



Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim poignantly reflects the mood of his team as he walks back to the dressing room after being dismissed for 7 on the second day of the second Test against South Africa yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Bowling the stronger suit?

SAKEB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein

If there is one thing that the second day's play of the second Test against South Africa has proven, it is that though the rest of the world ridiculed him, Mushfiqur Rahim was absolutely right in his decision to field first. It is common wisdom that to get an upper hand in Test cricket, you should put your better suit forward first. While we thought that for Bangladesh the better suit is batting and have been crying ourselves hoarse for the team to win the toss and bat first, obviously coach Chandika Hathurusingha and Mushfiqur knew better all along.

That is why Mushfiqur has been so hard on the bowlers. After the first Test when Bangladesh's true stalwarts conceded 496 for three and 247 for six, Mushfiqur tried to fire up his suddenly wayward stallions by saying even he, a mere batsman, could come in and bowl deliveries in good areas. But after the bowlers conceded 428 for three on the first day of the second Test, Mushfiqur tried one more salvo, implying that aging legend and Bangladesh bowling coach Courtney Walsh would fare better if he went out and bowled instead.

Well, even as they conceded 573 for four in just 120 overs, the bowlers did for a short period execute a plan to bowl short and extracted the wickets of openers Dean Elgar and Aiden Markram. That is what you expect of your stronger suit.

But it was soon time for Bangladesh's

weak link; how long can they hide? Proteas skipper Faf du Plessis also knows the secret - no amount of closed-door practice sessions can keep that under wraps.

The only plan the batsmen can be entrusted with, however, is the 'natural game' plan. The ever-favoured Soumya chased a wide delivery without moving his feet in the second over; only natural. As was his dismissal, bowled around his legs by Kagiso Rabada. Mominul Haque tried to defend, tried to play his natural game, but could not get his bat away in time. Why should he be expected to? These are foreign conditions, it's not like he has had time in the game like the vastly superior bowlers.

Mushfiqur is trying something new. Instead of grafting, he has decided on this tour to be aggressive and went after short, rising deliveries. But he forgot that South Africa have three strong suits and Temba Bavuma sent him off with a stunner. Mahmudullah played his natural game, hanging bat out to edge to slip after driving a four. Imrul hooked nicely, then immediately after tea wafted horrendously. Sabbir came in and played his natural game. It was tough luck that he was caught at cover. But so long as he was following the process (presumably the natural game), that's fine.

But hard as he was on the bowlers, Mushfiqur was probably happy that his stronger suit finally came to the party. The bowlers, supporting the wicketkeeper, bailed them out from 65 for six to a score immeasurably better, but it might be too late for the stronger suit to strut their stuff in their day jobs.



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MOMENTS

FAF NEARLY DONE IN BY DUST

In the third ball of the 101st over, Faf du Plessis hit a straight drive that rushed past bowler Rubel Hossain while he was barely through the second step of his follow-through. Du Plessis held his pose for a fraction of a second at the ball and, the four being a foregone conclusion, strolled down the wicket to do a bit of gardening and perhaps receive partner Hashim Amla's congratulations on a shot well played.

Suddenly, Du Plessis scampered to the non-striker's end and Amla jogged to the striker's. Just when Du Plessis looked down to pat the pitch with his bat, the speeding ball had hit the sawdust positioned directly behind the umpire and slowed down enough for a fielder to collect it and throw it back. It was the doses that Bangladesh came to outsmarting South Africa in the series, but Du Plessis wised up just in time.

AMLA TOYS WITH RUBEL

By the 105th over, Amla was so entrenched in the wicket and so comfortable with the bowling that he was like a kid playing a cricket video game and after completing a hundred through orthodox but sparkling strokeplay, he was just picking his areas to score, maybe out of sheer boredom born of the simplicity of the challenge at hand.

He wanted to play a ramp shot. Rubel bowled it on a good length, but that was no issue. There was a gully in position; not even a consideration. Amla shaped for the ramp, bent a little lower than usual and uncorked his wrist to send the ball flying over gully's head for four.

BAVUMA'S BLINDER

In the 12th over of the innings Mushfiqur - who had flirted enough times in his seven balls with rising deliveries after off stump to keep the slips and gully interested - looked to run a ball down to third man for a boundary, and played it off the face of the bat to the right of gully. It went like a rocket and the diminutive Bavuma stuck his hand out and managed to put in a dive in that split second. In the next split second Bavuma had a look of disbelief on his face as he looked down at his right hand to see the ball safely lodged there. That disbelief did not compare with the look on Mushfiqur's face however.

'You never know; we're hoping; it happens'

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein

It took a follow-on to be enforced and a deficit of 419 runs at the end of the second day for Liton Das to admit that Bangladesh were on the back foot and that they were not likely to gain something from the match. After the fourth day of the first Test when Bangladesh were 49 for three in chase of 424, Liton would not admit that fact, preferring bluster to honesty. But yesterday his admission of Bangladesh's imperilled and highly disadvantaged position and his 70 in the Tigers' abject 147 all out were the only embers in a dark day for Bangladesh cricket.

