

SPORT

Mehedi blames luck despite mid-day lapse

SPORTS REPORTER from Galle

Before the Test started, Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim said that they needed to play well on all five days instead of just three or four days as they had done on the recent tours of New Zealand and India. However, whether it was the heat or just a drop in concentration, Bangladesh failed to maintain their standards in three sessions of the first day of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Galle yesterday.

After losing the toss on an unresponsive wicket, Bangladesh began very well and had the home side at 63 for two at lunch and 155 for three at tea. Then, a fourth-wicket partnership that started midway through the afternoon session between Kusal Mendis and Asela Gunaratne swelled to a 196-run behemoth after tea as Sri Lanka scored 166 runs in the last session

cially Kusal Mendis. If he had gotten out things would have been different."

He was referring to Mendis's first-ball bottom-edge off Subashis with Sri Lanka's score on 15 in the sixth over, a dismissal that was disallowed after umpire Aleem Dar's request for a front foot check revealed that the bowler had over-stepped. Mendis ended the day unbeaten on 166.

"I can only say that it was bad luck. We all tried our best and no one bowls a no-ball on purpose, it happens. But still, he [Subashis] handled it well afterwards," Miraz opined.

When asked whether the heat was a factor in the mid-day turnaround, Miraz said that it was no surprise in Galle but admitted that it may have gotten to them.

"The weather is supposed to be a little hot, but the weather we played in recently has been a bit cooler than here, so it will take a little time to acclimatise."

Bangladesh going in with three pacers with Subashis coming in place of left-arm spinner Taijul Islam may have been a surprise for many, but Miraz saw it as an advantage.

"On this wicket, spinners cannot easily take wickets unless the batsmen make mistakes. But pacers have more chances of taking wickets if they bowl in the right areas. So it is an advantage for spinners and pacers to be bowling in tandem."

Although things are looking bleak for Bangladesh with a batsman batting on 150-plus and Niroshan Dickwella looking at ease with the bowling and conditions, Miraz was still optimistic of a quick turnaround today.

"They have lost four top-order batsmen and have two main batsmen left," he said. "So hopefully if tomorrow [Wednesday] we can get the two at the crease, their lower-order batsmen will not be able to score many runs on this wicket. Our target will be to check the runs and get the wickets in the morning tomorrow."

Miraz was also happy to be playing alongside his good mate Mustafizur, and said that the left-arm pacer was looking much better than he did during the New Zealand tour in the aftermath of his shoulder surgery.



Bangladesh pacer Subashis Roy (L) appeals unsuccessfully against Sri Lanka batsman Kusal Mendis on the opening day of the Galle Test yesterday. The right-hander proved a thorn in Bangladesh's side, scoring an unbeaten 166. PHOTO: AFP



for the loss of one wicket.

However, off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who got the second wicket of the day just before the lunch interval, thought that they had done well and that a partnership like that was par for the course.

"Our bowlers bowled very well at the beginning -- especially Subashis [Roy] da, Taskin [Ahmed] and Mustafizur [Rahman]," he said at the end-of-day press conference. "But then, although we did well till the end, there was a partnership. In Tests there will obviously be a partnership."

Miraz said that the wicket did not offer much help to the spinners. "I bowled, Shikib [Al Hasan] bhai did too and there was not much help. Actually, it will stay like this for the first two or three days. I hope it will start turning from the third day onwards. Their batsmen played well, espe-

The heat gets to the Tigers

SAKEB SUBHAN from Galle



The heat in Galle is like an invisible partner that switches sides from time to time, most often aligning itself with the batting team. So when Bangladesh lost the crucial toss and were asked to field it must have seemed to the Tigers that they were facing two opponents -- a Sri Lankan team that has historically made them chase leather as if for fun and the scorching sun. On top of that, the pitch on which their bowlers were asked to toil was an unresponsive one.

Still, the early signs were good. What seemed like a brave decision to include Subashis Roy in place of left-arm spinner Taijul Islam was increasingly looking like a wise one as the three seamers -- Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman and Subashis -- bowled the lion's share of the overs before lunch and all three looked threatening.

In the first session the pitch seemed to be a little two-paced, with some balls flying through after pitching on a good length. The pacers exploited that and stuck to a good length outside off stump, which dried up the runs, especially after the early dismissal of Upul Tharanga, whose stumps were rattled by the fourth ball of Subashis's first over when the right-arm paceman

came on as first change.

When off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz struck to remove Dimuth Karunaratne with barely five minutes to lunch, it was Bangladesh's session. Until an hour after the break, culminating in the strangling of Dinesh Chandimal through a sharp catch at gully by Miraz off Mustafizur for a tortuous 54-ball five, Bangladesh were on the ascendency.

Credit must go to skipper Mushfiqur Rahim. For most parts of the first hour of the second session there was one and at most two fielders on the fence. Only when Kusal Mendis neared a composed half-century did Mushfiqur add more fielders on the fence, but was quick to bring them in when Chandimal was facing. The bowlers repaid that faith in full by buying into the plan and sticking to an off-stump line.

