

SPORT



Still room for improvement

SPORTS REPORTER

The series scoreline says 1-0 in favour of Bangladesh, and that can too easily be seen as a vindication of all the decisions and strategies that led to Wednesday's stirring 20-run victory. That may be the way the powers that be are thinking as they named an unchanged squad for the second Test in Chittagong starting on September 4. But the narrow margin of victory and the fact that it could easily have been different if not for Taijul Islam and Shakib Al Hasan's bowling heroics on the last day suggest that all was not perfect in Bangladesh's thinking and execution, even though it was a fine victory to be cherished.

In that regard, not much has changed since before the first Test, as team selection and the batting order are still contentious.

It is not that Shafiqul Islam bowled badly; it is just that he really did not bowl. He bowled six overs out of a total of 74.5 overs in the first innings and was manning the boundary for the entirety of the 70.5 overs in the second innings. Only part-timer Nasir Hossain bowled less, but at least his four overs were spread across both innings and in the second dig he opened the bowling in place of Shafiqul.

Now Nasir is mainly a batsman, so use out of him can be gotten elsewhere, but to play Shafiqul as a specialist deep fine leg fielder or a specialist sweeper cover is luxury that Bangladesh can ill afford.

Shafiqul's selection has been a point of controversy since before the first Test started. On a raging turner, if two pacers were to be fielded, was Shafiqul -- who can be a fine if injury-prone bowler in helpful conditions -- the best choice as Mustafizur Rahman's pace partner?

Against England last year the first Test in Chittagong was played with pacers Kamrul Islam Rabbi and Shafiqul, and even though they collectively bowled many more overs than the combined 15 bowled by Mustafizur and Shafiqul in the Dhaka Test against Australia, Shafiqul was excluded in the second Test and all-rounder Shuvagata Hom was brought in to shore up the batting.

That could be the way forward here. Judging by the wicket in last year's Test against England, Chittagong will be as much of a dustbowl as Mirpur, perhaps with less uneven bounce. Bangladesh proved that on such pitches they can take 20 wickets with four specialist bowlers, so picking an additional batsman may be the way to go, especially as just 20 runs have separated the two teams so far.

But for that they will have to choose either the currently out of favour Mominul Haque -- shoehorned into the first Test squad at the last moment, arguably because of public sentiment -- or Liton Das, a capable batsman whose chief value till now has been as wicketkeeping understudy for skipper Mushfiqur Rahim. In that light, the kneejerk naming of an unchanged squad does not seem particularly wise.

Then there is the perennial problem with Soumya Sarkar, whose talent is undoubted but proved himself technically and temperamentally deficient as an opener in the first Test. The persistence with him has a knock-on effect of breaking up Bangladesh's most successful opening pair of Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes, with the latter being turned into a makeshift, ill-at-ease number three in the absence of Mominul. It may well be that Imrul, who failed in both innings in Mirpur, makes way in Chittagong as there seems to be a chopping block with his name indelibly engraved on it. Then there is the problem with Sabbir Rahman who has become a floater in the batting order, which is a concept more suited to ODIs and T20Is.

Australia will certainly have a lot of headaches, but it is not as if the current series leaders will not have a worry-free Eid.



There may be a question mark over pacer Shafiqul Islam's spot in the Bangladesh playing 11 for the second Test. PHOTO: STAR FILE

Tigers take stock before Chittagong

SPORTS REPORTER



It was the morning after Bangladesh cricketers had entered a new era by registering their maiden Test win over Australia and taking a 1-0 lead in their two-match Test series. Most of the cricketers had gone home to spend time with their families ahead of their flight to Chittagong today for the second Test starting from September 4 at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

The man of the moment Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal and skipper Mushfiqur Rahim opted to stay with their families while juniors such as Mustafizur Rahman, Mehedi Hasan and Taijul Islam had an outing at the National Academy in Mirpur yesterday.

Left-arm seamer Mustafizur, who bowled just nine overs and remained wicket-less in the first Test, had a massage at the National Academy complex and he will be looking to regain his rhythm before the second Test.

Left-arm spinner Taijul has been the unsung hero behind quite a few Bangladesh successes in the recent past, including the Tigers' historic 20-run win over the Aussies in the first Test where he managed to bowl in the right areas and give the Australians a tough time.

He bowled just eight overs in the first innings -- trapping Peter Handscomb leg-before to capture his 50th Test wicket -- but he did superbly in the second innings where he consistently hit the proper length and ended up picking three for 30 from 19.5 overs.

According to Taijul, he is looking to bowl more balls in the right areas and informed that the Tigers were expecting to get a similar sort of pitch in Chittagong.