But those admissions were about all that were realistic in Liton's press conference; otherwise it was consistent with most of Bangladesh players'

utterances on tour so far - divorced from the ground realities. If the bluster was less yesterday, it was only because there was very little to find to be stand-offish or arrogant about.

"No one hopes for this," Liton said when asked to sum up the performance where Bangladesh were bundled out for 147 inside 43 overs after conceding 573 for four from 120 overs. "We are a good team and we can play better than this, but a lot of things happen in cricket, you have to accept it."

The detachment from reality reared its head when pressed further to give reasons for the debacle.

"We lost a lot of early wickets and [Temba] Bavuma took a good catch [of Mushfiqur Rahim]. If you see, often a catch like that changes the momentum. Mushy bhai is a very good batsman for Bangladesh, has been playing well for the last few years. If someone catches and dis-

misses a player like that, it creates a lot of pressure."

But that was only one wicket, whereas all of the other batsmen were out playing shots. Was the pitch too difficult?

"No, it was nothing like that. As I said, you only need one ball to get out. Sometimes you make mistakes. You have to understand that we have come here after 10 years. We are not used to playing in these conditions."

"Although it is not right to give an excuse like that, but even so it is in the back of our minds. Maybe we just couldn't do it. We are a better team than this, hopefully next innings we will play better."

His press conference was filled with terms like 'you never know', 'we are hoping', etc. It reflected the mind of a player, and beyond him, a team, who are merely hopeful of avoiding utter embarrassment. That embarrassment becomes even deeper when it is con-

sidered that captain Mushfiqur won the toss in both matches. It did not take long for Liton to take a complete flight of fancy, when at the end of the five-minute presser he was asked if they could avoid an innings defeat.

"The result has not happened yet. So of course we are in the match, let's see, maybe tomorrow we can make a strong comeback. You never know."

"Target is very big now, as we are now on the back foot," he said.

"So we will try to do as well as possible. Something like that may end up happening, that from here one of our batsmen may score 200. That is not something impossible. Maybe we can score 600 in the second innings. So then they will have to bat again. We are hoping, hopefully tomorrow we can play well."

At least he seems to think that defeat cannot be avoided, only the outside chance of South Africa batting again. But then again, you never know.

Bowlers rule the day

SPORTS REPORTER



The second day of the fourth round of the 19th National Cricket League belonged to the bowlers as a total of 29 wickets fell from the four games being played across the country yesterday.

In the Tier-2 game at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna, spinners dominated the fixture between Dhaka Division and Barisal.

Resuming the day on 231 for 7, Dhaka Division were bowled out after adding 19 runs to their overnight total. Skipper Mohammad Sharif scored 58 runs following a team-high 68 by Rony Talukdar. Barisal's slow medium-pacer Salman and left-armed Monir Hossain bagged four and three wickets respectively while Tanvir Islam picked up two.

In reply, Barisal were in a spot of bother, finishing the day on 201 for 6 with Sohag Gazi top scoring with 73 off 77 featuring ten fours and a six, while Nuruzzaman remained unbeaten on 51. The pair added 110 runs for the fifth wicket to avoid early damage.

Dhaka Division's two spinners shared five wickets among them as Shuvagata Hom scalped three and Mosharraf Hossain got two. Barisal will look to take a first innings lead on the third day although they still trail by 49 runs.

Meanwhile at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium in Chittagong, Dhaka Metro declared their first innings on 369 for 9 where hosts Chittagong ended the second day on 41-1 with Sadikur Rahman (26 not out) and Iftekhar Sajjad (4 not out) set to resume the third day trailing by 328 runs.

Overnight batsman Mehrab Hossain Jr. missed out on his century by just six runs as he was dismissed after a patient 94 run knock off 271 balls including seven fours and a six. Mohammad Ashraf (66) and Asif Ahmed (64) struck sixties before skipper Marshall

SCORES IN BRIEF

BARISAL VS DHAKA DIVISION
DHAKA: 250 all-out in 102.1 overs (Rony Talukdar 68, Sharif 58; Tanvir Islam 2-26, Salman 4-38, Monir Hossain 3-53) Barisal: 201 for 6 in 77 overs (Sohag Gazi 73, Nuruzzaman 51 not out; Shuvagata 3-53, Mosharraf 2-55) Barisal trails by 49 runs
CHITTAGONG VS DHAKA METRO
DHAKA METRO: 369 for 9 declared (Mehrab Hossain Jr 94, Mohammad Ashraf 66, Asif 64; Iftekhar Sajjad 5-91) Chittagong: 41 for 1 in 18 overs (Sadikur Rahman 26 not out; Ashraf 1-10) Chittagong trails by 328 runs
KHULNA VS RANGPUR
KHULNA: 218 all-out in 58.4 overs (Anamul Haque 61, Nahidul Islam 51; Ariful Haque 4-49, Sohrawardi Shuvo 4-57)
RAJSHAHI VS SYLHET
SYLHET: 91 for 6 in 40 overs (Sayem Alam 47; Delwar Hossain 2-25, Forhad Reza 2-39)

Ayub decided to declare the innings and attack.

