

SPORT

MOMENTS

THE DU PLESSIS PROPHECY

South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis cracked a joke on the eve of the match when asked what he would do if he won the toss. With opposite number Mushfiqur Rahim's inexplicable decision to field first in Potchefstroom and the backlash it created still fresh in the mind, Du Plessis said with a smirk: "I'll leave that to the Bangladesh captain." Even the home skipper would not have expected what eventually happened at the toss — Mushfiqur won the toss and elected to field, again. "Nine times out of 10 you would bat first; it's a normal wicket," a bemused Du Plessis said at the toss. He probably would have said '10 times out of 10' before Mushfiqur's decision.

THE SELF-EXILE

Having chosen to field again, it was all falling apart before Mushfiqur's eyes by the time Bangladesh had gotten through the first hour. With 55 runs coming from the first 14 overs and his bowlers continuing to bowl both sides of the wicket, too full or too short, after the drinks break the captain exiled himself to deep point (or deep square leg depending on the style of batsman). The message to the team seemed clear: I've got you into this mess, get yourselves out... I'm washing my hands off this mess.

THE RUSHED LUNCH

After a shellacking of 126 runs in the first session, Bangladesh's players were unexpectedly given an extra 10 minutes to think about their poor bowling as the afternoon session was delayed because, of all things, the Tigers' Halal food arrived late. It all seems to have worked out for the best however, South Africa's openers made up for lost time by adding 27 runs in the first 20 minutes after lunch, and Bangladesh now have an excuse if they fail to make inroads into the opposition batting — they had to eat their lunch in a hurry.



Bangladesh players celebrate the dismissal of South Africa opener Dean Elgar on the first day of the second Test in Bloemfontein yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

'Management wants me away from infield'

SAKEB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein

The sight of Mushfiqur Rahim walking towards the press conference area for the post-day press meet was a bit of a shock, and by the time it ended it was evident that all was not well in the Bangladesh dressing room. Usually the captains take the microphone on the day before the Test and once the match has finished. The intervening days are normally left to the best performers of the day and yesterday, with two wickets, it could well have been Subhasish Roy in Bangladesh's woeful concession of 428 for three after choosing to field first. That Mushfiqur, not often chomping at the bit to face up to the media, chose to take the questions meant that he had something to say, which for a second cast the mind uncomfortably back to Bulawayo 2013 when he announced that he would relinquish captaincy after an ODI series loss. It was not as drastic as that yesterday, but there was something he evidently had to get off his chest. Over the first two sessions, while his bowlers were being hammered from pillar to post, he spent much of the time observing proceedings from the boundary and not guiding his bowlers. When asked why, he replied: "I want to make something clear: I am not a good fielder. The coaches wanted me to field in the deep because they feel I give away runs or drop catches in the infield. I tried to abide by their instructions. You have to do what the team management tells you to do. I tried to field in the deep but whenever I was in the infield, I tried to speak to the bowlers."

Taken at face value, Mushfiqur's reply means that someone among the coaching staff or in the team management is pressuring Mushfiqur about his fielding now that, because of team combination considerations, the captain has given the wicketkeeping gloves to Liton Das. That speaks to discord between the captain and management/coaching staff, always a sign of trouble that often leads to some kind of drastic action especially when the team is not doing well. Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's T20I retirement had similar undertones, but the team were at the end of a largely successful tour of Sri Lanka by then.

And if that is the case, it does not say anything positive about Mushfiqur that as captain of the team, he would take things discussed in a dressing room so much to heart as to relinquish the reins for stretches of a day when his team were faring poorly.

That answer seemed to darken the mood of the presser. Before that Mushfiqur had answered with humour of a philosophical bent when queried on his decision to field again, after a similar decision had started the chain of events that led to a 333-run loss in the first Test.

"I think it was my mistake to win the toss. I have been trying to do everything honestly for the last 12 years. But in these last two games it seems it'd been better had I lost the toss," he said with a smile.

But even in good humour there were some echoes of that day in Bulawayo in the way he blamed himself for the bad results and expressed his frustration.

"It could be my failure. Maybe I wasn't able to give them the message properly. The bowling coach [Courtney Walsh] can't go and do it himself. He bowls in the nets everyday but we still can't work him to mid-on or mid-off," he said when asked about the bowling. "I thought it was a good wicket to bowl on but our bowlers didn't capitalise. We leaked a lot of runs in the first session. When it was up, they knocked the ball straight down the ground."

'SA pitches will suit me'

SPORTS REPORTER



M o h a m m a d Saifuddin seems eager to fill the gap in the Bangladesh limited

overs side of seaming all-rounder after being named in the Tigers 16 member ODI team.

