

# SPORTS

## Mushfiq deflects and reflects

AL-AMIN

After chastising 333-run defeat against South Africa at Potchefstroom on Sunday, Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim took the trouble of reflecting on that loss as well as the thinking behind some questionable decisions by the team management that added to their misery.

At a press briefing after the game he rightly said that they failed collectively.

"It is disappointing. I don't remember the last time we batted like this or were out for under a hundred," the Bangladesh captain said about the batting in the second innings where they were bowled out for 90, their second sub-100 total for over ten years.

He was more critical of his bowling unit.

"Even I could have bowled two balls out of six in the right place. The bowlers disappointed me a lot in the first innings," he said briefly.

His fury is justified. On a wicket typical of South Africa and typically subcontinental, Bangladesh's second-innings debacle is inexplicable. They were expected to battle for at least two sessions on the fifth and final day but crumbled even before the morning dew.

The bowling, apart from left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman, was not only ordinary but also lacked the necessary discipline. Mushfiqur's frustration was so intense that he questioned the lack of understanding of his bowling unit on how to bowl on a flat wicket. "I don't believe our bowlers can't bowl on a flat wicket. At least they could have bowled in the right areas, if not take wickets. This skill gets you to play for the national team."

It is always welcomed when the skipper speaks his mind. It drives the team to correct the mistakes. But as a true leader of the team it is also expected that Mushfiqur accepts his own mistakes rather than being diplomatic.

His decision to field surprised all and sundry but then asked what prompted him to take the decision he said: "All of us took the decision. None of us knew about this sort of wicket in South Africa."

This statement suggested that either he wanted to disown it or he was only a mere



Chief selector Minhazul Abedin (L) and captain Mushfiqur Rahim walk out of the Potchefstroom team hotel on way to Bloemfontein where Bangladesh will play their second Test against South Africa from October 6.

PHOTO: SAKER SUBHAN

part of it. Had it been an imposing leader, who is not afraid of taking a mistake on the chin, he would have said: "The decision was as balling as the wicket was".

Mushfiqur has never been witty or as assertive as his batting when it comes to marshalling his troops on the field. He also came up with an excuse regarding the decision to bowl first that needed special attention.

"On any flat wicket, the help for the bowlers comes within the first two hours. If you think about what will happen in the fourth innings and then get bowled out for 100 in the first innings, it becomes difficult," the captain said.

This particular statement portrays a 'fear factor' that has been a part of Bangladesh ever since their humble journey to the Test

arena 17 years ago.

It suggests that the decision to field first was driven by the fact that they were afraid of batting first no matter what the wicket was. If it is the case, then they better not play Test cricket. If you are afraid of surviving the first hour on a placid wicket, how can you expect to play on any given day of a Test match against the new ball?

The most successful Test teams in the world have lived up to one motto: bat first and put the pressure on the opposition right from the word go. There has always been an exception, but Potchefstroom, even if there is overnight rain and the wicket is green, can never be a bowl first decision for any captain who wants to take the challenge and win games.

The Bangladesh team management, driven by that premeditated decision, made a few more mistakes that included packing the attack with pacers when they should have included a left-arm spinner against so many right-handers on a slow turning wicket. Besides, the decision to pick TASN Ahmad and Shaiful Islam ahead of Subhshis Roy and Rubel Hossain was more emotionally driven than logical.

The second Test in Bloemfontein starts in five days' time and the wicket will be not as kind. It will definitely offer pace and bounce which many feel will be a worry for Bangladesh.

But to be honest it is not the pace and bounce that the Tigers manfully thwarted in Wellington that is cause for concern, but that self-imposed defensive mindset that they need to overcome.

## 'Pacers need more time'

SPORTS REPORTER



There have been a lot of questions over the Tigers' performance in the first Test against South Africa, with even Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim lashing out at his pacers and questioning their ability after a crushing 333-run defeat in Potchefstroom.

The pace bowling trio of Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed and Shenail Islam manages to scalp batsmen in suits in a combined 105 overs in the first Test and bowled toothlessly compared to their South African counterparts.

According to Mushfiqur, the pacers failed to bowl proper line and lengths but Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza believes that it is difficult for pacers to improve overnight. Instead he said they would need to concentrate more in the domestic circuit to gain experience for longer version cricket.

"Bowling in Test cricket has always been our biggest concern because you have to bowl for long periods and provide breakthroughs. Spinners have dominated in recent wins against England and Australia at home and it's never easy to change the bowling approach in Test cricket overnight," Mashrafe told reporters at a programme of a mobile phone company in the capital yesterday.