Chittagong off-spinner Iftekhar Sajjad added three wickets to his two on the first day, to claim a fourth five-wicket haul in first class cricket.

Elsewhere, rain continued to hinder the tournament as there were only 36 overs played in the Tier-1 game between Khulna and Rangpur at the Shahid Kamruzzaman stadium in Rajshahi.

Khulna resumed on 77 for 3 with overnight batsman Anamul Haque who was on 47 and eventually became the top scorer with 61 runs off 98 balls including nine fours and a six. Nahidul Islam was the second highest scorer with 51.

However, Rangpur's seamer Ariful Haque and left-arm spinner Sohrawardi Shuvo took four wickets each while leg-spinner Tanvir Haider also picked up two wickets to bundle out the batting side on the small total of 218.

BD-SA SCOREBOARD

South Africa: First Innings		R/B	4s/6s	
(overnight 428-3)				
Elgar c Mustafizur b Subashis	113	152/17/0		
Markram b Rubel	143	186/22/0		
Amla b Subashis	132	163/17/0		
Bavuma c Liton b Subashis	7/12	1/0		
du Plessis not out	135	181/15/0		
de Kock not out	28	27/2		
Extras: (b-4, lb-2, nb-1, w-8)	15			
Total: (For 4 wickets decl in 120 overs)	573			
Did not bat: Phehlukwayo, Parnell, Maharaj, Rabada, Olivier.				
Fall of wickets: 1-243, 2-276, 3-288, 4-535.				
BOWLING				
	O	M	R	W
Mustafizur	25.0	3	113	0
Subashis	29.0	3	118	3
Rubel	22.0	1	113	1
Soumya	5.0	0	21	0
Tajjul	27.0	0	145	0
Mahmudullah	9.0	2	35	0
Mominul	1.0	0	6	0
Sabbir	2.0	0	16	0
Bangladesh: First Innings				
Imrul c de Kock b Rabada	26	46/4	0/0	
Soumya b Rabada	9	24/2	0/0	
Mominul c de Kock b Olivier	4	7/1	0/0	
Mushfiqur c Bavuma b Olivier	7	8/1	0/0	
Mahmudullah c de Kock b Parnell	4	6/1	0/0	
Liton c du Plessis b Rabada	70	77/13	0/0	
Sabbir c Parnell b Rabada	0	6/0	0/0	
Tajjul b Olivier	12	38/0	0/0	
Rubel b Rabada	10	33/2	0/0	
Mustafizur c Markram				
b Maharaj	0	3/0	0/0	
Subashis not out	2	9/0	0/0	
Extras: (lb-3)	3			
Total: (All out in 42.5 overs)	147			
Fall of wickets: 1-13, 2-26, 3-36, 4-49, 5-61, 6-65, 7-115, 8-143, 9-143, 10-147.				
BOWLER				
	O	M	R	W
Rabada	13.5	4	33	5
Olivier	12.0	3	40	3
Parnell	7.0	1	36	1
Maharaj	5.0	2	7	1
Phehlukwayo	5.0	1	28	0
Bangladesh: Second Innings				
Imrul not out	6	17/1	0/0	
Soumya not out	1	0/0	0/0	
BOWLER				
	O	M	R	W
Rabada	1	0	6	0
Olivier	0.2	0	1	0



Liton Das was the only batsman in the Bangladesh ranks who batted with purpose. He scored 70 in Bangladesh's woeful total of 147 all out.

PHOTO: AFP

'It gets tougher than this'

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein



Everyone, South Africans and Bangladeshis, were thinking it. But it was a South African journalist who asked Kagiso Rabada to compare the standard of cricket displayed by Bangladesh in the two-match series, and specifically the second day of the second Test yesterday, to the first-class cricket the fast bowler plays in South Africa.

"I don't think you can compare a first-class game to an international game," said Rabada, who is much gentler off the field than on it, with an embarrassed smile. "But yeah, it feels like one in terms of there not being much of a crowd. It feels very peaceful, very quiet."

"We didn't take them lightly and we

executed our plans very well. They've got some good players and we just made sure not to give them any space."

The veil of diplomacy did slip when asked how it feels as a group of young bowlers and players who grew up together to be representing the nation. After expressing his happiness that South Africa are in good hands for the future, he said: "They [newcomers] have been exposed to international cricket. It gets much tougher than Bangladesh, of course. You can go play Bangladesh in their conditions and it's a different story. It gets harder from here... this is not it."

Mushfiqur Rahim had said after the first Test, which they lost by 333 runs, that they must fight to preserve the respect they have earned in recent years. That now seems like a pipedream.