

SPORT



Some solidity at long last

MAZHAR UDDIN from Lincoln

As he walked off the field after the first day of the two-day practice match had concluded yesterday, Tamim Iqbal turned to this reporter and remarked: "You can smile now, Bangladesh have played well in New Zealand for the first time on this tour."

It was indeed the first time the Tigers had something to cheer about since arriving in Middle Earth as the visitors were whitewashed in the three-match ODI series owing to below-par batting performances.

However, the players looked relaxed yesterday and regardless of the quality of the bowlers in the New Zealand XI, the Bangladesh batsmen should also get some credit for making the most of their time in the middle at the Bert Sutcliffe Oval in Lincoln yesterday.

It was an ideal preparation in terms of adapting to conditions as Bangladesh took guard under chilly, overcast conditions throughout the day, which at times featured a light breeze.

Almost all the batsmen scored runs and looked comfortable as the Tigers ended the first day on 411 for six in 96.1 overs. Four of their batsmen had retired to give others a chance and as many struck fifties.

It was a relief to see openers Tamim Iqbal and Shadman Islam add a 100-run opening stand and even more pleasing that the left-handers took their time and looked to play according to the merit of the ball.

Shadman was more composed as he not only left balls away from the stump,

but also played shots on both the front and back foot with great authority as he reached a half-century.

At the other end, Tamim played comfortably as right-arm seamer Adam Milne, who has played forty ODIs for New Zealand, was the only express bowler in the opposition's bowling attack.

However, Milne bowled just four overs and left the task to the uncapped seam-bowling trio of Edward Nuttall, Ben Sears and Dale Philips. They could not bowl to great effect as Tamim and Shadman took the score beyond the hundred-run mark in the first session.

Later, it was left-arm spinner Ben Lockrose and left-arm chinaman Blake Coburn who operated for most of the proceedings, which the Tigers negotiated with comfort.

Mominul Haque was the only batsman who missed out as he was caught at third slip for 20 while trying to guide a short of a length delivery.

On the other hand, Liton Das, Soumya Sarkar, Mahmudullah Riyad and Mehedi Hasan Miraz all remained compact with their shot selection and all of them -- barring Soumya, who had 41 -- struck fifties and retired.

Mahmudullah hit a 60-ball 59, featuring eight boundaries and a six, and his return to form will surely be a confidence boost ahead of the first Test in Hamilton, a venue where the right hander has struck two hundreds -- his maiden Test hundred in 2010 and a cracking century against New Zealand in the 2015 World Cup.

However, now that the batsmen have had their turn, it will be important for the visiting bowlers to gain in confidence as well on the second day before facing the real test against New Zealand.



The Sri Lanka team pose with the Test series trophy after winning the second Test against South Africa by eight wickets in Port Elizabeth yesterday. With this, the visitors completed a clean sweep of the two-match series and became the first Asian side to win a series in the longest format of the game in South Africa.

PHOTO: COLLECTED FROM SAMEERA PEIRIS

SL land where nobody landed before from Asia

AGENCIES, Port Elizabeth



Sri Lankan captain Dimuth Karunaratne hailed his happy, united team after they completed a historic series triumph against South Africa at St George's Park in Port Elizabeth on Saturday.

Oshada Fernando and Kusal Mendis propelled Sri Lanka to an eight-wicket win on the third day of the second Test, playing exactly the sort of cricket that Karunaratne wanted.

"We told them, 'play your normal game, if you can hit over the fielder go for it,'" said Karunaratne after the unheralded Sri Lankans became the first team from Asia to win a Test series in South Africa.

Fernando (75 not out) and Mendis (84 not out) attacked the South African bowlers from the start of play on Saturday, taking Sri Lanka from an overnight 60 for two to the victory target of 197 in just over two hours of uninhibited stroke play.

"When you play like that, South Africa are on the back foot," said Karunaratne.

Appointed only as an "interim" captain, Karunaratne said he had a simple message for his players when he took over at a time of apparent turmoil in Sri Lankan cricket.

"When I started, I said to my boys, 'whatever happens you have to keep smiling, keep enjoying. If you're not enjoying you don't get to a hundred percent!'"

Karunaratne praised the contribution of his bowlers, notably the inexperienced Vishwa Fernando and Kasun Rajitha, who took 12 and nine wickets respectively over the two matches.

"Our bowling line-up did a really good job, especially the youngsters," he said.

South Africa, however, witnessed their run of seven consecutive home Test series wins come to an end and captain Faf du Plessis said their misfiring batsmen must shoulder the blame.

"I thought we were poor with the bat throughout the series," Du Plessis said. "I thought in general through the series both teams probably didn't perform with the bat on two pitches that were very conducive to scoring runs."