"Those who are out of the team will have to concentrate more on domestic cricket for a longer period and it's not like after playing well for three-four matches you are going to perform better in Tests. Test cricket is not easy, the batsman will give you challenges. But I would say that they are very inexperienced and I believe they will improve the more they play and gain experience," Mashrafe continued.

However, the inspirational captain opined that the demoralised cricketers should be backed after their disappointing show in the first Test and added that if they were able to stage a comeback in the second Test it would help boost their confidence for the upcoming limited-overs series at home.

Criticism was also leveled at the Tigers' inability with the bat as the visitors were bowled out below 100 after 10 years, collapsing to 90 all out in the second innings after posting 320 in the first innings. However Mashrafe backed them as well.

"It was a bad day for us and if you have been there you have an idea how difficult it was to bowl in those conditions. A few of our batsman got set but if you could have made it a big knock then it would have been better for us. What happened in the second innings can happen any day in cricket and obviously it was disappointing but I think they should move forward," Mashrafe concluded.



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

## Rupali, Abahani keep winning

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Rupali Bank Kriya Parishad and Dhannomdi giants Abahani Limited continued their winning streak in Women's premier Division Cricket League as they beat BKSP and Khelghar SKS by six and two wickets respectively in BKSP, Savar yesterday.

Opting to bat, BKSP were all-out on 156 in 46.1 overs where opener Murshida Khatun top-scored with 62 off 75 balls including seven fours and a six. Sobhana Masrura (29) and Nahida Akter (27) were the other two batsmen to reach the double figures along with the extras column before being bundled out for a low total.

Rupali Bank's Indian recruit, off-spinner Neelam Bisht, was the pick of the bowlers and bagged four wickets while skipper Rumana Ahmed took two.

Rupali then reached the target in 14.4 overs with six wickets to spare as wicket-keeper batman Nuzhat Tasnia scored the highest with 44. Opener Aysha Rahman added a further 39 runs while Rumana remained unbeaten on 25 to help their side clinch a fourth win.

In the other game of the day, Abahani also sealed their fourth win of the tournament by two wickets after Khelghar posted 150 for 7 in 50 overs where Sampa Mukherjee's 38 was the highest score. Abahani's Suborna Islam and Jannatul Ferdous took two wickets each for the bowling side.

Abahani fought back hard to chase down the target in 47.4 overs for the loss of eight wickets. Montaha Khatun scored 40 off 70 balls, the team highest, with the help of three fours to eventually seal the victory.

## Mobasher serves another legal notice

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director Mobasher Hossain has sent a legal notice to the National Sports Council (NSC), asking it to not approve the BCB's newly-drafted constitution which was passed in the BCB's AGM and EGM on Monday.

Mobasher stated that these activities were illegal in accordance with the Supreme Court verdict, saying that it would not be possible to approve anything until the earlier show-cause notice was resolved.

On September 24, Mobasher filed a writ petition to the High Court (HC) seeking a directive to restrain the BCB from holding the AGM and EGM.

The HC later issued a rule upon the government and the NSC to explain why it should not be directed to restrain the current executive committee from discharging its activities.

However, it did not pass any order on the plea.

## Of execution and intent

SAKER SUBHAN from Potchefstroom



When the first Test ended on Monday, just an hour and twenty three minutes into the fifth and final day, there was bright sunshine. But the forecast was for rain in the afternoon and some more rain in the evening. Just after evening lunch would have been if Bangladesh had shown more fight and taken the match that far, but were instead cooling their heels in their rooms at the adjacent NWU Puk Sports Village, the heavens opened and rained for half an hour.

Later, at around 4:00pm, there was a hailstorm, preceded by half an hour or so of gathering gloom that produced conditions similar to those that forced an early close because of bad light on the third day. In other words, at least two hours of play - roughly 30 overs - would have been taken out of the final day if Bangladesh had been able to show more fight in the first hour. Instead of the allotted 98 overs they would have had to face a maximum of 68. And the rain was not a surprise, but was forecast from the previous day.

But, resuming on 49 for three, Bangladesh just managed to play 17.1 of those overs for the addition of 41 runs.

"We were thinking of saving the match. We weren't really thinking about the rain," said Mahmudullah Riyad yesterday while talking to reporters before boarding the team bus towards Bloemfontein, where the second Test will begin on October 6. "Our target was to draw out the game; it would have been difficult to win. But we couldn't cope with the first session. Our execution was poor."

