

SPORT



OMNIPRESENT BEAUTY OF A TEST MATCH: This is an image of one of Test cricket's most desperate moments at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch yesterday where ten England fielders are breathing down the neck of New Zealand lower-order batsman Neil Wagner, hoping for an edge which only came off the last ball of the game. But Wagner's never-say-die seven runs off 103 balls in a match-saving stand of 37 runs for the eighth wicket with leg-spinner Ish Sodhi, who scored an unbeaten 56, in that nail-biting final session of the fifth day provided the biggest advertisement of Test cricket's tenacity and undeniable beauty.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Mashrafe the man to follow

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal believes that youngsters can learn from ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's dedication and the importance he gives to domestic cricket.

The left-hander was speaking about Mashrafe becoming the highest wicket-taker in a single edition of the Dhaka Premier League and was asked why the youngsters had failed to challenge the 34-year-old veteran in the country's lone List A competition.

There have also been questions about whether Mashrafe's feat exposed the failure of youngsters to step up to take the leading role.

Tamim initially backed the youngsters over their dedication but added that they must improve in order to get the desired results on the international circuit.

"That's one aspect we need to improve," Tamim said when asked about the fading performances from young bowlers in the league this season.

"In the national team we still believe that the bowlers really win games for us, evidenced during the big wins in series against India, South Africa and Pakistan. The batsmen also performed but it was the bowlers who contributed to the wins. You can win matches at the international level when the bowlers perform their best. So I hope that the bowlers who are out of form will return to their flow soon."

"The batting department in the national team is stable now and if the bowling department starts to perform then we will be able to win many tough

matches in the coming days," he said after working on the rehabilitation of his injured knee at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

There remains a huge concern over who among the next generation of the Bangladesh national team can fill the gaps and take the responsibility currently borne by senior members in the team such as Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur



Bangladesh's pace bowling coach and legendary West Indies fast bowler Courtney Walsh (L) imparts his wisdom to young pacer Kamrul Islam Rabbi during a training session at the BCB Academy ground yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad.

Unfortunately the Tigers' think tank is still searching for those kinds of cricketers among the next generation. And the fact of the matter is that not many youngsters have displayed either the consistency or the tendency to take responsibility and learn from their mistakes as their predecessors did.

The performances of the young pace bowlers on sporting wickets in the ongoing league showed their lack of hunger, especially when Mashrafe, at the age of 34 and with the weight of 17 years of top-level cricket on his knees, remains on the top of the wicket-takers list.

He surpassed Abu Hider's tally of 35 for Gazi Group last season before taking two more in Abahani's victory on Monday and now sits on 38 scalps -- 10 ahead second-placed pacer Qazi Onik, who has played five games less than Mashrafe this season -- with one game left to play in the country's lone List A competition.

Among the top ten wicket takers this season, six are fast bowlers and the majority are experienced campaigners like Forhad Reza, Mohammad Shahid, Shafiqul Islam and Mashrafe. They were accompanied by two Under-19 seamers, Onik and Robiul Haque.

Interestingly, the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Kamrul Islam Rabbi and Abu Hider have remained rather ineffective, bagging 16, 15 and 14 wickets while playing nine, ten and eight games respectively. However, all three of these seamers have been expensive, with economy rates nearing six per over.

So, while praising Mashrafe for his marvellous achievement, the think tank must also reflect on the other side of the coin.

The heroes of the Hagley resistance

AFP, Christchurch



Ish Sodhi and Neil Wagner were hailed as heroes Tuesday after their gritty 188-ball stand secured a second Test draw and series win for New Zealand against England.

Battered and bruised after a torrid time from a desperate England attack, the pair hung on until bad light stopped play with Wagner's dismissal in the penultimate over.

The second Test draw in Christchurch gave New Zealand the series 1-0 after they won the first Test by an innings and 49 runs and it stretched England's winless away record to 13 Tests.

"Neil Wagner and Ish Sodhi were heroic," captain Kane Williamson said.

"If it wasn't for them putting their hand up, weathering the storm bumps and bruises and all, this series result could have been so different."

Any hopes New Zealand had of reaching 382 to win disappeared when they slumped to 42 for two at the start of the final day when England took two wickets with the first two balls.

England had New Zealand six for 182 when the second new ball was taken before tea, but the series-defining final session belonged to New Zealand.

After Colin de Grandhomme (45) was the seventh wicket to fall, Wagner and Sodhi added 37 runs in 31.2 overs, but by that stage

only survival mattered for New Zealand who finished on 256 for eight when the close came after Wagner's dismissal.

Sodhi, who feared he may have finished with a broken finger, said it was a difficult period to bat through.

"I was trying to figure out which balls to play and which to get under and it started to become a bit difficult through the middle period when the odd one would jump," he said.

It ended an arduous and unsuccessful tour for England who lost the Ashes series 4-0 before coming to New Zealand.

"It's been very disappointing in terms of results... we've not performed to our ability and not got the results we wanted," said captain Joe Root.

"We tried a number of different things and we couldn't have tried much more," he said.

"It's very frustrating. I thought we had a very good opportunity coming into today, we had fantastic start and we threw absolutely everything at them."

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 307 & 2nd innings 352 for 9 decl.

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 278 & 2nd innings 256 for 8 (Latham 83, De Grandhomme 45, Sodhi 56 not out; Broad 2-72, Wood 2-45, Leach 2-61)

Result: Match drawn.

Player-of-the-match: Tim Southee.

Player-of-the-series: Trent Boult.