Saifuddin along with skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, vice captain Shakib Al Hasan and Nasir Hossain will fly to South Africa today for the upcoming three-match ODI series starting from October 15 in Kimberly.

The 20-year-old, who made his T20I debut in April this year against Sri Lanka, is hoping to establish his place in the fifty over format in the testing South African conditions where Mushfiqur Rahim and his troops currently struggle in the two match Test series.

The all-rounder wants to bank on his seam bowling, which according to him is his biggest strength, along with his ability to hit hard with the bat if he manages to make his ODI debut against the Proteas.

"It will be a tough ask for us in the South African conditions but at the same time the pitches there will also suit my style of cricket. If I get the opportunity I will definitely look to play my natural game accord-

ing to the demand of the team. My main strength is bowling where I have to work on my variations as well while I will also look to contribute with the bat," Saifuddin told the Daily Star yesterday.

The cricketer from Feni was a regular performer during the ICC Under-19 World Cup last year in Bangladesh while he also performed significantly well in the recent High Performance teams' tour to the UK.

"The recent tour of UK with the HP side was a fruitful one as the conditions there are quite similar to the South African conditions and I think the experience will definitely help me. Obviously international cricket is always going to be tougher where I have to adjust my game and also work on variations," he added.

Meanwhile, champion all-rounder Shakib will join the Tigers, who have been struggling in the series, after completing his break from Test cricket and will certainly boost the side's morale.

It will be yet another challenge for captain Mashrafe to display better performances especially away from home while Nasir will be hoping to cement his place in the absence of Mosaddek Hossain in the ODI side.

PERFORMER OF THE DAY

AIDEN MARKRAM



On yet another day of pedestrian bowling from the Tigers, a genuine wicket-taking delivery from Rubel Hossain took the middle stump of Aiden Markram but not before the 23-year old right-hander outclassed the visitors attack. His dream of making a hundred on debut in the first Test

was dashed following an unfortunate run out only three runs shy of the mark but Markram took full advantage of the Tigers ordinary bowling effort on the first day of the second Test to reach the magical three digit figure. His 186-ball 143 contained 22 fours and he formed a 243-run opening stand with Dean Elgar which put the home side in a strong position in Bloemfontein.

Imrul worry for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein

Things have gone from bad to worse for Bangladesh.

Over the first two weeks of the tour of South Africa, all three openers on tour have sustained injuries. With Tamim Iqbal ruled out of the second Test, now Imrul Kayes' participation in the second Test is in doubt.

Half an hour into the afternoon session, at 1:16pm in the 35th over Imrul was hit on the knee on the bounce when Aiden Markram edged Mustafizur Rahman towards slip. He limped off the field and was not seen for the next four hours and four minutes of the day.

"Imrul's knee was swelling a lot, although it did not look fractured to the naked eye," said Mushfiqur after the day. "We will observe him tonight and the physio will assist him in the morning and if he is fit, tomorrow he will go straight to the field."

Even so, with the rules stating that a player cannot bat before making up the amount of time he was off the field, it seems likely that Bangladesh will have to do with a makeshift opening combination for the second time on tour, with Tamim having to bat at five in the first innings of the first Test after going off the field for 49 minutes.

Patience pays off

SPORTS REPORTER



The highlight of the first day of the 19th National Cricket League's fourth round was how players remained patient while spending longer periods of time at the crease. Dhaka Metro finished the day on 236 for 3 in 90 overs against hosts Chittagong Division while Dhaka Division are in a difficult position after losing seven wickets to score 231 runs against Barisal Division yesterday.

In the Tier-2 match at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium in Chittagong, Dhaka Metro made a solid start, posting 92 runs for the opening wicket. However, both their openers Shamsur Rahman (46) and Saykat Ali (48) were dismissed on forties while skipper Marshall Ayub (1) also departed cheaply as the batting side struggled to 116 for 3.

But Left-hander Mehrab Hossain Jr. and Mohammad Ashraf, who returned to the side after recovering from dengue fever, took charge. Both batsmen opted for a defensive approach, showing vast patience which eventually paid off as they added an unbeaten 120 runs for the fourth wicket.

Mehrab faced 213 balls for 75 runs, including five fours and a six, during his four hour stay at the crease while Ashraf scored 54 off 143 deliveries with five fours.

At the Sheikh Abu Naser stadium in Khulna, after electing to bat, Dhaka lost wickets at regular intervals as opening batsman Rony Talukdar tried to single handily steady the ship.

The right-hander was eventually dismissed after scoring a composed 88 off 224 balls with five fours while left-hander Taibur Parvez added 46 runs. Skipper Mohammad Sharif remained unbeaten on 41 alongside Zahiduzzaman (17) and will resume on the second day.

