

# SPORT



## Couldn't bowl to a plan: Rubel

SPORTS REPORTER from East London

Positives for Bangladesh have been few and far between on Bangladesh's current tour of South Africa and after the 3-0 loss in the ODI series was sealed by a 200-run defeat in East London on Sunday, pace bowler Rubel Hossain was -- along with Mushfiqur Rahim -- one of the few players who has something good to look back upon. Rubel took four for 62 in the second ODI and was Bangladesh's highest wicket-taker with five of the 12 wickets they managed to get in the series.

With ODI skipper and T20I retiree Mashrafe Bin Mortaza having left for Dhaka yesterday along with the injured left-arm pacer and strike bowler Mustafizur Rahman, Rubel is left as the leader of the pace pack for the upcoming two-match T20I series and, as he himself admitted, that is not the easiest task.

"I have been with the national team for some time now," said Rubel before the team departed East London for Bloemfontein, where the first of two T20Is will be held on October 26. "T20s are challenging and we have also lost the Tests and ODIs to them. We have to concentrate more in practice, think harder about their batsmen.

"The pace bowlers should have done better on these pitches, but we were unable to do so. The pitches were batting-friendly. I think we couldn't bowl according to the plan. We should have taken wickets with the new ball, but we couldn't."

Much like his ODI captain, Rubel focused on the mentality as the reason behind their poor showing on this tour.

"We have to come with a stronger mentality in these conditions. We should know how to bowl in these conditions and read particular batsmen. We



have to change some of our plans.

"There's a lot to take from this series," said Rubel when asked if there were any positives to take from a series where they lost the first match by 10 wickets, the second by 104 runs and the third by 200 runs. "We have to work a lot harder. All of the bowlers -- pacers and spinners -- have to become mentally strong. We have to learn how to bowl according to conditions."

While admitting that the team were not up to mark, Rubel was still hopeful of a good T20I series.

"It has been a really bad series for some of us. We still have two T20s, so if we can all stick to the plans, we might get something out of it. It is important to understand quickly what responsibilities a batsman or a bowler has in the shortest format. We are mentally [down] after the Tests and ODIs but if we work hard, we can make a comeback."

## Three players' night out after 200-run loss

SAKEB SUBHAN from East London

On-field problems have beset the Bangladesh team on their tour of South Africa, but the team management seemingly also has to deal with discipline off the field as three cricketers had visited an East London casino on Sunday night less than three hours after their 200-run loss against South Africa in the third match of the ODI series, which Bangladesh have lost 3-0. While team management maintained that there were no team rules broken as they returned within the curfew, it was learnt that the three had in fact returned later than the curfew.

The players in question were pacers Taskin Ahmed, Shafiqul Islam and all-rounder Nasir Hossain. Their culpability increases a little more when their shaky stature is considered. Shafiqul and Nasir have been in and out of the national team for years and seem on their way out again, while 22-year-old Taskin is enduring a prolonged bad patch. Bangladesh chief selector and manager for the current tour, Minhajul Abedin, informed on Monday morning that there were no rules broken as they returned on time. "Because there was not a match the following day we set a curfew for 10'o clock at night, and they told me that they returned within that time."

"They went out to have a bite and they walked over to the casino," added Minhajul. "[South African players Kagiso] Rabada and [ABJ] de Villiers were also there."

The main issue here, as far as team disci-



TASKIN AHMED

NASIR HOSSAIN

SHAFIUL ISLAM

pline is concerned, is the curfew. The three were seen going out together at around nine. As mentioned, it was learnt that the three had returned later than the curfew and a little alarmingly, the management were unaware what the three members had been up to and only seemed to learn of it when asked by journalists well after the time of the curfew.

"They did not play, but I will personally take up the matter in the team meeting at Bloemfontein," said Minhajul when pressed on the curfew. That Minhajul will take the matter up in a formal team meeting is in itself a sign that he is not completely convinced by the players' version, a prudent stance given that he was not in a position to know where they were and when they returned.

While many may latch on to the social stigma surrounding the matter, it may be mentioned here--although it is beside the point -- that to the best obtainable information, the three had not indulged in gambling. It has been said by many who know a thing or two about the pressures of touring, for example ex-Pakistan off-

spinner and former Bangladesh spin-bowling coach Saqlain Mushtaq on the 2013 tour of Zimbabwe, that the Bangladesh players should go sightseeing more when they have the time, so as not to suffer from a kind of siege mentality by being holed up in a hotel.

