

SPORT

Consistency the buzzword

NAIMUL KARIM

The way the two teams competed in the first Test bedazzled the entire cricketing world. The neck and neck battle throughout the four days against a vastly more experienced Test side eventually went on to create new Test fans across the country.

Cricketer discussions among fans strayed from the usual path. Technical issues, which are rarely discussed during the limited-overs games, such as the importance of reverse swing or the special character of the Chittagong track to not break up despite turning from day one, were the key highlights.

However, with the first Test done and dusted, the genre of discussions has moved on. The main question at the fore right now is whether Bangladesh can once again display the consistency that they had shown in the first Test.

In the past, they have been guilty of breaking down after putting in a good show in the first Test. Can the England series, which has already garnered plenty of attention due to its uniqueness, be any different?

Captain Mushfiqur Rahim certainly thinks so.

"We were on the back foot prior to the first Test because we were playing after 15 months and that too against a team like England. But by the grace of God we were consistent and that's going to be our focus in the second Test as well. We ended on a good note and hope to begin in the same manner as well," said Mushfiqur during the pre-match

press conference yesterday.

At the end of the fourth day of the first Test, the headlines of a possible historical win for Bangladesh stormed the media. When asked if that factor was playing at the back of the players' minds, Mushfiqur's reply was a practical one.

"I think it will just be another game of Test cricket. For us, every Test is special because we don't get to play as many Tests. England are a good side and it will be challenging. What's more important for us is to play consistent cricket over the four or five days. If we do that, the result will automatically come," he said.

"Yes, we are not habituated to play well against a strong side. But it's not as though we will become the world's number one team if we win this game. Hopefully we won't let that opportunity go this time. Our first target will be to create a good situation by playing consistently," he added.

Reverse swing turned out to be one of the key factors in the first Test with the England pacers depending on it quite a lot. Their top batsman, Joe Root, did not really do well with the bat but he did a great job in keeping one side of the ball shiny. That's something that Mushfiqur wants his teammates to apply in the second Test.

"There are very few players who can play reverse swing well. Hopefully our top order will score well and not let the tail get exposed to the reverse at the end. Also, we need to maintain the ball when we are bowling. Many a time because of the shine, the ball drifts and that helps the spinner as well," said Mushfiqur.

A special day for a special man



Mushfiqur Rahim's much-praised technique did not form overnight and this picture, taken during practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday, perfectly illustrates how hard the batsman has had to work in the nets to develop his game.

BISHWAJIT ROY



A baby-faced boy just shy of his 18th birthday who showed early signs of his eventual high caliber at the ground called the Mecca of Cricket is now a 29-year old man about to play his 50th Test today at the home of Bangladesh cricket in Mirpur.

It's not like his arrival had astounded the world cricket fraternity but his talent was clear to those who can spot diamonds in the rough. Into his 12th year, the man from Bogra has established his position in such a way that people are compelled to say that to a large extent Bangladesh's batting now depends on him.

In May 2005 at Lord's, when Mathew Hoggard, Steve Harmison and Andrew Flintoff had toyed with the Bangladesh batsmen in trying

conditions, Mushfiqur, who was a wild-card inclusion for Bangladesh's maiden tour of England as a future wicket keeper, handled them with sheer technique and courage. That 56-ball 19-run innings is still fresh in many minds like his then skipper Habibul Bashar.

"Our first impression was that this guy had a sound technique. Many have flattered to deceive but Mushy does not belong to that dropout class; rather what he showed in Chittagong in both innings in the first Test is simply the continuation of his Lord's promise," said Bashar. "His instinctive capacity to apply technique is simply amazing. He had impressed everybody with his technique on his arrival and now he is considered as the most technically sound batsman," he continued.

It was however a little painful for the former Bangladesh captain to reflect on the number of Tests one of the country's finest batsmen has played so far. "Undoubtedly it's a great achievement to play 50 Tests without any break but a batsman of his calibre deserves more Test matches. I still believe that only Tests can make a

superstar but unfortunately Mushy still has not got enough opportunity to show the world his real ability as Bangladesh played few Tests in the last few years," a frustrated Bashar observed adding: "Mushy is through and through an honest cricketer who always wants to improve."