Salman, Monir Hossain and Tanvir Islam picked up two wickets each while Nuruzzaman got one for Barisal.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BARISAL VS DHAKA DIV
DHAKA: 231 for 7 in 90 overs (Rony 68, Taibur 48, Sharif 41 not out; Tanvir 2-26, Salman 2-30, Monir 2-50)
CHITTAGONG VS DHAKA METRO
DHAKA METRO: 236 for 3 in 90 overs (Mehrab 75 not out, Ashraf 54 not out; Iftekhar 2-58)
KHULNA VS RANGPUR
KHULNA: 77 for 3 in 22.2 overs (Anamul 47 not out; Sohrawardi 2-21)
RAJSHAHI VS SYLHET
Day-1 called off due to wet-outfield.

BD-SA SCOREBOARD

SOUTH AFRICA: First Innings R/B 4s/6s				
Elgar c Mustafizur				
b Subhasish	113/152	17/0		
Markram b Rubel	143/186	22/0		
Amla not out	89/99	12/0		
Bavuma c Liton b Subhasish	7/12	1/0		
Du Plessis not out	62/92	6/0		
Extras: (b-4, lb-2, nb-1, w-7)	14			
Total: (For 3 wickets in 90 overs)	428			
Fall of wickets: 1-243, 2-276, 3-288.				
To bat: De Kock, Phehlukwayo, Parnell, Maharaj, Rabada, Olivier.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mustafizur	18	3	78	0
Subhasish	20	2	85	2
Rubel	18	1	91	1
Soumya	5	0	21	0
Tajjul	19	0	98	0
Mahmudullah	7	2	27	0
Mominul	1	0	6	0
Sabbir	2	0	16	0

BANGLADESH: Mushfiqur Rahim (captain), Soumya Sarkar, Imrul Kayes, Mominul Haque, Mahmudullah, Liton Das (wkt), Sabbir Rahman, Tajjul Islam, Rubel Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Subhasish Roy.

Imamul in for Azhar

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan rested Azhar Ali for the five-match one-day series against Sri Lanka starting in Dubai next week to give the opener time to recover from a knee problem, selectors said Friday.

The 32-year-old is featuring in the second and final Test in Dubai on Friday only after having injections to relieve the pain.

Pakistan have made only one change from the side which won the Champions Trophy in England in June this year, bringing in uncapped 21-year-old opener Imamul Haq in Ali's place.

For the love of the game

SAKEB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein



As players, coaches, support staff, organisers and media people milled about the practice area of the Mangaung Oval chasing some invisible cheese to win some unfathomable rat race in the lead-up to the second Test, one elderly gentleman stood out. Clad in a red jacket to guard against the Bloemfontein chill and just standing in a corner taking it all in, at first it seemed like he was a hardened journalist who just needs to observe from afar to produce a great copy.

He kept asking the names of each Bangladesh player as they were heading out of the indoor nets on Wednesday, and then wrote the names down. So he was an old-fashioned journalist after all, acquainting himself with this young Test team. But no, the next day, upon further opportunity to talk to him, he turned out to be quite something else; cricket was not just his vocation, but his passion.

"I have watched cricket in 60 venues around the world," Englishman Peter Chisdon said on the day before the Test started. When asked whether all of them were Test venues, he replied in the affirmative, as if there could be any other format worth watching.

"I have watched over 200 Test matches, and this completes the South Africa set," said Chisdon. He travelled to South Africa from

England just to see this series. Part of his bucket list seems to be to visit every Test venue in every country. "I have completed Australia, there are two left in New Zealand, I completed India but now there are new Test venues there."

"I watched Jason Gillespie's double-hundred in Chittagong and the match before that in Fatullah," he said with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, perhaps in

containing the names of the Bangladeshi players on them. He was hunting autographs. Taskin Ahmed was on his way to the net and politely informed Chisdon that he will give him the autograph on his way back. Chisdon did not have to wait long to get one more name checked off as Subhasish Roy, on his way back from an adventurous session with the willow, paused and signed the card.



Peter Chisdon (L), a long-time cricket fan who has seen Test cricket in 60 venues and watched more than 200 games, is in Bloemfontein chasing Bangladesh cricketers for autographs. PHOTO: SAKEB SUBHAN

the knowledge that the match in question is a tough one for a Bangladeshi to revisit.

He has been doing this for more than 30 years. His first Test was the England-Pakistan encounter in Birmingham in 1987. The best Test, according to him, that he watched was West Indies' record chase of 418 in Antigua in 2003.

"I was there," he said wistfully. He then took out a pack of cards

The players went on their way, everyone else was milling about, and Chisdon was sitting on a chair organising his precious cards.

Having travelled thousands of miles, he will be watching from the stands, and should be one more reason for the Tigers to put up a good show. Even if they do not, this great fan of Test cricket will still probably find a way to enjoy the great game.