But then the heat got to them. Near the end of the afternoon session, Subashis being dispatched for two consecutive boundaries by Mendis to opposite ends of the ground signalled a breakdown in discipline. That aberration before tea became the pattern after the break as the weary Tigers stared down the barrel of a two-and-a-half-hour session necessitated by a terribly slow over rate. Although he bowled well, Taskin was especially guilty, often taking well in excess of five minutes to complete an over.

As well as the bowling, the thinking got muddled under the late afternoon sun. Even though the pitch slowed down considerably after the first session and short balls were routinely dismissed for boundaries, Taskin started the session with two fielders on the fence behind square leg. While that pointed to the bouncer trap, Taskin barely bowled a bouncer.

The nadir of the evening session came in the 75th and 77th overs bowled by Miraz. Off the last ball of the 75th, Asela Gunaratne knocked the ball to long on and Mahmudullah Riyad collected the ball before unleashing a throw at the non-striker's end. The ball missed the mark and neither the bowler, wicketkeeper or first slip were backing up and four overthrows resulted, bringing up the 150-run fourth-wicket partnership. In Miraz's next over, the same thing happened and Gunaratne was eight runs richer.

Taskin broke the partnership late in the day but despite talk of Bangladesh's progress at Test level, the end of day score of 321 for four is similar to Sri Lanka's average first-day score -- 328 for six -- when they have batted first against the Tigers.

It remains to be seen whether a night's rest can rejuvenate the Tigers into replicating their morning performance on the second day, and if they cope better with the heat with bat in hand.

India clinch stunning victory

AFP, Bangalore

An irate Virat Kohli accused Australia of repeatedly overstepping the mark Tuesday after India stunned the visitors by 75 runs in an ill-tempered second Test to level the series 1-1.

The Indian captain was furious at opposite number Steve Smith for seeking guidance from the dressing room over his dismissal, something the rules forbid, during a thrilling encounter in Bangalore.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin grabbed six wickets -- becoming the fastest to reach a 25th five-wicket haul in an innings in Test cricket -- as Australia, needing 188 for victory, collapsed to just 112 half-an-hour into the final session on day four after tempers frayed between the world's top two sides.

The umpires had to cool the players down after Kohli was enraged by Smith looking over

to his backroom staff as he decided whether or not to go for a review after being ruled out lbw off Umesh Yadav.

"We take our decisions on the field ourselves. We don't ask for confirmation from upstairs," fumed Kohli. "I saw that happening two times when I was

batting out there. I pointed that out to the umpire as well that I have seen their players looking upstairs for confirmation.

"And that's why the umpire was at him. When he turned back the umpire knew exactly what was going on. We observed that, we told match referee and the umpire

that it's been happening for the last three days and it has to stop," the Indian captain continued.

"There is a line that you don't cross on a cricket field. Sledging and playing on the opponent's mind is different but I don't want to mention the word but it falls in that bracket. I would never do something like that on the cricket field," Kohli added.

Asked if that word was "cheating", Kohli replied: "I didn't say that you did".

Smith admitted to the mistake but insisted it had been a one-off.

SCORES IN BRIEF
INDIA: First innings 189
AUSTRALIA: First innings 276
INDIA: Second innings 274 (Rahul 51, Pujara 92, Rahane 52; Hazlewood 6-67, O'Keefe 2-36)
AUSTRALIA: Second innings 112 (Smith 28, Handscomb 24; Ashwin 6-41, Yadav 2-30)
Result: India won by 75 runs and level four-match series 1-1.
Player-of-the-match: L.Rahul.



India captain Virat Kohli (C) and his teammates embark on a fiery celebration after the fall of the last Australian wicket on the fourth day of the second Test in Bangalore yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

'Will try to make it a double century'

SPORTS REPORTER from Galle



He may have been out to the first ball he faced early in the morning session, but at the end of the day he was batting on 166 and had taken his side to a dominant position after the first day of the first Test against Bangladesh. The scoreboard will not remember nor reflect that he edged a delivery off a no-ball delivered by Bangladesh pacer Subashis Roy.

"I may have played a false stroke the first ball I faced; I play that way naturally," said a satisfied Kusal Mendis after the day's play. "After I played that shot I got a second opportunity to do justice to my team. I took that advantage and I provided the team with what they required from me."

It was his second century in 15 Tests, with the first one being 176 against Australia in Pallekelle last July. So he seems to be in the habit of playing big innings and was relishing the opportunity to turn this century into a maiden Test double ton today.

"I am keen to score a double century. I missed

getting one at Pallekelle," he said. "I am a set batsman and the team expects me to score big. I will try my best to score 200, if not more."

His 196-run fourth-wicket partnership with Asela Gunaratne was what turned the match in Sri Lanka's favour after an uncertain start.

