

SPORT

THE MASH EFFECT

SAKEB SUBHAN



A common theme running through most analyses of Bangladesh's sharp reversal in performance to outplay West Indies in Sunday's first ODI in Guyana has been the change in format from Tests to ODIs, which the Tigers are much more comfortable with. The most important factor, however, may have been the presence in the dressing room and on the field of one of the most remarkable cricketers in the world. It helps too that he is the captain.

While the Tigers were being embarrassed in the Test matches, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was in Bangladesh beset by much graver concerns as his wife was seriously ill. Her condition had put his departure for West Indies in doubt. It was eventually delayed and he missed out on the practice match on Thursday. For a man with seven knee operations and one who had not bowled competitively since the end of the Dhaka Premier League in April, he could have been forgiven for not bowling in the first ODI, but he was the best bowler on either side as his figures of four for 37 attest.

But even that is not as important as the Mash effect. It was not the first time that Mashrafe's arrival has produced an uptick in



Bangladesh's talismanic captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza celebrates one of his four wickets that inspired the Tigers to a 48-run win in the first ODI against West Indies in Guyana on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

batting performance that saw Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim combine to post Bangladesh's highest total in the

West Indies. After a similarly sordid batting performance in the two Tests in South Africa last October, Bangladesh scored 278

for seven -- their highest score in South Africa -- in the first ODI.

It was a function of their opposition's much greater class and alien wickets that they went on to lose the match by 10 wickets, but at least the batting group -- upon whose mood swings the team's fortunes often rise and fall -- had overcome the siege mentality. It would be lazy to think that Mashrafe's cheerful demeanour is all that was needed. That is part of it but the whole effect is much more.

That he was in West Indies at all speaks more about his commitment to the cause than his bowling figures. No one could have faulted him if he had sat out the tour. But he perhaps knew that after the Test debacle -- which had attached to it the now inevitable public tongue lashing from the board president -- morale would be low.

Then there is his evolution as a bowler. There is no better example of a thinking bowler currently in operation in world cricket. He was once a tearaway quick, memorably bowling in excess of 145kmph in the 2007 World Cup knockout blow to India in West Indies. But four years later, ahead of a home World Cup, his failing knees had caused him to tearfully withdraw from the tournament. In the aftermath, in a culture dominated by talk of the 'natural game',

Mashrafe changed his nature and nurtured variations. With considerably reduced pace, he kept no less a man than Chris Gayle quiet in the victorious home series of 2012, allying his swing and accuracy to clever changes of pace.

That is what he did on Sunday, even as he bowled off a reduced run-up to go easy on his tortured knees. That he walks, let alone runs, on those knees tells other players that it is okay to struggle through any niggles they may feel on the field.

His 'spot-on' bowling changes, as Tamim put it after the match, has long set the example of being alive to the match situation that Bangladeshi players are often guilty of not doing. Very rarely is Mashrafe seen implementing a preset plan while the ground realities point the other way.

"Nothing special, just tried to say that play with your hearts -- you're playing for your nation. Whatever's gone is gone," said Mashrafe after the match when asked how he pumped his boys into a side unrecognisable from the one that played the Tests.

On this there is disagreement. When it comes to Mashrafe, whose qualities as a leader overshadow his considerable ability as a bowler, there is very little that is not special.

It is a new skill for me, says Mushy

MAZHAR UDDIN



When Mushfiqur Rahim walked to the crease with just 15 balls remaining in the innings with the score reading 221 for three, something extraordinary was required to go past even the 250 mark for Bangladesh after a record 207-run second-wicket stand between Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal on Sunday.

The experienced wicketkeeper-batsman saved the best for last as he, along with centurion Tamim, struck 43 runs in the last two overs to post a challenging 279 for four in 50 overs.

The pocket-sized dynamo blasted three fours and a couple of sixes in his 11-ball 30, clobbering 22 runs in the penultimate over from West Indies captain Jason Holder.

