



While Darren Sammy's (L) whirlwind 47 off 14 gave Rajshahi Kings the late boost they needed to beat Comilla Victorians, Rangpur Riders skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's 17-ball 42 after coming in at one-down proved to be a shrewd decision as his side clinched a last-ball win.



PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS



Smith battles against the Crown

SMH



A cover drive to the boundary, arms and bat raised to loved ones, a celebration ritualised and even normalised for a scarcely believable 21st time in the past four years. Another Steve Smith Test century, the sixth in 12 months.

Then, he gave it a little extra. The cheering went into a momentary lull, time stood still and Smith, his face bared by fatigue and a headband, had another moment. He thumped his heart twice and gave his teammates a "C'mon". It was a gesture of defiance, one of those images where the team game is reduced to a purely individual battle.

The case of the Crown versus Smith reached this point when the rest of the Australian top order batting melted away. Shaun Marsh could not carry his resistance from Friday afternoon into Saturday morning. Tim Paine and Mitchell Starc came and went. Pat Cummins was sticking by his captain, but make no mistake, not since Allan Border had an Australian captain on home soil carried his team so squarely on his shoulders in Ashes cricket.

Smith forced England to try all their plans and tactics and then make up a few on the fly. During a searching dual spell from Stuart Broad and James Anderson, Smith faced a stacked off-side field, a stacked leg-side field, a pseudo-Bodyline field, and even occasionally a conventional field.

In one over, Broad alternated deliveries from around and over the wicket. He went wide on the crease and narrow. He was lucky to escape censure with an over of bouncers.

Anderson swung the new ball and the old, in and out. It was invigorating bowling, more like Ian Botham than the contemporary creed of consistency-first.

Smith's response was typically oddball. As a communicator, he offers little with words. His interviews are blandly affable. He has written a book almost devoid of his otherwise unique expressiveness. He leads by example, with his bat and his body. This should not be taken to mean he does not have anything to say, only that he finds his voice within the rope of a cricket ground.

During this innings, he was constantly gibbering to himself, tapping down the top of his helmet, punching imaginary shots, adjusting phantom wrinkles in his gear, compulsively signalling to the overworked twelfth man, swatting tennis overheads, scolding himself for obscure mental errors, flashing every emotion on the spectrum. At times he was ranting and raving like a park bench eccentric. The demeanour of the English was more bemused than frustrated.

To deal with a lunatic, they tried their own forms of lunacy. The only tactic that really worked was to take the wicket of the player at the other end. England will not mind this, for it simplifies their task.

But the Crown versus Smith will not be settled, it will go through a full trial.

Cummins, a sometime specialist top-order batsman for the Penrith club during the six-year wait to play Test cricket at home, was Smith's most able colleague. He showed admirable restraint during a two-and-a-half-hour vigil and, with his captain, advanced Australia from a calamitous 7-209 to a merely perilous 8-275. During that stand, they coped with an intense eight-over examination from Broad and Anderson, and were the first Australians to blunt that imposing pair.

And still the defence did not rest. Smith urged Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon forward until they gained Australia a first-innings lead. Then he urged Lyon to extend it.

This innings was becoming an Ashes epic, not just for its time but its timeliness. Smith batted for more than a full day, most of it with the lower order. No act of leadership could have been more inspiring to his teammates, and his tap upon the heart was a challenge to their own hearts. Their captain is in this Ashes fight. Now it was for the other ten to respond.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 302 all out

AUSTRALIA: First innings 328 all out (Smith 141 not out, Marsh 51, Cummins 42; Broad 3-49)

ENGLAND: Second innings 33-2 (Stoneman 19 not out; Hazlewood 2-11)



Australia skipper Steve Smith singlehandedly turned the tide against England with a sublime unbeaten 141 to give his side a first innings lead in the first Test yesterday.

Sammy, Sami & Perera's last-ball 6

SAKEB SUBHAN from Chittagong

There was very little else that the eager crowd at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium could have wanted from the second day of the Bangladesh Premier League's Chittagong leg yesterday. They got to see a half-century by Comilla Victorians skipper and Chittagong native Tamim Iqbal, they witnessed the beloved Mustafizur Rahman's come back to competitive cricket and were entertained by Rajshahi Kings skipper Darren Sammy's six shower that produced the most expensive over in the five editions of the BPL so far. And that was just in the afternoon game, which Rajshahi won by 30 runs thanks to the captain's fireworks and a superb four-wicket haul from Mohammad Sami.

