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Imrul revels in crisis

MAZHAR UDDIN

Known as the comeback man of Bangladesh cricket, opener Imrul Kayes delivered his best when it mattered.

The left-hander, who became a first-time father just a fortnight ago, struck his third ODI hundred and celebrated the feat with a cradle celebration dedicated to his son Suhaib Bin Kayes on way to scoring a career-best 144, the joint second-highest ODI innings by a Bangladesh batsman.

However, just a month ago Imrul was not even in the national reckoning. After being initially left out of the Asia Cup squad, his fortunes changed when he was flown to the UAE as emergency reinforcement and he grabbed the opportunity with an unbeaten 72 against Afghanistan as a last-minute inclusion.

When asked whether the pressure of him going in and out of the team helped him play well, Imrul said: "I believe in one thing -- that if you work hard you will get the reward. I have learned a lot from Mushfiqur [Rahim] as his hard work has brought him to this stage. I always try to follow what he does," Imrul said during the post-match press conference yesterday.

He also rated the Asia Cup performance more than yesterday's. "It [144] is one of the better innings of my career, but my innings against Afghanistan was badly needed for the team. Ultimately when you play well, it helps the side and today's [Sunday's] innings helped rescue Bangladesh," he said. "But this innings was a turning point for me and it was needed."

Playing in crisis mode is nothing new for Imrul. But the situation yesterday was perhaps more difficult than in Abu Dhabi because he did not have a senior batsman with him after Bangladesh fell to 139 for six.

"I was a bit nervous early in the innings. It was not happening the way I wanted to at the start and at one point I had to struggle because it was tough to play the drive with the uneven bounce on the pitch. Whenever I thought of playing strokes there were wickets falling and I kept myself in check and wanted to bat till the end then see what happens as I knew 240-250 is a good total here," said Imrul.

His record seventh-wicket 127-run stand with Mohammad Saifuddin helped post a fighting total of 271 for eight.

"I tried to give confidence to Saifuddin at the other end and nothing else as the wicket was tough. I was not saying anything negative and tried to keep things normal rather and told him to play it like a league game," he added.

His innings continued to set him apart from the younger players as he showed the ability to knuckle down and play big innings. It also showed once more that when the stakes are high, for him or the team, he has got the game and temperament to rise to the occasion.

"The situation was tough as if I got out my team would have been in trouble, so I tried to stay till the end. I was feeling very good and I had the confidence that I could hit anywhere in the ground, which happened. Obviously when you play big innings it will encourage the youngsters and they will see what happens in such tough situation. They can learn from this," said Imrul.

Opener Imrul Kayes (R) and all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin shared a seventh-wicket partnership of 127 runs to give Bangladesh a challenging total in the first ODI against Zimbabwe at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

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Embarrassment avoided

SAKEB SUBHAN

On Saturday, Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza talked about the culture in Bangladesh cricket of not taking defeat very easily, even if the odd defeat comes as a by-product of a bit of experimentation for the long-term benefit. Keeping in mind that that culture needs to change, to say that Imrul Kayes's 144 helped Bangladesh avoid embarrassment is not to say that the embarrassment being spoken of is losing to Zimbabwe. In stumbling to 139 for six on a fairly typical Mirpur wicket against a group of disciplined bowlers was

the root of the potential embarrassment. It was not the absence of the injured Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal that caused the collapse; there have been collapses with the full complement of stalwarts before. The disheartening aspect that will surely be swept under the carpet in the wake of a 28-run win is that on a home pitch against a side widely believed to be rungs below them in quality, the same problems surfaced to hound the Tigers. Zimbabwe seamers Kyle Jarvis, Tendai Chatara and Donald Tiripano did little more than bowl an off-stump line on a pitch that was slightly double-paced, with the odd ball moving a bit. That was enough. Five of

the top seven batsmen were caught behind, four of them to seamers, three of whom -- Mohammad Mithun, senior batsman Mahmudullah Riyad and Mehedi Hasan Miraz -- offered nothing shots with minimal feet movement, a long-time failing. On the other hand, for the right-handers the sight of a leg-spinner -- a longstanding bogeyman -- in Brandon Mavuta was also enough. When the youngster's ball pitched on a good length on middle and leg, both Mohammad Mithun and the team's best batsman Mushfiqur Rahim floundered. An uncertain Mushfiqur was eventually strangled down the leg side by the wrist-spinner who, unlike their recent nemesis in

Afghanistan's Rashid Khan, did not even seem to have the googly. Mashrafe was half right -- it is true that defeats are not taken well, but it is as much a problem that wins forgive all. Yesterday's batting debacle did not have anything to do with missing out on two key players and experimentation because Imrul was replacing Tamim at the top and Saifuddin was the 'experiment' and they were the ones who averted disaster. If indeed the culture is a healthy one, questions have to be asked of those in charge of batting, not least batting coach Neil McKenzie, about why such long-standing problems cannot be rectified, even when against a weaker team and on a familiar pitch.