"Today for the first time there was a real display of what should have happened in the rest of the series, two guys getting together and scoring some big runs."

"On this wicket we should have scored a lot more runs."

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 222 and second innings 128.

SRI LANKA: First innings 154 and second innings 197 for 2 (Karunaratne 19, Fernando 75 not out, Mendis 84 not out; Rabada 1-53, Olivier 1-46)

Result: Sri Lanka won by eight wickets and clinched the two-match series 2-0.

Player-of-the-match: Kusal Mendis.

Player-of-the-series: Kusal Perera.

WHAT THEY SAID

Congratulations @OfficialSLC for achieving what no other Sri Lankan team has ever come close to. Huge character shown by all concerned. The team, coaching staff and management having been under tremendous pressure. A team effort for the ages. Keep believing and keep fighting.

- Kumar Sangakkara

Soooo happy for the guys. An achievement to cherish for a life time. Resilience when there was no hope... Truly incredible!!! Well done!!! Never lose hope!!!

- Russel Arnold

Really happy for the boys, fantastic team effort. This series win among the Top achievements of Sri Lanka Cricket. Well done @IamDimuth & team, coaching staff.

- Rangana Herath

Arguably the best day ever in the history of Asian test Cricket n surely the best day ever for #SLC. Well done @IamDimuth and team! You made the entire nation proud #LionsRoar #Speechless

- Danushka Gunathilaka

Congrats @OfficialSLC for achieving what no other Sri Lanka team has done. Fantastic display getting them all out with a low score in both test matches and the fast bowlers for an outstanding performance! Well Done Guys, u believed u can, and u did! Enjoy the Win.

- Chaminda Vaas



Bangladesh's Mehedi Hasan Miraz (L) and Mahmudullah Riyad both retired on 50-plus scores to help the Tigers post an inspiring 411 for six in 96.1 overs on the first day of the two-day practice match against New Zealand XI in Lincoln yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Women's NCL from tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

Sylhet Division will face off against Dhaka Division while Rajshahi Division take on Khulna Division when the 10th Women's National Cricket League begins on February 25 in Cox's Bazar. Both matches will be played simultaneously at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium's ground-1 and ground-2.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) women's cricket wing development manager Nazmul Abedin Fahim was optimistic about discovering new talents through the 50-over competition.

"A total of eight divisions are taking part in the tournament, which will take place in the two grounds in Cox's Bazar. We hope for a competitive tournament with a very good environment where all the best players of our country can play," Abedin said.

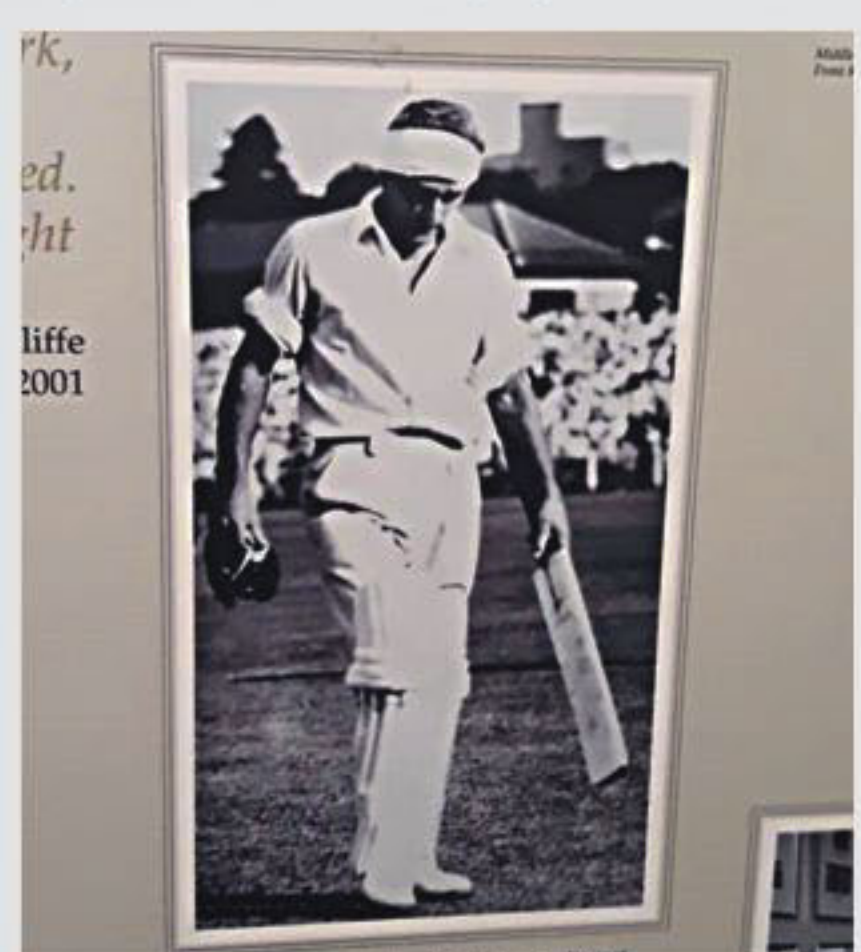
"We hope that the existing good players we have will do good and maybe some new players will emerge. We also hope to find some players for the 'A' team that we have been trying to form." Abedin concluded.