Even if they were not thinking of the rain, it is alarming that they went about their stated target to draw the game in the manner that they did. Only skipper Mushfiqur Rahim was out to a special delivery from Rabada on the fifth day, and even then he could have left it alone. Mahmudullah, who was unsure whether to play or not against a Rabada delivery which was outside the line of off stump, hung his hat out and was bowled off the inside edge for the second time in the

match. The other frontline batsman, Sabir Rahman, as usual, wanted to hit his way into some runs, missed a sweep and was trapped before.

On the fourth day after Morke's ripper to Tamim Iqbal and his subsequent lucky wicket of a review-shy Mominul Haque, Imrul Kays went hell for leather, was dropped and then was finally caught behind for

"Some get set through playing shots - if he gets bad balls and his three-four boundaries, then why not? He should play his own game. Conditions should be considered but these were good batting conditions. We couldn't execute our skills. We were very poor."

He was still hopeful of a turnaround in Bloemfontein. "The

than the action in the first Test.

It was a Test that started with an inexplicable decision to put South Africa in on a flat pitch, but Sabir said after that day that any captain would win the toss and field first in South Africa - an assertion proven patently false by a cursory look at the stats. On the second day, after a 100-run lead for three fast bowlers, Taskin Ahmed said that they were happy with the way they bowled. On the third day, Mominul rejected his support for the decision at the toss after Bangladesh were bowled out for 90. On the fourth evening, Liton Das insisted that they were not on the back foot after being reduced to 49 for three in chase of 242.

Only Mushfiqur's apology to the nations after the defeat he sounded seemed in keeping with the action on the field. But even after a 333-run defeat, talk of players playing their own game (a euphemism for the dreaded 'natural game') has been trotted out by Riyad. He also talked about respecting the conditions, but gave his team an out by saying the conditions were very good for batting, so presumably it was okay to play shots.

"We are here after a long time. But we can take confidence from the New Zealand series when Shabbir [AI Hasan] and Mushfiqur batted well. We believe that our skills are good enough if we can execute it."

It is the presence and precedence of skill that makes these words more culpable. There has been much talk about execution and the need for players to play their own game. But what of intent? The problem with this obsession with the natural game is what it makes that individual players will not and do not have to sublimate their gut instincts in favour of the team's cause, like Dean Elgar did when scoring a 388-ball 199 against an attack that gave him more bad balls than South Africa's. Whatever his natural instincts, Elgar's intent is to do what is best for the team.

With Bangladesh players' words completely disconnected from the realities on the field and their actions divorced from the needs of the team, it all comes down to the intent to see the team's needs as bigger than their own. Only then can execution follow.



Mahmudullah Riyad promised Bangladesh will put up a better batting display in the second Test against South Africa while talking to reporters in Potchefstroom yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

32 off 42 balls. Failure to execute seems now to have become a cliché much in the vein that the term 'natural game' has been the go-to phrase for cricketers explaining shots inappropriate to the match situation.

"It is not wrong to play shots," said Riyad when asked about their batting in the first innings too when, in response to South Africa's 496 for three, a number of their players got out after having settled.

belief comes from within, although he did not play well in the last innings. If we could convert the fifties or 30s, 40s in the first innings into bigger innings it would have been better. There's no use talking about that now, the main thing is we have to come back strongly in the second Test."

There may be no use talking about it now, but the talk from Bangladesh has been heard louder

## De Villiers to play tour match against Tigers

AGENCIES, Cape Town

JP Duminy will captain the SA Invitation XI that also includes AB de Villiers for the 50-over tour match against Bangladesh to be played at Bloemfontein's Mangaung Oval on October 12.

"Now that JP has retired from first-class cricket this will be a quality match play opportunity for him ahead of the Momentum ODI Series," commented Cricket South Africa (CSA) National Selection Panel Convener Linda Zondo.

"We are expecting AB to play in the next round of Sunfoil Series matches but he will benefit from some game time in the shorter format."

"This match also provides the ideal opportunity for us to expand our player base for world-class cricket, grow our talent and generally plan for the future," said Zondo.

"Aiden Markram, Keshav Maharaj, Klaas van der Merwe, Heinrich Klaasen and Wiaan Mulder are all players who fall into this category."

"Robbie Frylinck is yet another player to be looked at in all our under-20 category while we have identified Matthew Breetzke as a young player who will play a key role for South Africa at next year's Under-19 World Cup."

SA INVITATION XI: JP Duminy (captain), Matthew Breetzke, Mbulelo Budaza, AB de Villiers, Robbie Frylinck, Beauan Hendricks, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, Aiden Markram, Wiaan Mulder, Malusi Siboto, Khaya Zondo.