



Liton Das (L) and Mominul Haque forged a 180-run partnership for the fourth wicket to drive hosts Bangladesh to a draw against Sri Lanka on the fifth and final day of the first Test at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Method man finds his own way

SAKEB SUBHAN



Not many among Bangladesh's fans, or indeed the media, will have the name Mominul Haque on the tips of their tongues when talking about the country's best batsmen. At the same time, not many will be surprised that he became the first Bangladesh batsman to score centuries in both innings of the same Test yesterday, in the process doing the lion's share of the work of saving the first Test against Sri Lanka.

After all, even before the Test in question, he boasted Bangladesh's best Test average of 43.8 - a number that stands at 48.2 now -- and during the first innings, his 47th, became the fastest Bangladesh batsman to get to 2,000 Test runs. Daylight is second and Tamim Iqbal (53 innings) third. In the averages, daylight is again second and Shakib Al Hasan (40.38) third.

His greatest accomplishment so far, however, may be that he is the only player in Bangladesh cricket to have not just maintained standards but lifted them even through long periods away from the rarefied air of the national set-up.

It is a damning indictment of the system, Bangladesh's cricketing culture and the regime under former coach Chandika Hathurusingha that for a while Mominul was in danger of slipping through the cracks. When he first came onto the scene in 2012 and for two years was part of the team in all three formats, Mominul was celebrated because of his consistency and high average. But once he was airbrushed out of the limited-overs picture by Hathurusingha in 2015, it became a case of out of sight, out of mind.

From mid-2015 to late 2016 Bangladesh played no Tests and Mominul was left in the wilderness. What followed after the long Test gap was a relatively lean patch, when in the five Tests starting from the first against England at home in October 2016 to the first in Sri Lanka in March 2017 he averaged 23.2 with two fifties. Hathurusingha seemed intent on playing a third opener in Imrul Kayes at number three, perhaps to give his favoured Soumya Sarkar a safety net, and Mominul was dropped for Bangladesh's next two Tests, the second of those being the first Test against Australia at home six months later.

Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan nonetheless shoehorned the left-hander into the squad for the two Tests against Australia. A month later, he hit 77 in the first Test in South Africa -- the highest individual score from the tourists in two one-sided Tests. Although then picked in the limited-overs squad in an injury-hit tour, he was once again ignored.

Faced with a coaching setup that was not amenable, a cricketing culture that did not value Test specialists and domestic facilities that pale in comparison to those enjoyed by the national team, Mominul did what countless -- think Shahriar Nafees -- failed to do before. Just as he does in aspects of his life off the field, Mominul took personal responsibility for his success and spent the time off after the Bangladesh Premier League with his former BKSP coach and mentor Mohammad Salahuddin to work on his batting against spin, keeping Sri Lanka's varied spin attack spearheaded by Rangana Herath in mind.

BANGLADESH'S HIGHEST SCORERS IN A TEST

BATSMAN	TOTAL	INNS	OPP	VENUE/DATE
Mominul Haque	281	176 & 105	SL	Chittagong, Feb '18
Tamim Iqbal	231	25& 206	Pak	Khulna, Apr '15
Shakib Al Hasan	217	217 & 0	NZ	Wellington, Jan '17
Mohammad Ashraf	212	190 & 22*	SL	Galle, Mar '13
Mominul Haque	203	181 & 22*	NZ	Chittagong, Oct '13

If that resulted in a measure of decisiveness in footwork against the spinners in innings of 176 and 105 that was not there before, he did not need to retool much else to come up with a player-of-the-match performance. His method of scoring runs -- knowing his limitations and almost always putting a high price on his wicket -- has remained much the same. Apart from the added surety against spin, he trusted in the method that served him so well before his career came under sudden threat.

He is not perfect by any means -- he will surely want to improve his average of 29.47 in 10 Tests overseas, where he is yet to add a century to go with his six half-centuries. The churlish will also say that he scored his twin tons on a flat Chittagong wicket. However, his more celebrated and privileged colleagues could not manage even one hundred over the last five days, proving that when it comes to scoring Test runs you need not look beyond Bangladesh's Method Man.