The evening match was an utter thriller that shifted this way and that. Rangpur Riders skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza provided the fireworks initially before the game shifted again and again until Thisara Perera hit the last ball of the match for six to seal a three-wicket win over Chittagong.

Chittagong Vikings rode on Stiaan van Zyl's 68 off 40 balls to score 176 for seven after Rangpur won the toss. After an uncharacteristically slow start from Brendon McCullum and Chris Gayle, the latter put on 60 runs in just 4.2 overs with skipper Mashrafe, who promoted himself and hit 42 off 17 balls with four boundaries and three sixes. Gayle's dismissal

for a 25-ball 33 with the score on 97 for three brought Chittagong back in the match.

With 26 needed off the last three overs, Rangpur were favourites, but a great 19th over from Luis Reece, which conceded just five runs for the wicket of Mohammad Mithun for a 29-ball 44, left Rangpur needing 14 off the last over bowled by Taskin Ahmed. Thisara Perera hit the first ball for six but Nahidul Islam was run out on next the ball.

Shahriar Nafees holed out the first ball and it came down to four needed off the last ball. Taskin bowled a wide down the leg side, but the legitimate delivery he bowled next was hammered over cow corner for a big six to spark Rangpur celebrations.

In the first match, chasing 186, the Victorians were in the game for much of the innings, thanks to an 87-run third-wicket partnership in 9.5 overs between Tamim and Shoaib Malik after being reduced to four for two in the first two overs.

Malik hit a 26-ball 45 with five fours and two sixes before offering a return catch to Dwayne Smith in the 12th over. Tamim hit a 45-ball 63 with four boundaries and three sixes, but he departed trying a big hit off Sami. After that, there was not much resistance as Comilla were all out for 155.

The star of the bowling side was Sami with figures of four for nine, including three wickets in the 15th.

Earlier, a blinder from Rajshahi Kings skipper Darren Sammy lifted them from 113 for four after 15 overs to 185 for seven. 32 of those came off the last over and the unfortunate bowler was Mohammad Saifuddin, hit for a two, a four and four sixes by Sammy. There were also two wides. Sammy ended on an unbeaten 47 off 14 balls with six sixes and one four.

SCORES IN BRIEF

RAJSHAHI KINGS V COMILLA VICTORIANS
RAJSHAHI: 185 for 7 (Wright 42, Sammy 47 not out; Saifuddin 3-50)

COMILLA: 155 all out (Tamim 63, Malik 45; Sami 4-9)

Result: Rajshahi won by 30 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Darren Sammy.

CHITTAGONG VIKINGS V RANGPUR RIDERS

CHITTAGONG: 176 for 7 (Soumya 30, Van Zyl 68; Nahidul 1-4)

RANGPUR: 180 for 7 in 20 overs (Mithun 44, Gayle 33, Mashrafe 42; Sunzamul 1-23)

Player-of-the-match: Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

Twin tons give India command

AFP, Nagpur



Opener Murali Vijay and Cheteshwar Pujara hit sublime centuries to put India in command of the second Test against Sri Lanka, as the hosts took a 107-run lead on Saturday's day two.

The overnight batsmen put together a 209-run partnership to pulverise the opposition attack after the hosts started the day on 11-1 in response to Sri Lanka's 205.

India were 312 for two at stumps in their first innings with Pujara, on 121, and skipper Virat Kohli, on 54, batting to push the visitors out of the game.

Vijay registered his 10th Test ton before falling to Rangana Herath in the final session of play. The right-handed opener gifted his wicket to the veteran left-arm spinner after mistiming his sweep on a full toss to short fine leg where Dilruwan Perera made no mistake.

Perera had dropped Vijay on 61 at short mid-on off paceman Lahiru Gamage and the spill proved costly for the visitors who managed only one wicket in the day.

Vijay and Pujara made sure India ran home the advantage from day one as they recorded their fifth century stand in their last seven Test innings together.

Pujara played the sheet anchor's role to perfection and took control after the fall of his overnight partner to record his 14th Test century. Pujara played a sedate knock to frustrate the bowlers on a gruelling day for Sri Lanka on the field.

