

SPORT



Bangladesh opener Soumya Sarkar comes down the track to smash one over the midwicket boundary during his enterprising, unbeaten knock of 53 in the second innings of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Galle International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

'A draw is very much possible'

SAKEB SUBHAN from Galle



Given the situation they were in halfway through the fourth day of the first Test yesterday with Sri Lanka's lead reaching 400, Bangladesh could not have asked for a better situation than to have all 10 wickets in hand when play ended prematurely because of bad light with 11 overs left to be bowled. By then Bangladesh had reached 67 without loss, with Soumya Sarkar batting on 53 off 47 balls and Tamim Iqbal keeping him company on a 44-ball 13, and were 390 runs adrift of an unlikely win with a maximum of 98 overs to bat on the final day today.

Bangladesh's ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who had one of the more fruitless Tests with the ball with three wickets for 204 runs in 57.1 overs of bowling across both innings, was happy with the start the openers provided and thought that a draw was a realistic possibility.

"Draw, since we still have 10 wickets," Shakib said when asked during the post-day press conference what the most realistic outcome was. "I think we need two or three partnerships. The first session is very important. The whole day will depend on how we play the first session. If we survive the first session, [losing] maybe not more than one wicket, I think then we can reassess the situation and look from there on."

Although he said the wicket was still good for batting, he did not seem to be thinking about a win, saying it would be huge for Bangladesh if that did happen.

"At the same time we have to think of playing session by session; not look at the end result. If we try too many things at the start of the session, we might lose a few wickets and end up losing the game."

"Of course on the fifth day the pitch may behave differently. The ball has started to turn a bit now, so it may turn more tomorrow. But I think our batsmen are capable and since we still have 10 wickets, we genuinely believe that if not a result, a draw is very much possible."


The left-hander believed the way Tamim

and Soumya batted yesterday evening was a good blueprint for the rest to follow.


"Every batsman coming to the wicket has to try and bat [for a] long [time], and also score runs because that increases a batsman's confidence and he becomes more comfortable. You cannot just defend or just attack. It has to be balanced, like Soumya batted today. He did not play any loose shots but he had a good strike rate."

"At the other end Tamim also batted very well. Maybe he did not get that many bad deliveries so he took a bit of time to score runs. Hopefully they can repeat it tomorrow and those of us batting later can also repeat it," explained Shakib. "The whole team wants them to bat as long as possible, then it becomes easier for the rest of the batsmen."

Although the Sri Lankans plundered runs almost at will and -- other than Shakib's



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MOMENTS

SPORTS REPORTER from Galle

FICKLE WEATHER GODS

With late afternoon rain forecast, ominous clouds were rolling in from the north of the ground yesterday. There were a few drops of rain as Sri Lanka's lead neared 350 an hour before tea and the groundsmen were lined up outside the boundary with the gigantic covers in hand, but then the wind changed direction and drove the clouds away. It seemed the weather gods were in favour of the natives and wanted to give them as much time as possible to -- as coach Graham Ford said a day before -- dictate, then declare. But then, with 11 overs left in the day, they rushed the clouds in and forced the Bangladesh batsmen and the Sri Lankan fielders off the field, thereby averting Bangladesh's customary wicket glut near the end of the session and enabling the visitors to keep all of their wickets intact overnight. It remains to be seen whose side the fickle guardians of the clouds will be on today.

POETIC JUSTICE THWARTED

Shakib Al Hasan had drawn Bangladesh fans' ire on the third day when he chased a ball down the leg side from Lakshan Sandakan and feathered a touch through to the keeper to be out for just 23. In the 34th over of the Sri Lankan innings, with Shakib bowling to Kusal Mendis, the perfect riposte seemed to be on the offing when all went up to appeal for a catch when the right-hander seemed to tickle the ball through to the keeper down the leg side. The umpire's shake of the head was met with a prompt review, but unfortunately for Shakib, replays showed that the ball had just missed the batsman's gloves. Shakib's reply will have to wait for another day, at the least.