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BD-SL SCOREBOARD					
BANGLADESH: First innings 513					
SRI LANKA: First innings 713 for 9 decl (Mendis 196, De Silva 173, Silva 109, Chandimal 87, Dickwell 62, Perera 32, Herath 24; Mehedi 3-174, Taijul 4-219)					
BANGLADESH: Second innings R 8 4s 6s (overnight 81 for 3)					
Tamim c Dickwell b Sandakan	41	62	6	0	
Imrul c Chandimal b Perera	19	48	1	1	
Mominul c Karunaratne					
e b De Silva	105	174	5	2	
Mushfiqur c Mendis b Herath	2	20	0	0	
Liton c Perera b Herath	94	182	11	0	
Mahmudullah not out	28	65	3	0	
Mosaddek not out	8	53	1	0	
Extras: (b-3, lb-2, nb-4, w-1)	10				
Total: (For 5 wks in 100 overs) 305					
Did not bat: Meeidi, Taijul, Sunzamul, Mustafizur.					
Fall of wickets: 1-52, 2-76, 3-81, 4-261, 5-279.					
Bowler	O	M	R	W	
Herath	28	6	80	2	
Lakmal	9	1	25	0	
De Silva	12	0	41	1	
Perera	26	5	74	1	
Sandakan	18	2	64	1	
Kumara	6	0	16	0	
Mendis	1	0	2	0	
Result: Match drawn.					
Player-of-the-match: Mominul Haque.					

Shakib out of 2nd Test too

SPORTS REPORTER

Regular Bangladesh Test captain Shakib Al Hasan will miss the second Test against Sri Lanka starting on February 8 after missing the first in Chittagong due to a finger injury picked up in the tri-series final on January 27. Shakib was not included in the 15-man squad announced yesterday. Meanwhile, left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam, who played the first Test and had figures of one for 153, was dropped. **SQUAD:** Mahmudullah Riyad (capt), Tamim Iqbal, Liton Das, Mushfiqur Rahim, Imrul Kayes, Mominul Haque, Mosaddek Hossain, Taijul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Kamrul Islam Rabbi, Sabbir Rahman, Abdur Razzak, Naeem Hasan, Tanbir Hayder.

Banishing the 2nd innings demons 'Small size, big deeds'

AL-AMIN



The early morning fog acted as a pall of gloom when Bangladesh came out to bat on the fifth day of the opening Test against Sri Lanka in Chittagong yesterday. The fear

of yet another second-innings debacle was doing the rounds after dependable batsman Mushfiqur Rahim fell in the last over on the fourth day, leaving the home side at 81 for three and, more importantly, still 119 runs behind going into the final day.

But as the day wore on the fear vanished into thin air like the fog in the form of a magnificent fourth-wicket stand of 180 runs between Mominul Haque and Liton Das. More than the runs, the pair batted out almost two sessions against an increasingly edgy Sri Lanka attack that sniffed victory in the morning.

While it is true that the wicket played as true as it did in the first morning of a run-fest Test, the partnership from the left-right combination under tremendous pressure was something refreshingly different for Tigers followers, who have grown up watching their team stumbling in

such situations irrespective of wicket or opposition. While Mominul provided assurance at one end with his calm and collected approach, Liton played the best supporting actor's role at the other. And the way the two kept the spin-heavy Sri Lanka attack marshalled by a wily Rangana Herath at bay, it gave new meaning to the Tigers' mental makeup while batting in their second innings, if not completely solving the crux of a well-documented self-destruct attitude.

Mominul followed his emotionally charged 176 in the first innings with a typically combative 105 at his happy hunting ground to become the first Bangladesh player to score centuries in both innings of a Test. It was his fifth out of six hundreds at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. His exceptional knocks in the opening Test has certainly added spice to his soured relationship with former coach Chandika Hathurusingha who, now sitting in the rival dressing room, could only be appreciative of the left-hander's effort. An otherwise introverted Mominul had an emotional override after scoring his hundred in the first innings and it was understood that he was trying to prove a point to Hathurusingha, who dropped Mominul from

Bangladesh's victorious 100th Test in Colombo in March 2016.

