



South Africa opener Dean Elgar cashed in on an inexplicable decision from Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim to field first after winning the toss on the opening day of the first Test at Senwes Park in Potchefstroom yesterday. The left-handed batsman hit an unbeaten 128 as the home side finished the day on 288-1.

PHOTO: AFP

# Fooled by clouds, foiled by fear

**SAKEB SUBHAN** from *Potchefstroom*

At 7:00 am, the clouds had gathered. In the days leading up to the Test match, the talk from most people who knew a bit about Senwes Park was that the ball does not seem around much here, unless there is a bit of cloud cover. And even then, they said it will move around only for the first hour. At any rate, they added, it is a bat-first pitch. South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis said as much when he lost the toss yesterday -- that he would have batted first.

South Africa started their innings. Mustafizur Rahman and Shaiful Islam were unable to get many balls to move off the straight. It was imperative that they did, because the Kookaburra ball used in South Africa has a flat seam and whatever movement the seamers could get would be on offer for the first 20-25 overs.

Before that, Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim had said on the eve of the match that the pitch looked dry, and would take spin later on in the match, which presumably would disadvantage the team batting second. Du Plessis had said that he 'hoped' that it was whittish with a tinge of brown, not much grass. The sun was ducking in and out, but in the horizon there was a widening strip of blue. Even if the cloud cover persisted till the start of play, it would not last long. There would be an hour of movement at most.

Skipper Mushfiqur had uttered the words 'courage' and 'guts' on more than a few occasions in the lead-up to the first ball. Interestingly, he also used them at the toss. There was also much talk about using Bangladesh's pacers on the pace-friendly pitches of South Africa. Coach Chandika Hathurusingha had said that when, now two South Africa pacers are injured, may be the best time to play them.

Yesterday, by the time the players started warming up at 8:30 in the morning, an hour before the toss, the sun had begun to peak through the pitch, uncovered for the first time in a day, was whitish with a tinge of brown, not much grass. The sun was ducking in and out, but in the horizon there was a widening strip of blue. Even if the cloud cover persisted till the start of play, it would not last long. There would be an hour of movement at most.

After Sharaf had bowled two overs, and the score read 13 for no loss after five, Mushfiqur brought on off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz, in South Africa. After they won the toss and elected to bowl, an off-spinner, with Taskin Ahmed waiting in the wings.

So, the time for the all-important toss had arrived and just at that moment, the sun ducked in behind some clouds. If you were a Bangladesh follower at the ground, and generally wished the team well, you would not have had to wonder too long why the clouds were making you uneasy. The electronic scoreboard had the explanation: Bangladesh have won the toss and elected to field.

Was it that Mushfiqur was trying to simulate home comforts by bringing the spinner on early? That is a question that can be sure, at the time of writing that the post-day presser is still to take place, there will not be a satisfactory answer to. Neither will there be a straight owning up to the real reason they chose to field first. It was explained by the decision to bring Mehedi on. There was not a courageous or attacking atom in the decision; there was no plan to hunt the opposition with pace. There was just the fear of the 7:00am shadow.

A South Africa team desperate for runs after a poor series with the bat in England closed their previous season were allowed the first use of a pitch that both captains had agreed was a good one for batting. If you reverse the saying 'fortune favours the brave', then justice seemed to have been done, especially if his words are an indicator.

That is of course not to say that Bangladesh would have plundered runs if they had batted first. Even if they were all out for less than 200, they could say that they took the positive option to put runs on the board, but failed. As it turned out however, yesterday they failed to implement whatever plan they had and also exposed themselves as fearful of negotiating even the possibility of some movement in the first hour.

In doing so, they have made it clear as early as the first morning that there can only be one winner in this Test.

# 'Any captain would field first in SA'

SPORTS REPORTER from *Potchefstroom*

It was such a day for Bangladesh that choosing someone to send to the post-day press conference must have been a difficult decision for the team management. Usually, the best performer of the day is sent, even if the performance was not much to write home about. On particularly bad days, and the opening day of the Test series against South Africa in Potchefstroom during which the home side reached 298 for one equalises as such a day, someone from the coaching staff goes up.

year-old Sabir Rahman, who had a hand in Bangladesh's sole success when he ran out debutant Aiden Markram three runs short of a most deserving hundred, who stood in the firing line.

The decision to field first caught everyone -- be it the television commentators, the South African journalists in the press box, home skipper Faf du Plessis or debutant Markram -- by surprise. Sabir however thought that the mistake was in reading the pitch.

Leaving aside the ease with which an international cricketer admitted that a whole cricketing set-up has failed to read a pitch that was devoid of green grass, the fact is that assertion is not correct. Skipper Mushfiqur Rahim is on record as having said on the eve of the Test that the Senwes Park wicket looked to be dry and will probably take turn as the days wear on.

One possibility could have been that the early morning cloud cover influenced the decision, either to exploit seam and swing or to avoid the same from the South Africans. "Cloudy or sunny weather does not influence you to field first. You are playing in South Africa, of course you will win the toss and field. Any captain would do that," Sabir said confidently. "There is nothing more to say."

the team that won the toss has fielded first a total of 65 times. The number of times the team opted to bat first is 156.

Sabir's utterances, it seemed, were in keeping with a performance that was clueless from toss to stumps. He had one more gem when asked about the total they were hoping to restrict South Africa to. "If they bat for three days then we don't know how many runs they will score, they may score 700 or even 1000. We don't have any target. We have to restrict them to as low a total as possible.

That seems easier said than done, especially if his words are an indicator.