He also combined with Kohli for an unbeaten 96-run stand, forcing skipper Dinesh Chandimal to continue juggling his bowling options till the end of day.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: First innings 205 all out

INDIA: First innings 312-2 (Vijay 128, Pujara 121 not out, Kohli 54 not out; Herath 1-45)

It's Rahman, not Zadran

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

In the recently concluded U-19 Asia Cup, there was one name doing the rounds from the Afghanistan side that once more made history by winning the event. But the name, curiously, was the wrong one.

Till he came to the Bangladesh Premier League side Comilla Victorians, the 16-year-old off-spinner who had taken 20 wickets in the youth tournament was known as Mujeeb Zadran. So uncertain were some outlets about the name that many went on to just put 'Mujeeb' on scorecards and did away with the last name altogether. But confirmation came yesterday from Comilla Victorians' media manager Khan Noyon.

"His name is Mujeeb Ur Rahman," Khan told The Daily Star yesterday. "That is how it is printed on his passport. I don't know why it became Zadran for a while."

MOMENTS

FRANKLIN KNOCKED OFF HIS GAME

In the 17th over of Rajshahi Kings' innings, James Franklin hit a ball towards cow corner and rushed for a run. Seeing that the fielder was not really rushing, Franklin sensed an opportunity and rushed back for the second run. The fielder was not completely defeated as he did manage to land a punch, almost literally. His throw to the keeper's end caught Franklin, who had reached his crease by then, on the back of the helmet. Franklin took the lid off and stared quizzically back at his assailant. Cue the next ball, and he was trapped in front by Hasan Ali. Although coaches tell cricketers to always be looking for the extra run, that initiative cost Franklin his wicket and a knock on the head.

TAMIM OR FIZZ?

There were two kinds of homecoming at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday. One was hometown favourite Tamim Iqbal playing in front of his adoring fellow Chittagonians, albeit for another team in Comilla Victorians, after recently making a comeback from a thigh muscle tear. The other was from the man who is loved all over Bangladesh — the young Mustafizur Rahman. The Rajshahi-Comilla match was the Fizz's comeback to competitive cricket after more than five weeks on the sideline. In the fifth over, the two clashed when Mustafizur came on to bowl his first over of BPL 2017. There was a deafening roar from the stands as the pace sensation marked his run-up. Could he actually be more popular than Tamim in Chittagong? The answer was swift in coming — Mustafizur bowled the first ball on Tamim's pads and the left-hander flicked it away for a boundary, which was met by a roar twice as loud. Geography matters.

ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER SOUMYA GAFFE

On Friday, Chittagong Vikings' Soumya Sarkar looked a little foolish when he went on a walkabout only for Sylhet Sixers' keeper Nurul Hasan to gleefully whip off the balls. Yesterday, with opening partner and skipper Luke Ronchi in good form, all Soumya needed to do was make sure that he was supporting him. But in the second over, Soumya played Lasith Malinga down to third man and scampered through for a single. Rubel Hossain sent a good throw back to the keeper's end, but Soumya had already turned around and started sprinting for the second, inducing Ronchi to leave his crease at the end. But Soumya suddenly stopped and left Ronchi in no man's land for Mohammad Mithun to run him out. At least this time Soumya made his skipper look a fool, as well as himself.

WHAT THEY SAID



It was Sami's over that won it

I think the [Mohammad] Sami over was the difference, we lost three wickets in that over. Otherwise, we were in the match till then. It can happen that an over is taken for 30-32 runs, it's part of cricket. Their bowlers each gave away 11 or 12 runs an over, only Sami bowled four overs for nine runs and took four wickets. I think that was the difference.

- Comilla Victorians' AI-Amin Hossain on where they lost the match

No, it was Sammy

Darren Sammy doing that made a huge difference. I think if we just got 150, we would have probably lost. And then Mohammad Sami with the ball was amazing, but I think Sammy put massive pressure on them, which helped take those wickets in the end.

- Rajshahi Kings' Luke Wright has a different take



Cheteshwar Pujara and Murali Vijay scored centuries and stitched together a mammoth 209-run partnership as India took a huge lead in the first Test against Sri Lanka yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP