching up were the overwhelming favourites coming into the three-match series.

There was always the possibility that Bangladesh's 11-month absence from ODI cricket would result in some rustiness. It was evident in their innings of 265 all out which, despite having substantial scores from Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah Riyad, never really got into fifth gear. They would have to count on their greater experience and calibre to pull through in the first ODI.

That is what happened in a narrow victory over the over-achieving Associate Member nation in Mirpur yesterday. What the Tigers possibly counted on was their best cricketer to be operating at a level too hot for Afghanistan and like he has so often done before, Shakib Al Hasan delivered with telling hands with both the ball and the bat to end up with the man-of-the-match award.

"Actually, our job is not to worry; our job is to do it and keep the belief that we can win the game and that belief was there," said Shakib with his typical

insouciant charm when asked if they were worried when the Afghans looked like stealing the show. "Because we are playing after almost a year there was some rustiness in all of us. It showed in the body language; our fielding wasn't that good.

"No matter how many practice matches you play or how much you train, playing international cricket requires match-fitness, which is a different thing altogether. Hopefully in the next two matches the performance will improve."

It was Shakib who turned things around -- first

instances as the turning points in a close match.

The pace duo's returns, especially Taskin's from a suspension for an illegal bowling action, was an intriguing subplot and it would have pleased the team management to no end that they came good after inauspicious starts. Rubel bowled a tight 49th over and picked up a wicket while Taskin picked up two each in the 48th and 50th to end with figures of four for 59 from eight overs.

"One returned from injury and one returned from suspension, so it was difficult for both," Shakib said of his teammates. "At the start they didn't do well but the last three overs they bowled solidly. Rubel's over was very important, and he bowled very well. Taskin bowled his last two overs very well."

He had generous words for his vanquished opponents, the empathy perhaps brought on by the fact that not long ago Bangladesh routinely lost close matches such as this. "The situation was such that they should have won. Maybe it was a lack of experience that had an effect, and for us our greater experience worked."

Afghanistan batsman Najibullah Zadran was understandably smarting from a defeat that could so easily have been a famous win in their short but inspirational cricket journey.

"We played well and as you saw 265 was a chaseable target on this pitch," he said. "Unfortunately our batsmen played some wrong shots in the end. Bangladesh played well, their bowlers bowled well and that's why they are winners."

BD-AFG SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH		R/B	45/65		
Tamim c Naveenul b Ashraf	80/98	9/0			
Soumya c Noor b D Zadran	0/3	0/0			
Imrul b Nabi	37/53	6/0			
Mahmudullah c Ashraf b Nabi	62/74	5/2			
Shakib c N Zadran b D Zadran	48/40	3/0			
Mushfiqur b Rashid	6/7	0/0			
Sabbir lbw b Rashid	2/5	0/0			
Mashrafe c Rashid b Naveenul	4/8	0/0			
Tajjul c Rahmat b D Zadran	11/9	1/0			
Taskin b D Zadran	2/2	0/0			
Rubel not out	1/1	0/0			
Extras: (b-1, lb-1, w-10)	12				
Total: (All out in 50 overs)	265				
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-84, 3-163, 4-203, 5-215, 6-227, 7-246, 8-254, 9-260, 10-265.					
AFGHANISTAN		R/B	45/65		
Noor lbw b Shakib	9/24	1/0			
Shahzad c Mushfiqur b Mashrafe	31/21	4/1			
Rahmat c Soumya b Shakib	71/93	2/3			
Shahidi c Soumya b Tajjul	72/110	6/0			
Nabi c Sabbir b Taskin	30/24	3/0			
N Zadran c Mushfiqur b Mashrafe	7/6	1/0			
Stanzai c Rubel	7/5	1/0			
Ashraf lbw b Taskin	3/3	0/0			
D Zadran c Sabbir b Taskin	2/3	0/0			
Naveenul not out	0/1	0/0			
Extras: (b-1, lb-2, w-13)	16				
Total: (All out in 50 overs)	258				
Fall of wickets: 1-46, 2-46, 3-190, 4-210, 5-230, 6-243, 7-245, 8-253, 9-255, 10-258.					
Bowler		O	M	R	W
D Zadran	10	0	73	4	
Naveenul	10	0	62	1	
Nabi	10	0	40	2	
Ashraf	10	0	51	1	
Rashid	10	0	37	2	
AFGHANISTAN		R/B	45/65		
Noor lbw b Shakib	9/24	1/0			
Shahzad c Mushfiqur b Mashrafe	31/21	4/1			
Rahmat c Soumya b Shakib	71/93	2/3			
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Ashraf lbw b Taskin	3/3	0/0			
D Zadran c Sabbir b Taskin	2/3	0/0			
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Bowler		O	M	R	W
Mashrafe	10	0	42	2	
Taskin	8	0	59	4	
Shakib	10	0	26	2	
Rubel	9	0	62	1	
Tajjul	10	0	44	1	

SA thrash Ireland

REUTERS, Benoni

A century on his one day international debut from Temba Bavuma and four wickets from part-time spinner JP Duminy helped South Africa secure a one-sided 206-run victory over Ireland at Willowmore Park on Sunday.

Bavuma, dropped on one, scored 113 as South Africa reached 354 for five with Farhaan Behardien hitting 50 off 22 deliveries and Quinton de Kock (82) and Duminy (52 not out) also contributing runs.

Kevin O'Brien (41) and Paul Stirling (40) provided some resistance as Ireland reached 148 before being bowled out with 19 overs to spare.

Duminy returned career-best figures of 4 for 16.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: 354 for 5 in 50 overs (De Kock 82, Bavuma 113, Duminy 52 not out, Behardien 50; Young 3-81, O'Brien 2-66)
IRELAND: 148 all out in 30.5 overs (Stirling 40, O'Brien 41; Parnell 2-36, Phangiso 2-33, Duminy 4-16)
Result: South Africa won by 206 runs.



PHOTO: STAR

Considering his form with the bat, which has been on the decline for quite some time, it was not surprise to see Bangladesh opener Soumya Sarkar score a duck against Afghanistan in Mirpur yesterday.

The unrest beneath Soumya's first duck

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh opener Soumya Sarkar scored his first duck in ODIs after 17 matches at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. His untimely pull off the third ball he faced produced an edge that merely looped into the hands of the short cover fielder.

Going solely by the opener's ODI numbers so far, a batting average above 46 and a total runs tally of 692, one would expect Soumya to be in phenomenal touch. After all, he does currently have the highest batting average in ODIs among his teammates. However, the fact remains that the left-hander has had an awful past year and the reason that has not received as much focus is because Bangladesh and Soumya have barely played any ODIs in that time.

The poor patch is clear when one observes the left-hander's domestic record.

In the last year, the 23-year-old has had 51 outings and this includes first-class, List A and T20 fixtures. In these 51 outings, Soumya has crossed the 50-run barrier just twice. He scored an 84 against Abahani in the Dhaka Premier League recently. And prior to that he had scored a cautious 58 against Chittagong Vikings in the Bangladesh Premier League in December

2015.

There is no doubt about Soumya's talent. He was one of the reasons why Bangladesh managed to achieve their magical run against Pakistan, India and South Africa in 2015.

The team management reckons that he has the ability to destroy some of the best attacks in the world when on song. However, when he is out of rhythm, he seems a completely different player.

At the moment it seems as though the management is waiting for that one good knock from Soumya; one that can light the fire and help him get his venom back ahead of the England series and next year's Champions trophy.

However, the wait unfortunately has been quite long so far. Yesterday Bangladesh fielded three players -- Imrul Kayes, Tamim Iqbal and Soumya -- who can open the innings. And it was as a result of that change that Nasir Hossain, an experienced middle-order batsman who averaged 75 in the Dhaka Premier League this season, did not get a place in the eleven.

At the moment, the team management is likely to persist with Soumya. However, if he doesn't mend his ways soon, he might have to take a step back and play the role that the other openers in the team, the likes of Imrul and Anamul Haque, have been playing for so long: knocking at the national door

Rain keeps Ash waiting

SPORTS REPORTER



Rain interrupted three out of the four matches of the first round of the National Cricket League, a domestic four-day competition, which began yesterday.

The league saw the return of formerly suspended cricketer Mohammad Ashraful, who was included in Dhaka Metro's squad yesterday. While he was included in the playing eleven, he didn't get to bat on day one.

The competition is expected to give Bangladesh's Test players some practice ahead of their Tests against England.

The only game that saw a whole day's play was the one between Chittagong and Rangpur at the Sylhet International Stadium. Batting first, Chittagong rode on Yasir Ali's 90. He scored 12 fours and two sixes. He was helped by Tasamul Haque's 52 and Mominul Haque's 46. Opener Nazimuddin too contributed with a vital 43.

The problem with Chittagong was that none of their players managed to continue after getting set. They ended the day on 294 for five. Bowlers Alauddin Babu and Shubashish Roy, who have been included in the national pool for the next two series, took two and one wicket respectively.

In Khulna, Barisal rode on half-centuries from Fazle Rabbi and Shahriar Nafees to finish on 165 for three. While Nafees remained unbeaten on 76 with 11 fours, Fazle scored 82 with 12 boundaries.

SCORES IN BRIEF

DHAKA METRO: 47 for 2 (Shadman 18, Asif 15; Sharif 2-18) v **DHAKA**
BARISAL: 165 for 3 (Fazle 82, Nafees 76 not out; Mahed 1-0, Al-Amin 1-30) v **KHULNA**
RAJSHAH: 94 for 2 (Farhad 30 not out, Junaid 26 not out; Ebadat 1-15, Abu 1-27) v **SYLHET**
CHITTAGONG: 294 for 5 (Yasir 90, Tasamul 52, Mominul 46; Alauddin 2-49, Shubashish 1-52) v **RANGPUR**