FROM THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD

Remembering Bert Sutcliffe

SPORTS REPORTER from Christchurch

The venue for the Tigers two-day practice game at the Lincoln University in Christchurch is named after New Zealand great Bert Sutcliffe, a name that takes this reporter back to history with goosebumps. Sutcliffe, one of the all-time great Kiwi left-handers, also captained New Zealand in four Tests, losing three while managing one draw.



Interestingly, New Zealand did not win a single of the 42 Tests in which Sutcliffe featured, but he is especially noted in history for an unbeaten 80-run knock against South Africa in the Boxing Day Test in Johannesburg in 1953.

Despite being taken off to hospital to receive treatment after being hit in the head off the bowling of pacer Neil Adcock, Sutcliffe returned after tea, covered in bandages. However, it was a last-wicket stand with Bob Blair -- who was understood to have stayed behind

at the team hotel after learning of the death of his fiancée in a train accident two days prior -- that left the 23,000 fans speechless.

The pair added 33 runs in just ten minutes before Blair was dismissed and although New Zealand lost the match, the incident remains one of the most memorable in the history of game. The Lincoln ground still displays pictures and histories of the great cricketer in memory of his courage.

Dare before getting married

All of a sudden during the first day of Bangladesh's two-day practice game, a group of boys gathered outside the boundary fence at the Bert Sutcliffe Oval yesterday. One of them was wearing a fancy dress with an autographed bat in hand, asking for autographs from two Bangladeshi players.

It was later learned that Cameron Pluck, who will get married in a few days, was given a dare to take the two players' autographs. Bangladesh head coach Steve Rhodes was passing by at the moment and Cameron asked him to get the autographs. Rhodes obliged and got the bat autographed as Cameron's friends cheered and created a hilarious scene at the ground.



'We're on the rise as a team'

AGENCIES, Bridgetown



Shimron Hetmyer, whose unbeaten century helped the West Indies to a series-levelling victory in the second ODI against England on Friday, was pleased with the direction the team is moving in.

Coming in to bat at 121/3 in Barbados, Hetmyer guided the hosts to a decent total of 289 with his 83-ball 104*.

Sheldon Cottrell then sliced through the England batting lineup in the chase, returning 5/46 to bundle out the visitors for 263.

Hetmyer was adjudged the player of the match for his fourth ODI hundred. "Just trying to open up more sides -- still a work in progress," he said off his batting after the game. "I'm trying to change my approach, trying to bring

different dimensions to the game.

"Our mood was good as usual, the guys believed in themselves. It was a wonderful day for me and the team and I feel really pleased with my performance, which helped the team to win and level the series. We are on a rise as a team and we are trying to take it a game at a time, and one step at a time."

"Really pleased. We played a really good game," said Jason Holder, the Windies skipper. "Credit to Hetty, he set it up nicely for us with the bat. On a sticky wicket, we got a good total and credit to our bowlers [for] the way we defended it."

"We had the belief. We pushed from there. It gave us the momentum, put England under pressure. Credit to the boys. We need options in this day and age, with the big scores that batting teams score in modern ODI cricket. Cottrell has added variation --

he is a wicket-taker and very enthusiastic, love his energy. It's good to see the youngsters stepping up."

Eoin Morgan, the England skipper, was disappointed with the lack of substantial partnerships in their batting innings, but credited Cottrell for his inspired bowling display.

"We thought 290 was well within our capabilities," said Morgan.

"We made mistakes and it hurt us. The West Indies deserved to win."

SCORES IN BRIEF

WEST INDIES: 289 for 6 in 50 overs (Gayle 50, Campbell 23, Hope 33, Bravo 25, Hetmyer104 not out 104; Wood 1-38, Rashid 1-28)

ENGLAND: 263 all out in 47.4 overs (Root 36, Morgan 70, Stokes 79, Buttler34; Cottrell 5-46, Holder 3-53)

Result: West Indies won by 26 runs and levelled 5-match series level 1-1.

Player-of-the-match: Shimron Hetmyer.



West Indies batsman Shimron Hetmyer struck a ton while pacer Sheldon Cottrell (inset) picked up five wickets to secure a 26-run win in the second ODI against England in Bridgetown on Friday.

PHOTO: AP