BD-ZIM SCOREBOARD

BLDG	R/B	4s/6s
Liton c Zhuwab b Chatara	4/14	0/0
Imrul c Moor b Jarvis	144/140	13/6
Mahmud c Taylor b Chatara	0/4	0/0
Mushfiqur c Taylor b Mavuta	15/20	1/3
Mithun c Taylor b Jarvis	3/40	1/0
Mahmudullah c Taylor b Jarvis	0/4	0/0
Mehedy c Taylor b Jarvis	1/4	0/0
Saifuddin c Mavuta b Chatara	50/69	3/1
Mashrafe not out	2/5	0/0
Mustafizur not out	1/1	0/0
Extras: (b-1, lb-1, nb-1, w-14)		17
Total: (For 8 wkts in 50 overs)		271
Did not bat: Nazmul.		
Fall of wickets: 1-16, 2-17, 3-66, 4-137, 5-137, 6-139, 7-266, 8-267.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Jarvis	9	1	37	4
Chatara	10	1	55	3
Tiripano	10	0	60	0
Mavuta	8	0	48	1
Raza	6	0	37	0
Williams	7	0	32	0

ZIMBABWE	R/B	4s/6s
Masakadza run out	21/34	1/0
Zhuwab b Mustafizur	35/24	4/2
Taylor b Nazmul	5/13	0/0
Ervine b Mehedy	24/48	1/0
Raza b Nazmul	7/22	0/0
Williams not out	50/58	5/1
Moor lbw b Mehedy	26/45	2/1
Tiripano run out	2/4	0/0
Mavuta c & b Mehedy	20/16	2/1
Jarvis c Mushfiqur b Mahmudullah	37/33	3/2
Chatara not out	2/4	0/0
Extras: (b-3, lb-3, nb-1, w-7)		14
Total: (For 9 wkts in 50 overs)		243
Fall of wickets: 1-48, 2-59, 3-63, 4-88, 5-100, 6-145, 7-148, 8-169, 9-236.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mashrafe	10	0	55	0
Mehedy	10	0	46	3
Mustafizur	8	1	29	1
Nazmul	8	0	38	2
Saifuddin	7	1	29	0
Mahmudullah	4	0	24	1
Mahmud	3	0	16	0

Result: Bangladesh won by 28 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Imrul Kayes.



PERFORMER OF THE DAY

IMPERIOUS IMRUL

With a sublime 140-ball 144, Imrul Kayes proved once again why the team come back to him time and again. It was an innings of two parts -- a responsible Imrul before reaching his third century and a belligerent one after the landmark. In the Tigers' highest seventh-wicket partnership, he had to guide

Mohammad Saifuddin after Bangladesh were cut down to 139 for six, but he kept a good strike rate and reached his hundred off 118 balls in the 43rd over. It was all fireworks since then as he hit three sixes and five boundaries to add a further 44 runs in just 22 balls.

MOMENTS

TUCKER'S REDEMPTION

On September 28, Rod Tucker was in the third umpire's box at the Dubai International Stadium where, after a seemingly interminable series of magnified replays, he gave Bangladesh opener and last hope Liton Das out stumped in the Asia Cup final against India. Claims of Indian conspiracy did the rounds after the Tigers lost the match and Tucker became the target of all manner of abuse from Bangladesh fans because, they said, the benefit of doubt should have gone to the batsman. Yesterday, Liton hit Kyle Jarvis upshilly to cover, where Sikandar Raza took the ball -- seemingly on the full -- but immediately signalled for umpires to check the take on video. The soft signal was out and it went to none other than Tucker, the third umpire for two of three matches in this series. The catch seemed clean at first but after Raza tumbled forward part of the ball seemed to touch the ground. It seemed a fifty-fifty decision with the fielder expressing doubt and the on-field umpire saying it was probably out. It is not known whether the torrent of hate or the fact that he was sitting in a Bangladeshi stadium had anything to do with it, but this time Tucker sided with Liton.

