

SPORT

Pacers' slide in 2017

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh cricket team had been suffering from a perennial shortage of fast bowlers, until 2015, when the Tigers' pacers shifted gears and started to make an impact on opposition batsmen and occupying more space in the playing eleven.

But just when it looked like the pacers were going to take off, there was instead a crash landing that has marred much of 2017, especially the end of the year.

Despite the inclusion of West Indian fast bowling legend Courtney Walsh as the bowling coach the Tigers' fast bowling attack is yet to get the shape as it was expected since he was appointed earlier this year.

Mustafizur Raman, the best performer among the lot in 2017, picked up 16 wickets in six Tests at an average of 36.37 with best figures of four for 84 in 20.5 overs against Australia at home. The left arm seamer is also the highest wicket-taker for the Tigers in ODIs with 14 wickets in 11 games, apart from picking up five wickets in four T20Is.

Mustafizur's stats might not look outstanding but it was a reflection on the fast bowling department which was below par throughout the year.

Tigers' ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was the second-best performer among the pacers where he picked up 13 wickets in the as many games at an average of 49.53 in 2017.

Taskin Ahmed made his limited-overs debut in 2014 with a bang but the speedster was unable to blossom over the past few years despite having all the attributes of a genuine fast bowler. The 22-year-old made his Test debut in 2017, three years after his limited-overs debut, with high expectations but failed to make an impact. The tall right-arm seamer picked seven wickets in five Tests at a costly average of 97.42. He bagged 10 wickets in nine ODIs at an average of 42.79 and picked up just a wicket in four T20Is this year.



The Bangladesh pace bowling group, seen here receiving advice from technical director Khaled Mahmud during practice in Mirpur yesterday, has seen a sharp decline in performance. Abu Jayed (INSET) is the latest addition to the group.

PHOTOS: STAR

On the other hand, the selectors have always kept faith on another pacer, Shafiqul Islam, who has been able to play only 11 Tests since his debut in 2010.

Such a peculiar stop-start career -- his eleven Tests yielded 17 wickets and 56 ODIs netted 63 wickets -- is the result of a series of injuries.

But yet again he disappointed and played just two Tests and bagged two wickets in 2017 at an average of 70.50 -- numbers a bowler would never want to have.

Next to Mashrafe, the most experienced fast bowler in the Tigers line-up is Rubel Hossain and he is another disappointing example despite having the ability to undo the batsmen with his pace and variations. But Rubel was able to take just one wicket in two Tests,

while bagging 10 in 11 ODIs with an average of 51.50 and scalped eight in five T20Is -- once again figures that are not indicative of a bowler or bowling attack in rude health.

The persistence with Shafiqul is all the more puzzling because of bowlers like Kamrul Islam Rabbi, who despite making a bright start has been discarded after playing just five Tests, the last one being against India in the one-off Test in Hyderabad.

Subashis Roy also made a promising debut this year and needs to play more matches in the coming days to gain confidence. Left-arm seamer Abu Hider burst onto the scene after a magnificent Bangladesh Premier League in 2015, but went on to play just five T20Is for the Tigers before being left out without being given enough chances.

Rain halts England victory push

AFF, Melbourne



Rain hampered England's bid for victory on the fourth day of the fourth Ashes Test on Friday, with David Warner and Steve Smith also keeping the tourists at bay.

The umpires called off play at 5:20 pm (0620 GMT) after persistent rain with Australia 103 for two and trailing the tourists by 61 runs after England's first innings ended on the first ball of the day at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

When play was abandoned for the day, Warner was on 40 with skipper Smith not out 25.

There was some controversy even in the rain-shortened day, as there were suggestions in some Australian media outlets, including the site owned by Cricket Australia, that fast bowler James Anderson had tampered with the ball.

The tourists, with all the momentum after Alastair Cook's record-breaking innings of 244 not out, snared the wickets of Cameron Bancroft and Usman Khawaja to send early jitters through the home side.

Bancroft hit four fours before he chopped Chris Woakes on to his stumps on 27, while Khawaja was caught behind off James Anderson for 11.

England, pressing for their first victory in the already-decided Ashes series, were all out on their overnight total of 491 on the first ball of the day.

Anderson was caught by Bancroft at bat-pad off Pat Cummins for a duck to end the innings. Cummins finished with four for 117.

It meant that Cook achieved the highest

score of anyone carrying his bat -- the rare feat of batting throughout the innings -- in Test cricket, bettering New Zealand's Glenn Turner's 223 not out against the West Indies in Kingston in 1972.