"Most of the time I am able to get wickets but at the same time I am not able to bowl in good areas consistently. I will try to rectify that mistake and look to bowl more good balls in Chittagong. If I am able to bowl more good balls consistently it will help my career and also benefit the team," Taijul said while speaking to reporters at the National Academy yesterday.

The 25-year-old also informed that ace all-rounder Shakib had helped him by providing inputs throughout the game and added that the Tigers had the ability



Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam spoke to the press at the BCB Academy complex yesterday, stressing the importance of bowling in the right areas in order to get even more success. PHOTO: STAR

to clinch the series 2-0.

On the other hand, young off-spinner Mehedi, who was also superb with his tight line and length and had a talk with Australian off-spinner Nathan Lyon after the first Test, informed that Shakib inspired the team during the drinks break on the fourth day which helped the team immensely.

"Shakib bhai inspired me a lot during the drinks break by saying that if the supporters in the gallery had the belief that Bangladesh could win the game then why can't we think like that. After that everyone gave their all in the field and their wickets started to fall as Shakib bhai gave us important breakthroughs," Mehedi told reporters.

Media slam 'overpaid' Aussies

'Are Bangladesh the new Sri Lanka', asks Times of India

STAR SPORT DESK



Australia cricket team were slammed by media and termed as 'overpaid prima donna' cricketers by the Australian media following their 20-run defeat to Bangladesh in the first Test at Dhaka.

While Bangladesh were praised for their impressive victory, media focused on the financial disparity between the two sides.

The Australian's headline read '\$1.36m a year to lose to cricket's paupers' and the report detailed the gap between the two teams in financial terms.

The Aussie cricketers get paid about 26,000 Australian dollars per week and each member on average earns 1.36 million dollars a year.

By contrast, a Bangladesh cricketer earns 500 dollars a week and on average 26,136 dollars per year in salaries.

The Australian highlighted that the

Aussie cricketers will each earn more than their victors in the Dhaka Test.

Steve Smith and David Warner will each earn \$2m from their newly signed contracts with Cricket Australia.

Compared to that, Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Tamim Iqbal receive an annual salary of Tk 2.4 million, about 37,240 dollars.

"What happened in Dhaka was on one hand wonderful for world cricket and on the other embarrassing for a pack of overpaid prima donnas," the Melbourne Herald-Sun said. "Australia, if you're going to go strike over their pay packets, you want to make sure you back it up in the field of play. Losing to Bangladesh is hardly doing that."

The Australian even asked "Did our national team expend too much energy on the Australian Cricket Association picket line and not enough in the nets?"

Further down under, the New Zealand Herald heaped praise on Shakib and wrote: "Shakib proved why he was the world's No.1-

ranked allrounder across all three formats, taking five-wicket hauls in both digs after top-scoring with 84 in the first innings."

A Times of India's headline, meanwhile, asked whether Bangladesh are the new Sri Lanka, comparing the Tigers' recent upturn to Sri Lanka's surge from whipping boys to world champions in the 1990s. "There's been a shift in power balance in subcontinental cricket in recent times," the article began, and goes on to add: "It's their recent performances in Test cricket at home that has earned them the respect that the nation has been so desperately craving."

Meanwhile an article from The Guardian suggested that Bangladesh's improvement has been rapid and they 'earned this triumph.'

It said that rolling four year rating cycle cannot adequately measure rapid development like Bangladesh's and reminded that 'it is a false equivalency to conclude that Steve Smith's touring party are inherently more capable because they are banking big salaries.'

Twin tons lift India to 375

AFP, Colombo

Captain Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma slammed quickfire tons as India flayed a hapless Sri Lanka to post 375 for 5 in the fourth one-day international in Colombo on Thursday.

The batsmen shared 219 runs for the second wicket off just 168 balls after the visitors won the toss and elected to bat on an easy-paced wicket at the R. Premadasa stadium.

With the series already in pocket, Kohli batted with gay abandon, hitting 17 fours and two sixes in his 96-ball 131.

Sharma (104) hammered 11 fours and three sixes in an equally entertaining innings off 88 balls.

SCORES IN BRIEF
INDIA: 375 for 5 in 50 overs (Sharma 104, Kohli 131, M Pandey 50 not out, Dhoni 49 not out; Mathews 2-24)

'Not fussed about title-drought'

SPORTS REPORTER



Ace golfer Siddikur Rahman believes his recent performance in the Porsche European Open and the hard work he put in prior to that event is helping him raise his game, regardless of the fact that he has not won a title on a significant tour in almost four years.