Mushfiqur's Test average of 32.58 also saddened Bangladesh ODI and T20 skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. "It's hard to accept that a batsman like Mushfiqur doesn't get the chance to play Test cricket regularly. If he could get enough opportunities I can tell you his average now would have neared 50. Look at his last two years' batting average in ODI and it could have been the same in Tests had he got enough opportunities," opined Mashrafe.

"Everyone knows about his ability as a batsman, so what more can I say. Just look at his two innings in the first Test in Chittagong; you will

get the answer to why he is considered as one of the best batsmen technically speaking. His dedication is simply unmatched. Mushy has already given a different meaning to the words 'extra work'. Honestly speaking

I am just hoping to see Mushy get enough Test matches to show his true colours to the world," he added.

The lack of opportunity in Tests also frustrated Mushfiqur, which is why he said in a reaction to the auspicious day that: "It feels really good. It's not easy to play 50 Tests for Bangladesh and I want to thank God."

It would be fantastic if Mushfiqur can carry his form into the second Test to mark the day but he was not overwhelmed by individual achievements as he didn't forget that he was also captain of the team. "I will try to play well individually and contribute to a good result."

Many more Tests will definitely come for the right-hander but millions of fans will be hoping that the little man does something special in his special match.

TOP 6 TEST MATCH APPEARANCES FOR BANGLADESH

Player	Mts	Runs	Ave	HS	100s	50s
Mohammad Ashrafur	61	2737	24	190	6	8
Habibul Bashar	50	3026	30.87	113	3	24
Mushfiqur Rahim	49	2737	32.58	200	3	15
Khaled Mashud	44	1409	19.04	103	1	3
Shakib Al Hasan	43	2878	39.42	144	3	19

Rain threat not major

SPORTS REPORTER

Ahead of Bangladesh's second and final Test against England today, an aspect which dampened the spirits of fans anticipating another closely-fought encounter was the incessant rainfall throughout yesterday.

However, they may find solace in the news that the cyclone is not expected to affect the Test match for a large portion. According to a Met official, the weather is expected to improve from today with the cyclone's effects all but subsiding tomorrow.

"There may be light rain tomorrow [Friday], but everything should be dry and the effects of the cyclone are expected to subside by tomorrow," said Met official Badrul Rashid over phone yesterday.

Going by his words, there may be light showers in the morning, but from that point on it should be mostly smooth sailing, although clouds will continue to linger.

Elina, Nabila into semis

SPORTS REPORTER

The pairs of Elina and Nabila, and Shapla and Dulai moved into the semifinals of the women's doubles in the Rockland Summer Open (Ranking) Badminton Tournament at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium yesterday.

Elina and Nabila of Bangladesh Army defeated their teammates Erina and Lucky 21-11 and 21-09 to set a semifinal with Shapla and Dulai of Kawasaki, who handed a 21-11 and 21-12 defeat to Brishti and Rehana of Bangladesh Army in the quarterfinals.

In the men's singles, Parash, Morsalin, Rawnak, Salman, Anik, Razib, Enayet and Shohel moved into the quarterfinals.

Cook expects more spin

SPORTS REPORTER



With Bangladesh's stellar show in defeat in the first Test in Chittagong, the winners of the spectacular match have been all but forgotten in the build-up to the second and final game starting in Mirpur today.

Faced with conditions as alien to English Test cricketers as can be imagined, the tourists first kept pace with the home side and then landed crucial blows when it mattered to emerge victorious by a narrow margin of 22 runs on Monday.

The culture shock in the form of the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium dustbowl had enough impact on their psyche that three days later, the pitch at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium was at the forefront of discussions during the pre-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

"I think the rain has produced a bit more green grass than yesterday," skipper Alastair Cook said, allowing some degree of hope that they may get conditions that will favour their seamers, before reining in his optimism.

"Whether that will still be on tomorrow morning, we have to wait and see. It looks a dry wicket.

"We think it will turn. Historically Dhaka spins less than Chittagong. I have a feeling that might not be the case -- Bangladesh is looking to use their spinning group as a home advantage. Chittagong was supposed to be



high-scoring but it wasn't so high-scoring. I would expect it to turn."