The last Englishman to carry his bat in Tests was Mike Atherton, who scored 94 in New Zealand in 1997, while Geoff Boycott was the last in an Ashes innings with his unbeaten 99 in Perth in 1979.

Cook set a number of records on Thursday's third day, when he surpassed the highest score by a visiting batsman in a Melbourne Test, bettering the 208 by West Indian great Viv Richards in 1984.

Cook's fifth double-century also cata-

HIGHEST SCORES WHILE CARRYING BAT

Player	Score	Opposition	Venue	Date
AN Cook (Eng)	244	Australia	Melbourne	Dec 2017
GM Turner (NZ)	223	West Indies	Kingston	Feb 1972
MS Atapattu (SL)	216	Zimbabwe	Bulawayo	Nov 1999
WA Brown (Aus)	206	England	Lord's	Jun 1938
L Hutton (Eng)	202	West Indies	The Oval	Aug 1950

pulted him above West Indian Brian Lara to become the sixth highest run-getter in Test cricket with 11,956.

England have four sessions left in Melbourne to secure their first win of the Ashes series, after going an irretrievable 3-0 down in the first three Tests.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 327 all out and 103 for 2 (Warner 40 not out, Smith 25 not out, Bancroft 27; Anderson 1-20, Woakes 1-24)
ENGLAND: 491 all out (Cook 244 not out, Root 61, Broad 56, Woakes 26; Cummins 4-117, Hazlewood 3-95, Lyon 3-109)



Australia's hopes rested on batting lynchpins David Warner (L) and skipper Steve Smith (C), who saw out a rain-marred fourth day of the fourth Test against England in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'It's a slow news day'

AGENCIES, Melbourne



The thinly veiled allegations in some Australian media outlets that England fast bowler James Anderson had tampered with the ball illegally has raised the ire of some former England players and coach Trevor Bayliss.

Former England spinner Graeme Swann on Test Match Special: "It is ridiculous. It has annoyed me. The people who are making the story should know better.

"How you can use the back of your nail to push a bit of leather down on the shiny side and be accused of ball tampering is beyond me.

"It is because it is a slow news day and England are in a strong position."

Former England captain Michael Vaughan on TMS: "It looks to me that Jimmy Anderson has got the ball in his hand and has just tried to push down a flap on the shiny side to make sure it is smooth.

"He is not scratching it. He is polishing it to make it as smooth as possible.

"If it was the other side of the ball, the rough side, it might be a problem but he wouldn't be doing that to the shiny side.

"From what I have seen I don't think there is a great deal in it."

"This is a little bit more Pommie-bashing," said Australian Bayliss. "We knew we were going to get that when we came here."

But Bayliss said the umpires had later told him that the allegations were trumped up.

"It's a beat-up. As soon as I saw the headlines I raced into the umpires and that was their words: 'Nothing to worry about, it was a beat-up, absolutely fine'," Bayliss said.

"The umpires spoke to both captains during this game about throwing the ball into rough areas.

"Every team in the world does that and obviously the umpires don't want it to go overboard and both teams have taken it on board.

"I did see the footage and if he (Anderson) was trying to scratch it then he was scratching the wrong (shiny) side for it to go reverse. I'm quite sure that wasn't the case."

Rance's debut strikes sink Windies

AFF, Nelson

Debutant Seth Rance sparked a West Indies batting meltdown as New Zealand cruised to a 47-run victory in the opening Twenty20 match at Saxton Oval in Nelson on Friday.

Rance took two wickets in successive balls in his second over, including the prized scalp of Chris Gayle, to set the tourists on a downward spiral that ended in the 19th over.

New Zealand, sent in to bat first, posted 187 for seven with their total bolstered by 25 off the final over by Mitchell Santner and Tim Southee.

But the West Indies, the reigning world Twenty20 champions, never looked like reaching their 188-run target after star batsman Gayle fell cheaply for 12.

Because the batsmen crossed when Gayle skied the ball to Glenn Phillips, Chadwick Walton on seven faced he next Rance delivery and he smacked it straight to Anaru Kitchen at cover-point.

It left the West Indies at two for 19 and they never recovered from the initial setback.

Rance came back for his final over to end the West Indies innings with six balls to spare.