SPORTS REPORTER from Sri Lanka



Even before the tea interval on the fourth day of the first Test yesterday it was a little surprising that Sri Lanka, with a lead of more than 400, were not declaring. Tea came and went and clouds to the north of the Galle International Stadium looked threatening, and with some rain forecast for the afternoon for the fifth day as well, it was thought that Sri Lanka were cutting it a little close if they wanted to go 1-0 up in the two-match series against Bangladesh.

The hosts eventually declared four overs after tea at the fall of Dilruwan Perera's wicket, setting Bangladesh a chase of 457 in around 125 overs, 11 of which were lost because of bad light causing an early close. Opener Upul

Tharanga, who scored his second century against Bangladesh and third in Tests overall yesterday, said the weather was not on their minds when deciding upon the declaration.

"Our planning is not based on weather predictions. It could rain tomorrow [Saturday] as well. We have 98 overs and the first hour is going to be crucial. In that first hour if we can take two wickets, we can turn the game in our favour," said Tharanga, who scored 115 off 171 deliveries in Sri Lanka's second innings of 274 for six declared.

Tharanga denied that memories of their seven-wicket defeat to Pakistan in Pallekele in 2015, when Younis Khan's unbeaten 171 authored a chase of 382, had a bearing on the decision to declare late.

"Not really. Our aim was to give them 125 overs. We thought about it. This Galle wicket this time has less

turn. Even on Day Four there's not much turn which is unusual. Bowlers need some cover as well. When they [Bangladesh] have lots of runs they can be attacking."

Although the wicket has not overtly helped the spinners so far, Tharanga noticed some encouraging signs. "We saw towards our latter part of the innings, there was some help for the spinners. I hope that will be the same when we bowl late tomorrow."

A batsman who has batted up and down the order over his career, Tharanga said that he was happy to perform wherever he is needed. "Last two series I batted in the middle order. I was asked whether I liked to open before the series. I started as an opener and I didn't have any issues in saying yes. Last few years I batted in the middle order. Wherever I play I want to do a job for the team."

Imrul leaving for SL today

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh opener Imrul Kayes will leave for Sri Lanka today afternoon to join the national team in Colombo.

Imrul was not picked for the first Test since the team management was unsure whether he had recovered completely from an injury to his thigh muscle, which he had picked up in the New Zealand series and injured again in the one-off Test against India.

He was asked to prove his fitness in the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), where Imrul played three games and also scored a century.

The main aspect that the selectors wanted to observe was whether Imrul was fit enough to field more than 100 overs, and he did so during the BCL.

Speaking to The Daily Star Imrul said that he was happy to finally be joining the national team.

"I feel good, but I will feel better if I get a chance to play in the second Test," said Imrul.

However, with Soumya Sarkar having scored fifties in both innings of the first Test, it is unlikely for the left-hander to get an opportunity in the second Test.

BD-SL SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA: First innings 494					
BANGLADESH: First innings 312 (Mushfiqur 85, Soumya 71, Tamim 57, Mehedi 41; Perera 3-53, Herath 3-72)					
SRI LANKA: Second innings					
Karunaratne c Mahmudullah					
b Taskin	32/73	1/0			
Tharanga b Mehedi	115/171	11/2			
Mendis c Taskin b Shakib	19/49	0/1			
Chandimal not out	50/75	4/0			
Gunaratne b Shakib	0/3	0/0			
Dickwell c Litton b Mehedi	15/17	1/1			
Perera c Litton b Mustafizur	33/27	5/1			
Extras: (b-2, lb-1, w-6, nb-1)	10				
Total: (For 6 wickets declared in 69 overs)	274				
Did not bat: Herath, Lakmal, Kumara, Sandakan.					
Fall of wickets: 1-69, 2-134, 3-198, 4-199, 5-222, 6-274.					
Bowler					
Subashis	0	M	R	W	
Mehedi	20	1	77	2	
Mustafizur	9	4	24	1	
Shakib	25	2	104	2	
Taskin	8	0	32	1	
BANGLADESH: Second innings R/B 4s/6s					
Tamim not out	13/44	1/0			
Soumya not out	53/47	6/1			
Extras: (nb-1)	1				
Total: (For 0 wickets in 15 overs)	67				
To bat: Mominul, Mahmudullah, Mushfiqur, Shakib, Liton, Mehedi, Taskin, Mustafizur, Subashis.					
Bowler					
Lakmal	0	M	R	W	
Perera	5	0	24	0	