Despite going agonisingly close quite a few times, the 32-year-old has not had success on either the Asian Tour or the European Tour since winning the Hero Indian Open in November 2013. With the third-place finish in Hamburg late July, the two-time Asian Tour winner has now twice gone very close to winning on the European Tour, but could not go on to capture the title.

Siddikur, however, is not concerned about the lack of trophies in his cabinet -- the Bangladeshi golfer has two Asian Tour titles and six on the Indian Tour (PGTI) -- as he feels his overall game has improved.

"My game is fine at the moment," Siddikur said in an interview with The Daily Star. "I'm doing everything that needs to be done to be on top. I had some lacking in fitness which I have worked hard on recently. You could see the result of good fitness and psychological strength in Hamburg."

The Bangladeshi golfer was not in fact planning to go to Hamburg

until he received a late invitation. "It wasn't really planned. I didn't know much about the course. Had I known the course would be so long, I might not have gone there. Nevertheless I wanted to put to use the things I did during training. Thankfully, I went and I can say that it was one my best performances," Siddikur said.

Siddikur earned a paycheque of 112,600 dollars from finishing third in that event while his overall Asian Tour earnings this season has been 95,420 dollars, despite two top-ten finishes and six cuts overall. No wonder the ace golfer is concentrating more on the 'big events', in a dual attempt to preserve his fitness as well as improve his standing and prize money.

"Maybe I haven't won a title on the Asian or European Tour in recent times, but my game has improved. I won a PGTI event in Chittagong this year. I finished second in Mauritius last year and third in Germany this year. Average earning is pretty good and the position that I have held means more than wins for me," claimed Siddikur, who is currently 19th in the Asian Tour Order of Merit and 315th in world rankings, up 81 places from the week before the European Open.

The premier Bangladeshi golfer, who represented the country in the Rio Olympics last year, said he is planning to play at best six to seven more events in the remainder of the

season as he wants to make the most of his ability and fitness while maximising the chances of a further rise in rankings and tour standings.

However, like any other prominent golfer, his ultimate aim remains playing in the US PGA Tour, which he believes is possible if he keeps on improving his overall game.

"I definitely want to play on the PGA Tour one day, but that will take time," Siddikur said. "It doesn't depend on your will or hard work only. These things don't



Siddikur Rahman is more concerned about improving his game rather than winning titles. PHOTO: COLLECTED

happen by fluke. You can hit a good shot by fluke or have a good day that way, but over the long run you need a lot of hard work put in a proper way to be a good golfer. The way I'm doing things right now, Inshallah I will be able to be there after a few years."

For the time being though, Siddikur is fully focused on the Asian Tour and European Tour. He will be leaving for Switzerland the day after Eid, hoping to make a mark in the 2.7-million-euro Omega European Masters.

Good and bad news for Tamim

SPORTS REPORTER



Although there will be the regret of not scoring a century after imperious displays of batting saw Tamim Iqbal get fifties in both innings of the first Test against Australia, the left-hander will be glad to receive the news that he has reached a career-best 14th place in the ICC Test Batsman rankings.

The 28 year old batted brilliantly and showed great patience on a pitch which was extremely difficult for the batsman as he scored 71 in the first innings and 78 in the second innings to lay the foundations for a historic win.

Tamim jumped six places from his previous position in the ICC rankings to reach the best position a Bangladesh batsman has ever had in Tests.

However, there was also a bad news for Tamim as he was fined 15 per cent of his match fee for breaching the ICC's code of conduct during the fourth day's play.

In addition to the fine for his breach of article 2.1.1, one demerit point has been added to Tamim's disciplinary record. Since Tamim had come into the match with one demerit point against his name, he is now on two demerit points.

If the 28-year-old reaches four or more demerit points within a 24-month period, they will be converted into suspension points and he will be banned.



Tamim had received the earlier demerit point during the second Test against Sri Lanka in Colombo on 16 March 2017.

The incident took place in the first session of the fourth day's play when Tamim debated continuously with the umpires while the Australian batsmen were changing their gloves regularly. Shortly thereafter, he approached Matthew Wade and gestured towards him to leave the field upon his dismissal.

Meanwhile, Shakib Al Hasan also moved up three places to a career-best 14th position in the ICC's Test Bowler rankings after his match haul of 10 for 153 at Mirpur. The champion all-rounder also consolidated his position at the top of the Test All-rounders' list, racking up his highest aggregate of 489 points. He scored 84 and five respectively in the two innings.

Spinner Mehedi Hasan jumped three places to 30th, while Taijul Islam moved up four places to 32nd.