BAD GOOD THINGS HAPPEN IN THREES

Flurries of wickets seem par for the course for Bangladesh, so much so that when they reached 137 for four in the 28th over it almost seemed a given. And that is what happened. Mohammad Mithun, Mahmudullah Riyad and



Saifuddin's moment... not quite

In the 49th over, Mohammad Saifuddin was thrilled at reaching his first international fifty, but no one really noticed, perhaps because they were caught up in the game and in the afterglow of Imrul Kayes's 144. Instead, Saifuddin got a scolding a ball later from Mashrafe Bin Mortaza for almost causing a run-out.

Mehedi Hasan Miraz departed for the addition of just two runs in 2.1 overs. If we set the minimum wickets for a batting collapse to three wickets -- two quick wickets happen often enough -- for a maximum addition of 20 runs, one would think the Tigers are contractually obligated to have one every second game and, it turns out, for good reason. In the six matches they played in last month's Asia Cup, the Tigers suffered the aforementioned collapses in four of

them -- three wickets for eight runs in the opener against Sri Lanka, three for six against Afghanistan, three for 12 against Pakistan and three for 14 in the final against India. Bangladesh won the first three, with only mighty India managing to scrape through to a win in the last ball. So for all those fretting about Bangladesh's continued frailty with the bat, leave the cricket to the experts. Heroes like Imrul Kayes and Mohammad Saifuddin need a crisis and the Tigers are only too happy to oblige.

Bairstow's race against time

Jonny Bairstow has been ruled out of the fifth ODI and the one-off T20I against Sri Lanka because of an ankle injury, the ECB confirmed Sunday. The opener suffered ligament damage after twisting his ankle while playing football in training. "He will be monitored and assessed on a daily basis and a further update will be given in due course ahead of the three-match Test series," an ECB statement read. The first Test is from November 6.



India captain Virat Kohli celebrates his 88-ball century against West Indies in the first ODI in Guwahati yesterday.

AFP, Guwahati

Kohli, Sharma punish Windies

Skipper Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma hit sparkling centuries Sunday to lead India's eight-wicket demolition of West Indies in the first one-day international in Guwahati. Kohli made 140 and Sharma took an unbeaten 152 for a record 246 runs to flay the West Indies bowling attack during their team's 323-run chase. The hosts, who swept the two-Test series against the visiting Caribbean side, romped home with 47 balls to spare. The effort from Kohli and Sharma easily overshadowed a dominant 106 by West Indies batsman Shermion Hetmyer in his team's 322-8 after being put into bat first. In reply, India lost opener Shikhar Dhawan in just the second over of the innings after he was bowled by debutant fast bowler Oshane Thomas.

Kohli then took charge with Sharma, who was happy playing second fiddle to his in-form captain, as the duo put on India's biggest-ever ODI stand against West Indies for any wicket. The skipper built on his quickfire fifty to get his 36th ODI ton in just 88 deliveries, hitting Roach for a boundary to make the three-figure mark amid loud cheers from a packed home crowd. Sharma, who was relatively quiet till his captain's 100, soon got cracking and reached his century with a boundary off spinner Ashley Nurse. The two marauding batsmen started to toy with the opposition bowlers before Devendra Bishoo got Kohli stumped against the run of play. Kohli smashed 21 fours and 2 sixes. Sharma went on to hit the winning six with Ambati Rayudu, who remained unbeaten on 22, at the other end. West Indies had their moments in the game when Hetmyer smashed six fours and six sixes during his 78-ball

knock to give his side what looked like a competitive total. Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal claimed three wickets, returning impressive figures of 3-41 from his 10 overs, to check West Indies' surge. Hetmyer, who registered his third ODI century in just his 13th game, built crucial partnerships including a 60-run sixth wicket stand with skipper Jason Holder, who made 38. Bishoo, on 22, and Kemar Roach, on 26, put on 44 runs for their ninth wicket unbeaten stand to take West Indies well past the 300-run mark, which in the end proved insufficient to test the Indian batting. SCORES IN BRIEF WEST INDIES: 322 for 8 in 50 overs (K Powell 51, Hope 32, Hetmyer 106, Holder 38; Shami 2-81, Chahal 3-41) INDIA: 326 for 2 in 42.1 overs (Sharma 152 not out, Kohli 140; Thomas 1-83) Result: India won by 8 wickets. Player-of-the-match: Virat Kohli.