"Asela is also in very good form having scored in the T20s in Australia. I had belief that he would also go for a big score the way he played. During our partnership we ran a lot of singles and when I was tired he scored runs from the other end. That was very helpful for me, but unfortunately for him he got out. It was easy batting with him."

Mendis, like Bangladesh's Mehedi Hasan Miraz, felt that the wicket would not change much over the next couple of days and that it would continue to help the batsmen. He credited Bangladesh's bowlers for tying Sri Lanka down in the first session and a half.

"They bowled very well in the first two sessions; they had a plan and stuck to it, which is why we couldn't score too many runs in the first one and a half sessions. Initially it was difficult to score quickly; later on because we had wickets in hand we went for the runs."

PERFORMER OF THE DAY

KUSAL MENDIS

He might be just 22, but Sri Lankan legends, Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene, have already termed him as the next big thing for Sri Lankan cricket. Yesterday, he showed why. In August 2016, Kusal Mendis scored a brilliant 176 against Australia to help his side recover from the dead and win the series and yesterday, he helped the hosts recover from 92 for 3 with an unbeaten 166. He was initially a bit lucky, when he edged his first ball to the keeper. The decision however, was overturned because the bowler overstepped, but after that he was brilliant.

BD-SL SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA: First Innings	R/B	4s/6s
Karunaratne b Mehedi	30/76	2/0
Tharanga b Subashis	4/14	1/0
Mendis not out	166/242	18/2
Chandimal c Mehedi		
b Mustafizur	5/54	0/0
Gunaratne b Taskin	85/134	7/0
Dickwella not out	14/13	2/0
Extras: (lb-9, w-3, nb-5)	17	
Total: (For 4 wickets in 88 overs)	321	
To bat: Perera, Herath, Lakmal, Kumara, Sandakan.		
Fall of wickets: 1-15, 2-60, 3-92, 4-288.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mustafizur	15	3	50	1
Taskin	16	3	48	1
Subashis	16	3	58	1
Mehedi	12	0	66	1
Shakib	24	3	71	0
Soumya	3	0	9	0
Mahmudullah	2	0	10	0

BANGLADESH: Mushfiqur Rahim (capt), Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Mominul Haque, Shakib Al Hasan, Mahmudullah Riyad, Liton Das, Mehedi Hasan, Taskin Ahmed, Subashis Roy, Mustafizur Rahman.

South Zone hammer 749

SPORTS REPORTER



Prime Bank South Zone hammered the second highest first-class score in an innings, 749, in Bangladesh and in the process Shahriar Nafees hit his second double hundred on the third day of the final round of the Bangladesh Cricket League in BKSP yesterday.

However, as far as winning the championship is concerned, their mountainous scores won't make any difference since league leaders BCB North Zone bundled Islami Bank East Zone for just 216 runs yesterday, gaining a first innings lead and by doing so they have almost sealed their name on this year's trophy.

At the moment North Zone are on top with 19 points and by the end of the day, they were leading by 397 runs. After North Zone's Shaiful Islam scalped a six-wicket haul, the



SHAHRIAR NAFEEES ... 207 not out

Northerners rode on Nazmul Hossain Shanto's unbeaten 91 and Nasir Hossain's 63 to finish the day on 239 for 6.

Nazmul will be hoping to reach his hundred when North come out to bat today. Until yesterday, Nazmul had scored 91 runs with ten boundaries while Nasir scored a fluid 63 with eight fours.

For East Zone to create any kind of upset, they will probably need to chase down more than 450 runs at

SCORES IN BRIEF

NORTH ZONE v EAST ZONE	(Saifuddin 40, Rahatul 38; Shaful 6-70, Forhad 3-38)
NORTH ZONE: 374 and 239 for 6 (Nazmul 91 not out, Nasir 63, Junaid 40; Jayed 2-45, Saifuddin 2-47)	
SOUTH ZONE v CENTRAL ZONE	(Tushar 217, Nafees 207 not out; Shuvagata 3-202, Tanbir 2-65)
SOUTH ZONE: 749 for 8	
EAST ZONE: 216 all out in 69.5 overs	

least, depending on how well North Bat today, the final day.

In addition to that, South Zone will need to beat Walton Central Zone at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium, which at the moment seems quite improbable. Because even though South Zone romped up 749 runs in the first innings, Central finished the day on 184 for 3. Therefore South Zone will need to bundle them out twice in a day.

The wicket at Fatullah seemed to support the batsmen even on day three as Shahriar Nafees, who had

an overnight score of 170, ended up remaining unbeaten on 207. On the whole, he hit five sixes and 18 fours. He was well supported by Nazmul Islam, who remained unbeaten on 36 off 95 balls. Had Nazmul not supported the left-hander, he would not have been able to reach his double hundred.

After the exchange, Shadman Islam and Saif Hassan scored half-centuries to lead Central's reply.

At the moment, it seems as though both the games are going to end as draws.