But again, the crucial matter here is the curfew and team culture -- not just because the curfew is a seemingly arbitrary limit on time outdoors but because how strictly it is enforced and adhered to is a barometer of discipline and the extent to which all members -- especially unproven players and juniors -- are singing from the same songbook. The absence of that discipline has seeped and will seep into the field of play, with this tour being a prime example.

The other question that the powers that be may ask is what team culture is being promoted when seniors sit in quiet reflection in their rooms after a crushing loss and three juniors -- one of whom was in the playing eleven -- see it fit to violate curfew and have a night on the town.

## Multifaceted Mashrafe

Inspirational is the word most associated with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, and while he is that through and through, something that he is not credited with -- perhaps because of his light demeanour -- is that he is one of the deepest thinkers and keenest students of the game in Bangladesh. It is no surprise then that he is the most successful ODI captain for Bangladesh, having won 27 out of 50 matches. Although the occasion of his 50th match as captain has not been a happy one, it is still a landmark to be celebrated and an opportunity to fete a truly multifaceted cricketer, whose subtle but powerful versatility is illustrated by the fact that he has been the highest wicket-taker with 58 scalps since he began his second tenure at the end of 2014. He is also very generous, and after the third ODI against South Africa and on the eve of his departure to Bangladesh, he made time for a group of journalists to have a chat about his captaincy career so far. The following are excerpts.

SAKEB SUBHAN from East London

Question (Q): How was the journey so far, playing 50 ODI's as a captain?

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (MM): There were a lot of ups and downs and if I had started earlier it would have been more. I got to know about my 50th game as a captain yesterday from you guys. There were injuries and ups and downs and I got the captaincy quite a few times but this time it has been longer. I think the satisfaction is more than everything here.

Q: What do you think regarding the success graph since you have taken over? Do you think it could have been better?

MM: Overall I think my present dream is to find out why we failed here [abroad] and to overcome that. The start and the end were bad this year. However we did manage to win in the middle where we played an away tournament and an away series well. We have started to play well at home but cricket these days has become home and away, where most of the teams are losing away and winning at home.

We were previously unable to win at home which is something we are doing at the moment. So there is a satisfaction because our dream was to win 80-85 per cent at home and we are achieving that. At the moment the challenge as a captain is obviously winning maximum matches abroad. So far there is not much to say about that and recently nothing at all happened as we lost three consecutive matches very badly. But that's not the end of the world as

we have more opportunities because we are going to play four-five away matches. So you can say there is room for improvement.

Q: Did the win against England just after taking up captaincy ease your start to the journey as captain?

MM: I never think about this part and at the end of the day I judge my individual performance where I judge myself as a player based on my contributions. I was unable to do anything in this tour which is very upsetting for me. I have said before that I had to think for some time when I was offered captaincy for the third time because I got injured on the previous two occasions and I was scared of that, not of the game. But my father encouraged me a lot not to worry about injury and said to take up the captaincy and I took it only because of my father. Apart from that I did not think of anything else.

Q: Was that a challenge for you when you took up the captaincy keeping your injury history in mind along with Bangladesh's dismal performance in 2014?

MM: Obviously it was a huge challenge. I can remember in my first game as captain we were four wickets down for 39 runs against Zimbabwe before Shakib struck a century and Sabbir scored a quick 44 runs on his debut. I think I felt the challenge in the very first game and secondly I wanted to face a similar challenge when we came to South Africa this time. Before coming to South Africa I thought we may lose the Test series but we obviously have the ability to win the ODI series, but at the end we are zero. The difference is



that we were able to win all five games against Zimbabwe at that time but over here we were unable to win a single one.

The thing is the challenge is still there for me. To be honest there will be ups and downs and at the same time you can't win in the same manner and you have to think how to overcome the situation individually.

When maximum people in Bangladesh are following cricket the expectation is heightened. So when you go out to the field with that expectation then you have to analyse where the mistakes are and what is right and it's not only about the captaincy, it's also about the players' mentality. In this type of situation it's better to have a break which will help overcome things as you can have a good and bad time.

Q: Was it pleasing to see the team starting to play well since you took up the captaincy as Bangladesh were going through a tough period with the World Cup just around the corner?

MM: Obviously that was a very good feeling but in the back of my mind I wondered when this moment would come. As I am giving you the interview today I was waiting for this bad phase. It's not like this phase would never come. I have witnessed this in most of the big teams in the world. And the thing is how we can overcome the situation and I am sure this bad phase won't stay long.

Q: Do you think the leadership quality has been there by birth?