For Liton, it was like one last chance to save his fledgling Test career. After scoring a first-ball duck in the first innings and dropping a crucial catch behind the stumps, the right-hander, who scored tons of runs on the domestic front but remained an enigma in the cutthroat world of international cricket, walked along with Mominul to save the Test for the Tigers. And when he left under fading light after scoring a fine 94, he could rest assured of having done both -- saving his career and saving the Test for the Tigers. However, the way he got out was definitely uncalled for and a spoiling of a good effort that has become the Tigers' trademark. He chanced his arm against the toughest bowler in the opposition -- Herath -- in an attempt to reach his maiden ton in spectacular fashion. Unfortunately he was caught more spectacularly in the deep. This is a lesson Liton will certainly have to learn if he is to continue to make positive statements in the team.

The Chittagong Test will officially be recorded as a drawn game. However, it is more than just a draw for Bangladesh. It is a victory against the popular notion that the Tigers cannot hold their nerve in their second essay.

'Not a good Test wicket'

SPORTS REPORTER



The last day of the first Test in Chittagong yesterday started with Sri Lanka needing just seven Bangladesh wickets to wrap up a series opening win, but it ended with the tourists taking just two of those wickets.

Opener Dimuth Karunaratne, speaking at the post-match press conference, blamed the pitch with some justification as the Test produced 1533 runs for the loss of just 24 wickets.

"I don't think this is a good wicket for Test cricket. I think there needs to be something for the bowlers as well. I am hopeful we get a 50-50 wicket in the next Test [in Dhaka starting on February 8]," said Karunaratne.

Karunaratne thought that honours were even in the lead-up to the series decider.

"As a batting group, both teams did really well. We have to think up something special as a bowling unit to get wickets. I think both teams are in a good position after this game."



Mominul Haque (R) feeds a piece of cake to birthday boy and stand-in skipper Mahmudullah Riyad at the end of the day's play in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'Small size, big deeds'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong



Mominul Haque had something to prove coming into the first Test against Sri Lanka as the left-hander endured a tough time for the past three years under previous head coach Chandika Hathurusingha.

Though Mominul struck four hundreds in his first 12 Tests, the cricketer from Cox's Bazar was unable to smash a century in his next 13 games, where his ability to play short balls and face off-spin was questioned by Hathurusingha.

However the 26-year-old answered all those questions with his bat yesterday, when he became the first Bangladeshi cricketer to score centuries in both innings of a Test match by striking 176 runs in the first innings and following up with another magnificent 105 in the second to save the game for Bangladesh.

Although he is shy by nature and seemed unwilling to make a statement during the post-match press conference, Mominul admitted that the rough patch did help him with a change in mentality.

"I think it was an important game for me. I have had a change in mentality, and I work harder too. It was nothing of that sort. Players are unable to think in this way, target something or someone," said Mominul to reporters at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium in Chittagong.

Asked which century he would rate higher among the two, he replied: "I would keep the second one ahead, because it helped save the match."

Out of his six centuries, five have come in Chittagong but Mominul insisted that there was no specific reason behind his success at the venue and that he had the Almighty to thank for everything.

Meanwhile skipper Mahmudullah Riyad, who celebrated his 32nd birthday yesterday, revealed that he feels the Tigers' fighting approach was the biggest contributor to the comeback and that the team's actions spoke louder than words.

"The team talk was to stay positive, not to be bogged down. The wicket was quite good today. Mominul and Liton worked hard for a long time, because of which we got the result. The credit goes to them. There was more chance of us losing the game because of how it was last evening. But it was important to have the belief. We have the skills, and we needed a big partnership," said Mahmudullah.

Asked about Mominul's brilliant performance, the all-rounder replied: "He is of small size, but he does big deeds. He is a big hearted guy. I wish he performs even better in the future."