Rance returned the impressive figures of three for 30, while Tim Southee took three for 36.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: 187 for 7 (Phillips 55, Munro 53, Santner 23, Taylor 20; Brathwaite 2-38, Taylor 2-41)
WEST INDIES: 140 all out in 19 overs (Fletcher 27, Brathwaite 21, Nurse 20 not out; Rance 3-30, Southee 3-36, Bracewell 2-10)
Result: New Zealand won by 47 runs

'BCB boss is a clever man'

STAR SPORT DESK



In his first interview after resigning as Bangladesh coach and subsequently assuming charge of the national cricket team of his native Sri Lanka, Chandika Hathurusingha denied the notion that Bangladesh stalwart Shakib Al Hasan's wish to be rested from the South Africa Tests in September-October contributed to his exit.

In the interview with website Cricbuzz published late last night, Hathurusingha was asked about Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan's comments on December 9, when the Sri Lankan had returned to Bangladesh to complete the formalities of his exit, that the coach was disturbed by Shakib's request, which was eventually granted by the BCB.

"That's not true at all. Mr. Nazmul Hasan is a very clever, intelligent guy," Hathurusingha told the interviewer. "He must have used it for some other reason. Maybe that is done to fire up Shakib. I see that Shakib has been made the captain now. He must have used that for some reason, reading between the lines. He is very intelli-



CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA

gent in handling things."

It seems from the interview that Hathurusingha's decision to quit, which he conveyed through an email to the BCB boss midway through the ill-fated South Africa tour, had more to do with his wish to coach Sri Lanka and a wish to be with family than any discontent with the Bangladesh setup.

"Firstly, I felt that with Bangladesh, I have taken them to the best position I could. The other thing is that Sri Lanka Cricket had approached with the job for about four times. Then, I am coming to a stage where I can't stay away from my

family for too long. My dream was to coach Sri Lanka... if I am spending about three years away from my family coaching Bangladesh and if I want to spend another four years or so coaching Sri Lanka or another country after that, I can't do that. This is the only time."

This runs contrary to what, on November 9, Hassan said during the press conference announcing Hathurusingha's intention to quit. Hassan then speculated that it was partly because of mistreatment by the press and the players' tendency to talk to the media.

The former Sri Lanka all-rounder, who relinquished a post he was contracted to stay in till the 2019 World Cup, instead seemed to look back fondly on his time coaching Bangladesh.

"Beating Sri Lanka at The [P.Sara] Oval. It was a massive one for so many reasons," he said when asked about his best moment as a coach. "It was Bangladesh's 100th Test match as well. Beating Sri Lanka in Sri Lanka was a huge achievement. Sri Lanka at home was a very good Test side. Very satisfying personally."

The shoe will very shortly be on the other foot, as Hathurusingha's first assignment will be a tour of Bangladesh in January.



BJMC and Bangladesh Police players compete during the Victory Day Kabaddi Competition at the Kabaddi Stadium in Paltan yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Foreign training awaits approval

SPORTS REPORTER



Five months after being granted Olympic Solidarity Scholarships ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, some Bangladeshi shooters, archers and swimmers are still at home waiting for final approval from the Olympic Solidarity Committee (OSC).

Four shooters, two archers and one swimmer were awarded three-year long scholarship in September by the OSC, which is supposed to evaluate the improvement of those athletes every fourth months until the start of the Tokyo Olympics, but the archers and

swimmers are still waiting to get final approval to fly out to Switzerland and Japan respectively.

"The four shooters -- Shakil Ahmed, Anowar Hossain, Risalatul Islam and Umme Zakia Sultana -- have been training at our own training centre under the supervision of foreign coaches. However, we wanted to send them aboard for better training but we did not get the approval from concerned authority," Bangladesh Shooting Sport Federation's chief operational officer Mustaque Waise said, adding that OSC would provide US\$500 per month for each shooter.

Archer Ruman Sana is supposed to train at the World Archery Excellence Centre in Switzerland and his team-

mate Beauty Roy is supposed to train in Bangladesh while swimmer Ariful Islam is supposed to train in NOC Japan Training Centre.

"We have completed everything to send Ruman to Germany. We are just awaiting the final approval from the World Archery Association," Bangladesh Archery Federation's general secretary Kazi Razibuddin Ahmed Chapal said, adding that they would arrange for training at home if they can rope in German coach Martin Fredrick under the Vision Tokyo 2020 project.

Bangladesh Swimming Federation's general secretary BM Saif informed that they were ready to send Ariful to Japan, but they are also waiting for approval from FINA.