MM: I never like to impose anything which I don't agree to or like even when you're in the game or even in my family life and I think sharing is very important. I always try to create a comfort zone for others. I even think the same for my bowlers on the field when there is wind from one end I try to give him that comfort. At times I am unable to provide that so I explain the reason on the field and what to do. I think personal life is very important because there is an impact on the game from your personal life as well.

Q: Who do you think has the captaincy element among the other captains and vice-captains you have witnessed so far?

MM: From the past three years' experience I saw that one needs to have a lot of patience if they want to lead Bangladesh because there are a lot of impatient people around the captain. We can take an example from Steve Smith's position as he worked with patience to bring the current Australian team into good shape.

Q: Highs and lows as a captain?

MM: As a captain I think this is the toughest

period for me as the team is going through defeats. Yes we did lose to New Zealand but we tried to create the opportunities there. Losing the series against England, beaten by Afghanistan and a one-run defeat against India in the T20 World Cup were really frustrating. On the other hand there are a lot of good memories. Beating India and South Africa at home and reaching the semifinal of the Champions Trophy was among them.

Q: Your experience with Jamie Siddons and Chandika Hathursingha as a captain?

MM: Both are different. When I got captaincy under Siddons I was informed from a member of the team that he asked why I was made the captain. That was a big shock for me. On the other hand this time I heard nothing like that, instead I heard a lot of positive things.

Q: You being fit for the past three years since becoming the captain. How do you see that?

MM: My whole life is depended on luck and I truly believe in luck.

Q: Do you want to continue as captain?

MM: There lies a challenge for me as I have a desire to play only as a player rather than being captain. But at times I think about it but then again I think to continue as it is.

Q: Do you dream of winning the World Cup?

MM: For a captain or a good team it cannot be a standard. If that was it then South Africa would never be called a good team. Overall I want a good team that plays well both home and abroad and it's really tough. My ultimate challenge is to win matches away from home.



Officials pose for a photograph at the title sponsors declaration for the AKS Bangladesh Premier League T20 at the BCB headquarters in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Pakistan sweep series

AFP, Sharjah



Left-arm pacer Usman Shinwari destroyed Sri Lanka with a five-wicket burst to help Pakistan achieve a convincing nine-wicket win in the fifth and final match for a 5-0 clean sweep of the series on Monday.

Shinwari's 5-34 in seven overs reduced Sri Lanka to 103 all out in 26.2 overs in Sharjah before openers Fakhar Zaman (48) and Imamul Haq (45 not out) knocked off the paltry target in 20.2 overs.

This is Pakistan's sixth whitewash in a five-match ODI series. They had blanked Zimbabwe (2002 and 2008), Bangladesh (2003 and 2008) and New Zealand in 2003 in the past.

The result was never in doubt once Shinwari assisted by Hasan Ali (2-19) and Shadab Khan (2-24) had destroyed Sri Lanka who had totals of 209, 187, 208 and 173 in the series.

The win is Pakistan's ninth in a row since winning the Champions Trophy in June this

year while Sri Lanka plummeted to their 12th defeat in a row, also losing 5-0 each to South Africa and India this year.

Zaman hit seven boundaries in his 47-ball knock before he fell with just 20 needed. Imam hit the winning boundary, finishing his 64-ball knock with four boundaries and a six.

But it was Pakistan's new find Shinwari who rocked the Sri Lankans.

The 23-year-old finished with 5-34 as Sri Lanka, who won the toss and batted on an easy paced Sharjah stadium pitch, never recovered from early jolts of losing four wickets in the first three overs.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**SRI LANKA:** 103 all out in 26.3 overs (Thirimanne 19, Prasanna 16, Perera 25; Shinwari 5-34, Hasan 2-19, Shadab 2-24)

**PAKISTAN:** 105 for 1 in 20.2 overs (Imamul 45 not out, Fakhar 48; Vandarsay 1-30)

**Result:** Pakistan won by nine wickets and clinched 5-match series 5-0.

**Player-of-the-match:** Usman Shinwari.  
**Player-of-the-series:** Hasan Ali.

## Du Plessis out of T20Is

AGENCIES, East London

Proteas skipper Faf du Plessis has been withdrawn from the upcoming T20 international series against Bangladesh due to injury.

Du Plessis retired hurt on 91 in the third ODI against Bangladesh at Buffalo Park in East London on Sunday, and was unable to take further part in the match, which the Proteas clinched by 200 runs to win the series 3-0.

Proteas team manager Mohammed Moosajee explained: "Faf sustained an acute left lumbar (lower-back) strain while batting, and immediately left the field in extreme discomfort."

"He will return back to Cape Town overnight for investigation and further management."