Starc ruled out of India series

AFP, New Delhi

Australia's pace spearhead Mitchell Starc was ruled out of the ongoing tour of India on Friday after suffering a stress fracture to his right foot, the team physiotherapist said.

"Mitchell experienced some pain in his right foot during the second Test in Bangalore which unfortunately had not subsided a few days after the Test as we had hoped," the physio David Beakley said in a Cricket Australia statement.

"We made the decision to scan his foot in Bangalore this morning and unfortunately it has revealed a stress fracture."

Matara Hurricane a Mohammedan man

SPORTS REPORTER from Galle



1990s and early 2000s, at one point holding the records for the fastest fifty and fastest century. He was the scourge of opening bowlers the world over. His Test batsmanship was not far behind, with a highest score of 340 in Sri Lanka's world-record score 952 for six against India in 1997.

Today, he is the chairman of selectors of Sri Lanka Cricket.

Sanath Jayasuriya cut a busy figure, sitting in discussion with his fellows in the selectors' box at the Galle International Stadium. But he briefly visited the TV commentary box and on his way back, though a little nonplussed when cornered by the

Bangladesh media contingent, he beamed a smile when asked about his days in Dhaka's club cricket scene.

"My club is Mohammedan. I enjoyed my time with the club," said Jayasuriya about his time with the Old Dhaka outfit first in 1998-99 and then in 2009. "They looked after me very well. I was happy there. And [BCB vice-president and Mohammedan SC official] Mahbub [Anam] has looked after me very well."

He is in his second stint as the chairman of the selection panel and said that he was intent upon contributing to the growth of Sri Lanka's cricket.

"I am happy with what I did in cricket, and this opportunity again to serve as chairman of selectors. Every time what I want is to bring the team up and do something with Sri Lanka cricket, which I did for 20 years of cricket. So I'll be very happy to do this job. As long as I can do something for

Sri Lanka cricket, that's what matters."

After the exit of legends like Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene, Jayasuriya thinks it will take a bit of time for the island nation to get back to the standards of old.

"We are trying to build the Sri Lanka team at the moment with a young core. We have got quite a few talented youngsters and we have given them the opportunity and they've been playing well. You can't replace those players [Sangakkara, Jayawardene] overnight. You can't replace Aravinda De Silva still. You need somebody to give them [young players] the opportunity and experience, then one day we will talk about these players too."

"Sri Lanka cricket needs a bit more time to settle down. We are doing well in Sri Lanka but in South Africa, as the chairman of selectors I was not happy. We are in a transition period and the players need a little time to settle down."

He was part of Sri Lanka's 100th Test in 2000, and ahead of Bangladesh's Test century at the P Sara Oval in the second Test of the ongoing series, the former explosive opener said he has been impressed with Bangladesh's progress and also had some advice for Bangladesh's batsmen after they surrendered wickets during a first innings of 312.

"They've been really good, they've been improving. The Bangladesh Cricket Board has done a lot of things to improve grassroots cricket, youngsters and it's coming up really well. At the moment you have got a very good team, even though sometimes the ups and downs will be there, but Bangladesh cricket has done a lot of things."

"It's all up here, mentally," he said, pointing to his temple. "So if you get a chance anybody can get a big hundred like Kusal Mendis. You have to convert those fifties into hundreds. That will help the team"



SANATH JAYASURIYA