"The only thing I thought when I went out to bat was to just charge the bowlers and look to score as many runs I could. I was focusing on the gaps and tried to work the ball in those areas. Wind was blowing from one side of the ground so I tried to play with the wind which helped to get the distance," Mushfiqur told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

However, it was not the first time that the 31-year-old showed his hitting ability. His five consecutive boundaries off pacer Karim Janat in the third T20I against Afghanistan, when Bangladesh needed thirty of the last 12 balls, almost took the team across the winning line but eventually ended in a heart-breaking one-run defeat.

Mushfiqur informed that it is a new experience for him and the right-hander is working to develop his power hitting in training sessions.

"It's a new thing for me, to be honest -- batting in such situations where you don't have enough deliveries to face and at the same time need to score runs. I have started to develop this recently in the training session keeping such situations in mind. Another important thing is that I am working on my balance while hitting the ball and Alhamdulillah I got the rhythm and hopefully I will look to continue like this in future," he said.

Mushfiqur also praised Tamim and Shakib's partnership, which laid the foundation for the Tigers on a slow Guyana pitch.

"The pitch was a tough one in the first 15-20 overs and after the rain it got slower and there was turn as well. Credit goes to both Shakib and Tamim for how they handled the situation -- especially Tamim, who charged in the last two overs. I should also mention Shakib's innings which was equally important for us and at one point we thought the score will be around 250. It's good that we ended up posting 280. Hopefully we will be able to continue like this and our aim will be to win the next game and ensure the series," Mushfiqur added.



Tamim's 'special' toil

SPORTS REPORTER



One stat hints at Tamim Iqbal's importance to Bangladesh cricket -- of his 10 ODI centuries, seven have come in winning causes. His performance during his most recent century, the 160-ball 130 that set up Bangladesh's 48-run win over West Indies in Sunday's first ODI, holds ample evidence of why the team's success is often allied with Tamim's.

He put on a 207-run partnership with Shakib Al Hasan in 43 overs, a scoring rate not quite at par with the overall trend of one-day cricket. But it was the face that two of the team's most experienced players had correctly gauged the wicket that proved crucial.

After Shakib's dismissal for 97, it was Tamim's knowledge of his side's tendency to lose steam once set batsmen depart near the end of the innings that helped the cause further. He left the charge late, and along with Mushfiqur Rahim's 11-ball 30, helped score 53 runs in the last three overs.

"We had a target in mind, and we achieved that," Tamim said after the match. "To tell the truth Mushfiqur's cameo helped us exceed that target by 15-20 runs. Mushfiqur's innings was superb and Shakib played unbelievably well. I had to work hard to score the runs."

On a slow, spinning wicket Tamim scored the slowest hundred by a Bangladesh batsman, bringing up his ton off 146 balls. That however does not take any gloss off the achievement as his shrewd summing up of prevail-

ing conditions was perhaps the difference between the two sides.

"Any innings that contributes to a win is special, especially today because the wicket was not easy when we came out to bat," Tamim said. "We had to toil hard to reach a strong position. It was very hard going till the 25th over -- the ball was turning and their pacers were getting some assistance. Our plan was not to look at the scoreboard and bat as long as possible."

He also credited skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's captaincy and bowling, which netted him figures of four for 37.

"Mashrafe bhai was superb. He used his experience and did what was required on the pitch. His captaincy was also flawless and his bowling changes were spot on."



Tamim Iqbal brought all his experience into play while compiling a patient, unbeaten 130 on a slow pitch during the first ODI against West Indies on Sunday. PHOTO: AFP

TOUR OF IRELAND

Mominul to lead A team

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh national cricket team's 'Test specialist' Mominul Haque has been named captain of the Bangladesh A team's one-day squad for their upcoming tour of Ireland, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) informed through a press release yesterday.

Mominul was not considered for the shorter format ever since he last played a one-day game three years ago but the Ireland tour could prove to be an opportunity for the left-hander to showcase his talents ahead of the 2019 ICC World Cup in England.



Another national discard, Soumya Sarkar, will act as deputy to Mominul for the one-day series but will lead the side for the T20 format later in the tour.

Although Soumya lost his place in the national Test and ODI teams following a poor run of form, the 25-year-old partici-

pated in the just concluded A team series against Sri Lanka at home, where he suffered disappointing outings in both the four-day and one-day series.