After the Chittagong Test Cook had said that there would be some changes to the winning combination, as with a five-Test tour of India to follow, they are at the beginning of a seven-Test journey across the subcontinent. From his words yesterday, it seems that off-spinner Gareth Batty may be the unfor-

tunate one to make way for left-arm spinner Zafar Ansari.

"He [Ansari] has the ability to take the ball away from the right-handers. From what we have seen in the nets he bowls at good pace as well and he can bat," said Cook about the young bowler. "I thought Gareth got better and better, he settled into it. In an ideal world he would probably like another game. We like the three-spinner, three-seamer option. You did see how dangerous our seamers were when the ball did start to reverse and we did want to give Zafar a go if we could."

Cook did say that there were things to improve upon from their performance in the first Test.

"Hopefully we will improve. Hopefully our spinners can hold length slightly better," Cook said. "I was happy the way the ball reversed. It was very tough at the top of the order, three for 30 both times. It's as tough as I can remember for an opening batter with the ball spinning and skidding. It was a hard introduction. Hope for a better start and that someone goes on to get a hundred."



Sabbir Rahman fell just short of giving the Tigers a miracle in the first Test. However, as he returned to training after a brief bout with illness yesterday, he will be well aware of the heightened expectations from him in the second Test.

Tigers look to tame their own den

SPORTS REPORTER



The track in Dhaka has traditionally turned less than Chittagong's and the pacers have generally managed to extract more bounce from the wicket. It will not be a surprise if the hosts get reduced home advantage in Dhaka as compared to Chittagong.

However, that was not a factor that Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim seemed too worried about.

"More than the wicket what matters is how you bowl. There's no point if you don't use it well. Yes, the wicket was really helpful in the first Test, if it doesn't produce any extra turn here that does not mean we won't do well. The team that matches the conditions well will end up doing well," said Mushfiqur.

"It will probably be similar to Chittagong but the

bounce will be a bit different because of the black soil. It will be a different, clay wicket. Hopefully we will be able to use our home advantage well," he added.

Mushfiqur's statements regarding the wicket yesterday, in a sense, displayed just how much confidence the team has.

Bangladesh's past records suggest that Mirpur is not a happy hunting ground for them as far as Tests are concerned. Of the 14 Tests they have played here, they have won just once and lost 10 times. Bangladesh's batsmen have generally been more vulnerable to pacers in Dhaka than in Chittagong.

In addition, they have a tendency of burning out in the second Test of the series. However, whenever

these factors were brought up during the press conference yesterday, Mushfiqur brushed them aside. The hosts had returned from a 15-month hiatus and almost beat England in the first Test and that's something that Mushfiqur repeatedly indicated through his answers.

And that's the kind of attitude which shows that the second Test, against the odds, could very well see something as special as the first. It will not be a surprise to witness a few firsts during the second Test in Mirpur today.

The highest score by a Bangladeshi in Mirpur is 151, scored by Tamim Iqbal in January 2010 against India. That is one record many batsmen might want to reach for.

The last time a Bangladeshi scored a century on this ground was back in 2013 when Mominul Haque scored an unbeaten 123 against New Zealand. The batsman, who had scores of 0 and 27 in Chittagong, will hope he can resurrect himself.

At the bowling end, Shakib Al Hasan is the person Bangladesh will be looking to. He has scalped 44 wickets in 14 games in Mirpur. The next best is Zaheer Khan who has 17 in two. Shakib has five five-wicket hauls at this venue and he will certainly want to increase on that number.

On the whole, Bangladesh have produced slightly better numbers in Chittagong, but by the looks of things, the numbers are not going to put the hosts down, for the players seem to have a lot more belief after the first Test.



- Of the 14 Tests Bangladesh have played in Mirpur, they have won just once and lost 10 times
- The highest score by a Bangladeshi in Mirpur is 151, scored by Tamim Iqbal in January 2010 against India
- The last Test century scored in Mirpur by a Bangladesh batsman was the unbeaten 123 scored by Mominul Haque against New Zealand in October 2013
- Shakib Al Hasan is the highest wicket-taker in Mirpur with 44 wickets from 14 Tests. The next best is Zaheer Khan who