## PERFORMER OF THE DAY

**AIDEN MARKRAM**

Aiden Markram almost made his Test debut for South Africa a memorable one but was denied his maiden century against Bangladesh, consequently becoming the 30th batsman to get out in the nervous nineties, on the opening day of the first Test in Potchefstroom. The right-hander started brilliantly after Tigers skipper Mushfiqur Rahim surprisingly elected to field. Markram looked compact and displayed great maturity alongside Dean Elgar, adding 196 runs for the opening wicket. After lunch the 23-year-old opened up following his 50 off 77 balls, blasting 10 of his 13 boundaries, before being run-out on 97 off 152 balls.

## 'Have never seen it in a selfish way'

SPORTS REPORTER from *Potchefstroom*

On the day before the Test, there was a lot of buzz about the 22-year-old debutant Aiden Markram. South Africa skipper was asked about his temperament, and said that he had a good head on his shoulders. That was proved pretty quickly.

Yesterday, he batted sublimely to score 97 in a 196-run opening stand with Dean Elgar, and when his partner was on 99, he was run out in the eagerness to run Elgar's 100th run. But it was Elgar who seemed more disappointed.

"More than happy to take it. If you had asked me that I would score 97 last night, I would have taken it with open arms," said the debutant after the day's play.

"I've never really looked at the game from a selfish perspective. I think I wanted it so badly for him that I caught myself in no man's land." It's part of the game and you have to take it on the chin and move forward.

"Yes, pleasantly surprised for sure," he said when asked about Bangladesh's decision to field first after winning the toss. "Our plan was to bat first, as Faf mentioned."

Australia opener David Warner is ecstatic after his century in the fourth one-day international against India at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore yesterday.

# Consolation win for Aus

AFF, Bangalore

Australia beat India by 21 runs in the fourth ODI to secure a consolation win by restricting India to 313 for eight after their ill-fated losses.

The series result now stands at 3-1 to India's favour, with already clinched the series in the previous match.

Earlier, opener David Warner hit a sparkling century in his 100th one-day international to guide Australia to 334 for 5.

The swashbuckling opener combined with Aaron Finch to give the visitors a 231-run first wicket start in the fourth match of the five-game series after they elected to bat.

Australia are playing for pride in Bangalore after losing the first three games. The left-right batting pair of Warner,

who hit 124 off 119 balls, and Finch, who made 94, pulverised the Indian bowlers attack in the first 35 overs.

The left-handed Warner hit his 12 runs and four sixes. It was his 14th ODI century since making his debut at Hobart in 2009.

The batsman got to his milestone with a boundary off part-time spinner Kedar Jadhav, jumping for joy as the runs were marked up. He later fell to Jadhav's off-spin and walked off to a standing ovation.

Finch, who missed out on his second successive century, soon followed his partner after getting caught at mid-on off paceman Umesh Yadav.

Yadav, who returned figures of 4-71, got the prized scalp of skipper Steve Smith to bag his 100th ODI wicket. The visitors lost three wickets in just 15 deliveries.

But Travis Head and Peter Handscomb forged a 63-run fourth-wicket partnership to halt the Indian fightback with some intelligent batting.

Handscomb made a 30-ball 43, laced with three fours and a six, before being bowled by Yadav. Head made an effective 29.



PHOTO: AFP



Bangladesh Under-19 players pose for a selfie after their massive 145-run win against their Afghan counterparts in Sylhet yesterday.

PHOTO: BCS

# Under-19s rout Afghanistan

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Under-19 team notched a comprehensive 145-run victory over the visiting Afghanistan Under-19 side in the first encounter of a five-match U19 ODI series at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

## BD-SA SCOREBOARD

SOUTH AFRICA: First Innings: R/B 46/6				
Eggar not out	128/285 9/2			
Markram not out	97/152 13/0			
Amir not out	68/103 7/1			
Extras (R-4, W-1)	5			
Total (First Innings/Overs)	298			
To bat: Banama, Du Plessis, De Kock, Phakisoanyane, Maharaj, Rabada, Morkel, Olivier.				
Killed/caught: 1-196.				
Bowler				
M	O	M	R	W
Mustafizur	16	1	54	0
Shaiful	15	3	44	0
Mehedi	36	3	101	0
Taskin	15	3	52	0
Mahmudullah	2	0	13	0
Mominul	2	0	15	0
Sabir	4	0	15	0

**BANGLADESH:** Mushfiqur, Inam, Tamim, Mominul, Mahmudullah, Elton, Sabir, Mehedi, Taskin, Mahmudullah.

Bangladesh were bundled out for just 77 runs as left-arm seamer Kazi Anik Islam and Nayem Hasan decimated their batting order after Bangladesh posted 222 for nine in 50 overs.

Anik picked up four wickets while giving away just 27 runs from eight overs while Nayem took three scalps for only 11 runs from nine overs.

Tariq Stanilzai's was the highest score for Afghanistan and Nisarullah Wahdat (10) was the only other batsman to make it into double digits with Afghanistan failing to make a fighting stand.

## Lorgat quits as CSA CEO

AFF, Johannesburg

Cricknet South Africa (CSA) chief executive Haroon Lorgat has quit his post with immediate effect following a breakdown with the board. CSA president Chris Nenzani announced on Thursday.

Earlier, after being asked to bat, Bangladesh also looked shaky and were unable to build any strong partnerships before Towhid Hridly and Mahidul Islam added 75 runs for the fifth wicket.

Towhid top scored with 52 off 85, a knock that featured four boundaries, while Mahidul added 35 and all-rounder Anik accelerated the innings in the latter stages by scoring 27 off 24. Mujeeb Ur Rahman was the pick of the bowlers for Afghanistan, scalping four wickets while Tariq Stanilzai bagged another two.

"We tried to remedy the situation between Mr Lorgat and the board, but we were unsuccessful," said Nenzani.

All five matches will be played in Sylhet and Saif Hasan and his troops are set to take on Afghanistan in the second youth ODI tomorrow.