All eyes on Gold Coast

REUTERS, Gold Coast



The Commonwealth Games has become a multi-sports party that struggles to pull high-profile guests but enthusiastic host Australia has promised a beach-side bash on the Gold Coast

to reaffirm the event's place in the global landscape.

More than 6,600 athletes and team officials from 71 Commonwealth nations and territories will flock to the glitzy resort strip and other cities in sun-drenched Queensland to compete in 18 sports ranging from athletics to lawn bowls.

No other nation brings quite the same fervour to the quadrennial Games as Australia, and the hosts will have a full stable of stars in their record 473-athlete delegation when the event opens on Wednesday.

Outside the country, however, the Games lacks the same pulling power and recent editions have been almost as notable for their absentees as their confirmed starters.

Barring a token appearance for Jamaica in the relays at Glasgow, athletics' most bankable drawcard Usain Bolt steered clear of the showpiece during his brilliant career.

A host of track and field's biggest names will similarly dodge the Gold Coast, including Olympic 800 metres champion David Rudisha and fellow Kenyan Asbel Kiprop, the three-times world champion in the 1,500m.

Canadian triple Olympic sprint medallist Andre De Grasse withdrew to focus on the outdoor season, while South Africa's Olympic and world 400m champion Wayde van Niekerk is sidelined with injury.

There will still be enough quality on show, however, to draw crowds to Carrara

Stadium, where Jamaica's latest sensation Elaine Thompson, the reigning Olympic 100 and 200m champion, will headline the women's sprints.

Her team mate Yohan Blake, a former 100m world champion, will also highlight the men's event and hope to step out of the shadow of his former training partner Bolt.

A number of their top swimmers skipped last year's world championships in Hungary to focus on the Gold Coast and some will be hugely motivated for success after flopping at the Rio Olympics.

Former 100m world record holder Cate Campbell, who finished sixth at Rio after being the raging favourite for gold, has returned to form after a year-long sabbatical.

Men's Olympic 100m champion Kyle

Chalmers may face his stiffest test against another Australian in Cameron McEvoy, who owns the fastest time in a textile swimsuit (47.04 seconds).

BANGLADESH AT THE GAMES

The Bangladesh contingent left for the Gold Coast on Sunday, while the shooting team had an earlier start, leaving on March 24 to acclimatise to the foreign conditions.

Bangladesh -- who will also be represented in swimming, boxing, weightlifting, athletics and wrestling -- sent 13 shooters, the biggest contingent for Bangladesh, to compete in the discipline which holds the most hope of bringing a medal to the country.

Bangladesh have so far won six medals from shooting while failing to produce medals in any other discipline.



Eleven-year-old Anna Hursey is set to make Commonwealth Games history this week when the pint-sized Welsh table tennis player hopes to punch above her weight and win a medal. Hursey, who first picked up a racket at five, will become the youngest athlete to represent Wales at the Commonwealth Games and is thought to be the youngest athlete, of any nationality, ever to compete at the quadrennial event.

PHOTO: AFP



South Africa pace spearhead Morne Morkel (with the cup in hand) could not think of a better way to sign off from Test cricket, a series win against Australia, their first time since readmission, at Wanderers in Johannesburg yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Philander bowls SA to historic win

AFP, Johannesburg



Vernon Philander sent Australia crashing to defeat with a sensational spell of bowling on the fifth day of the fourth and final Test against Australia at the Wanderers Stadium on Tuesday.

Philander took a career-best six for 21 as Australia were bowled out for 119, giving South Africa victory by 492 runs, a record runs margin for South Africa.

South Africa completed a 3-1 series win, the first time they had beaten Australia in a home series since 1969/70.

It brought to an end a series of high-quality cricket and even greater off-field drama, culminating in a ball tampering scandal during the third Test in Cape Town which resulted in former captain Steve

Smith, vice-captain David Warner and Cameron Bancroft sent home.

South African captain Faf du Plessis hailed the victory.

"This whole series has been probably the best we have been right through a series. We've been winning a lot of series but there have been little holes where we could improve. This series has been incredible the way we have put it all together," he said.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 488 & 2nd innings 344 for 6 decl.

AUSTRALIA: First innings 221 & second innings 119 (Burns 42, Handscomb 24; Philander 6-21, Morkel 2-28)

Result: South Africa won by 492 runs and clinched 4-match series 3-1.

Player-of-the-match: Vernon Philander.

Player-of-the-series: Kagiso Rabada.

Pak complete clean sweep

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan produced another imperious performance to beat the West Indies by eight wickets in the third and final Twenty20 international in Karachi on Tuesday, completing a 3-0 clean sweep of the series.

The West Indies fared better with the bat compared with the first two matches, reaching 153-6 in their 20 overs after winning the toss. Opener Andre Fletcher scored a 43-ball 52 -- his team's only half-century on this tour.

It was not enough, however, as Pakistan got to the total comfortably, with opener Babar Azam scoring a rapid 40-ball 51.

The hosts raced to 61 in the sixth over with left-handed opener Fakhar Zaman smashing two sixes and six boundaries in his 17-ball 40.

He miscued a drive off Rayad Emrit and was caught behind, but Azam and Hussain Talat continued Pakistan's domination with a 52-run stand.

Talat finished with 31, and Asif Ali scored 25 not out as Pakistan chased down the target in 16.5 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

WEST INDIES: 153 for 6 in 20 overs (Fletcher 52, Samuels 31, Ramdin 42 not out; Shadab 2-27)

PAKISTAN: 154 for 2 in 16.5 overs (Fakhar 40, Babar 51, Talat 31 not out)

Result: Pakistan won by 8 wickets and clinched the 3-match series 3-0.

Player-of-the-match: Fakhar Zaman.