Taskin Ahmed was also named for the Ireland tour as the pacer has recovered from a back injury and it will be vital for the 23-year-old to regain his confidence if he is to return to the national side. The same can be said for all-rounder Saif Uddin, who was also named in the squad.

Wicket-keeper batsman Nurul Hasan Sohan returned to the country after the recent Test series against West Indies and was included as well alongside Nazmul Hossain Shanto, who is currently still in the Caribbean

for the ODI series.

Meanwhile pacers Khaled Ahmed and Shariful Islam, who impressed during the series against Sri Lanka A, were retained.

The Bangladesh A team will depart for Ireland on July 28 and will take on the hosts in a five-match one-day series followed by a three-match T20I series.

SQUAD: Soumya Sarkar (Captain for T20 series and Vice Captain for one-day series), Nazmul Hossain Shanto, Fazle Mahmud, Mominul Haque (Captain for one-day series), Afif Hossain, Khaled Ahmed, Shariful Islam, Al Amin (Jr.), Zakir Hasan, Nayeem Hasan, Sunzamul Islam, Nurul Hasan, Saif Uddin, Mizanur Rahman, Saif Hassan, Taskin Ahmed

'Adaptability was the key'

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh team's victory in the first of a three-match ODI series against West Indies in Guyana was a much needed win after their disastrous two-match Test series defeat in the Caribbean. Following that triumph, former Bangladesh captain and national selector Habibul Bashar and the Tigers' coach for their inaugural Test Sarwar Imran outlined the reasons behind the 48-run win yesterday.



SARWAR IMRAN

I think both Shakib and Tamim batted sensibly, however, there were concerns over the run rate at one stage. Nevertheless, they played with a lot of responsibility. The way Mushfiqur Rahim finished the innings gave a huge boost. It shatters the opponent's morale when they suffer such blows in the death overs. It actually helped our players gain some spirit, which was reflected during their fielding. Another important fact is that the ball swings more in Test cricket as it's a red ball and the pitches were also more seaming friendly during the Test series. I think we still need to work on the longer format but the only place our players get competitive cricket is the Dhaka Premier League. I think the first-class leagues should also get more exposure so that the players get attracted and improve in this format.



HABIBUL BASHAR

Obviously it's a relief for us as we did not have a good Test series and we all knew that it was not their normal game. The most important thing about the match was the way our batters adapted to the pitch and if you noticed, we scored just thirty runs in the first ten overs, which is not our style of play. Both Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal are stroke-makers but they did not get assistance from the wicket. I am happy about the fact that none of them threw away their wickets while going after the ball and they were able to read the nature of the pitch. In this type of wicket it's hard to score runs initially but you can go after the bowlers later. If they did not bat well till the 40th over, it would have been hard for us to post such a total as it is tough for a new batsman to score high instantly. I think it was a much needed result keeping the situation in mind.

AFP, Colombo



Sri Lanka on Monday completed a 2-0 Test sweep of South Africa to record their first series win over the Proteas since 2006 after Rangana Herath wreaked havoc with six wickets.

The visitors were all out for 290 in the second session of day four in Colombo, 200 runs short of the highly improbable winning target of 490 on a bone-dry wicket.

It was South Africa's first Test whitewash since they went down in the island nation 2-0 in a two-match series almost 12 years ago.

Sri Lanka had wrapped up the first Test in Galle within three days, reducing South Africa to 73 in the

second innings -- their lowest Test total since the nation's post-apartheid readmission to international cricket.

"Right through the series we didn't have that ability to score partnerships. I think we only had three partnerships of 50 and above the whole series," Faf du Plessis, South Africa's crestfallen skipper, said Monday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Sri Lanka: First innings 338

South Africa: First innings 124

Sri Lanka: Second innings 275 for 5 decl

South Africa: Second innings 290 (Elgar 37, De Bruyn 101, Bavuma 63; Herath 6-98, Perera 2-90, Dananjaya 2-67)

Result: Sri Lanka won by 199 runs and clinched two-match series 2-0.



Left-arm spinner Rangana Herath's (C) six-for helped Sri Lanka to a 199-run victory against South Africa on the fourth day of the second Test in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS