

SPORT



Much like rookie pacer Khaled Ahmed, who took a tumbling catch to finally send New Zealand opener Jeet Raval on his way, Bangladesh were floored by Kiwi openers Raval and Tom Latham's 254-run opening stand that gave New Zealand a potentially decisive advantage on the second day of the first Test at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Stark difference in application

MAZHAR UDDIN from Hamilton

It is all about having a clear mind and a specific game plan, but those are aspects in which Bangladesh were found wanting while New Zealand were one step ahead over the first two days of the first Test at Seddon Park in Hamilton.

After asking Bangladesh to bat first and despite there being very little assistance from the pitch for the seamers, the Kiwi fast bowlers -- especially Neil Wagner -- kept things simple and did what was expected of him by unleashing a barrage of short deliveries. Bangladesh's batsmen fell for the trap and the tourists were all out for 234 despite Tamim Iqbal's blistering hundred.

It was pretty similar when New Zealand went out to bat. Openers Jeet Raval struck his maiden Test hundred in an opening stand of 254 -- the third-highest opening stand in New Zealand's history -- with Tom Latham, who smashed his fourth 150-plus score.

The Seddon Park green-top was expected to play even better as the day progressed and in such conditions, Bangladesh's pacers Ebadot Hossain, Khaled Ahmed and Abu Jayed looked helpless.

There was hardly any notable spell from the fast bowlers both in terms of their pace or the maintenance of a tight line and length to test the home batsmen. None of the specialist Bangladesh seamers managed to pick up a wicket, which will hurt the visitors even more.

To make things even more difficult, both Raval and Latham waited for the bowlers to get tired while also cashing in on the odd loose delivery with assured boundaries.

Even Bangladesh head coach Steve Rhodes admitted that there were constant changes in plans with the ball which eventu-

ally did not work, but he also gave credit to the Kiwi batsmen.

"We didn't start the day as well as we wanted with the ball and we probably went too leg stump-ish and then we changed plans as we planned to go leg side. And then we had another plan probably way too early which was to go short. It could have worked but it didn't as you have to understand that sort of plan takes a lot out of the bowlers and we might have to do that from one end rather from both ends. The bowlers were pretty cooked going into the afternoon and evening sessions," Rhodes told reporters yesterday.

The Englishman, however, did prescribe his seamers to be more consistent when it comes to hitting the right areas consistently in Test cricket and backed them, saying it was a 'learning curve' for the young pacers.

Talking about learning, the Tigers' batsmen could also take a lesson from their New Zealand counterparts like Raval, Latham, and skipper Kane Williamson, who remained unbeaten on a chanceless 93.

It took 27 innings for Raval to eventually bring up his maiden ton in Test cricket and the 30-year-old's words after play held some tips for the Bangladesh batsmen, who like to play their shots and are often not able to resist that approach in Test cricket, which led to the sub-par first innings.

"I have worked with the red ball and I made sure I work on my discipline and focus, which I wanted to build on especially after getting those starts and not being able to convert those into big scores. I had a chat about it with the coaches and it worked well for me. If you are very clear on how you go about your innings, it makes it easy but if you are confused and try to pick and choose it makes it slightly complicated. So I just try to keep it as simple as possible and try to be disciplined within my own game plan," Raval told reporters yesterday.

Semi heroics from Ziaur, Forhad

SPORTS REPORTER

Seven sixes, four boundaries and an explosive unbeaten 29-ball 72 -- all-rounder Ziaur Rahman went absolutely berserk as he helped Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club register a five-wicket victory with 14 balls to spare against Shinepukur Cricket Club in the first semifinal of the inaugural edition of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) T20 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

In the day's second semifinal under lights at the same venue, skipper Forhad Reza's all-round brilliance ensured Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club's six-wicket victory over Prime Bank Cricket Club to become the last team to book a place in the final of DPL T20.

In the day's first game, chasing a challenging 181 for seven posted by Shinepukur, when Ziaur walked in Sheikh Jamal were in a spot of

both, having lost five wickets for 65 runs in nine overs. The equation stood such that Sheikh Jamal required 117 runs in 66 balls -- a mammoth task indeed. However, Ziaur unleashed the beast right from the word go as he strung together an unbeaten 117-run sixth-wicket partnership -- just the required number of runs -- with skipper Nurul Hasan to see their side through very comfortably in just 17.4 overs. Nurul supported Ziaur well with his unbeaten 31-ball 43.

Ziaur thought that everything had worked out for him on the day, which helped him to play such an explosive innings.

"I don't often get the opportunity; today I got to bat for 10 overs but previously I would get two or three overs. But today everything was in my favour as well as my luck and that's why I could play a beautiful game," said Ziaur after the match.

Earlier, electing to bat, Shinepukur skipper Afif Hossain's 41-ball 65 and opener Sabbir Hossain's 32-ball 47



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED
Ziaur Rahman's explosive 72 saw Sheikh Jamal through to the final.

helped their side to a challenging total, only to see their efforts trumped by the magnificent Ziaur later on the day.

In the last game of the day, Doleshwar skipper Reza returned

SCORES IN BRIEF

SHINEPUKUR v SHEIKH JAMAL
SHINEPUKUR: 181 for 7 in 20 overs (Afif 65, Sabbir 47, Shuvagata 31; Salauddin 4-28, Shahidul 2-25)
SHEIKH JAMAL: 182 for 5 in 17.4 overs (Ziaur 72 not out, Nurul 43 not out, Fardeen 22; Sohrwardi 2-31, Tipu 1-23)
Result: Sheikh Jamal won by five wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Ziaur Rahman.

PRIME BANK v DOLESHWAR
PRIME BANK: 170 for 9 in 20 overs (Kapali 55, Zakir 52, Anamul 12; Forhad 5-32, Enamul 2-22)
Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club: 171 for four in 19.4 overs (Saif 61, Ayub 46, Forhad 24 not out; Razzak 1-19, Monir 1-34)
Result: Prime Doleshwar won by six wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Forhad Reza.

FROM THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD

A BROTHER'S DISAPPOINTMENT

SPORTS REPORTER FROM CHRISTCHURCH

When Henry Nicholls was batting with New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson during the 100-run fourth-wicket stand yesterday, there was one person at the press box who kept a close eye on the left-hander's every move. Willy Nicholls -- Henry's elder brother -- is the media and communications manager of New Zealand Cricket, and he looked dejected when his brother shouldered arms against Mehedi Hasan Miraz and was bowled after scoring 53 runs.

A lively Willy, who was smiling just a minute ago, looked sad and was not even willing to speak for a while. When this reporter tried to cheer him up, Willy said: "Obviously I am disappointed as Henry has now been dismissed by Mehedi for at least four-fives times. He was out twice in the three-match ODIs series. Mehedi also bowled Henry in a Test when he was

on 98 back in 2017 and it's really getting annoying."

Found love in a hopeless place

Nothing seemed to be going right for Bangladesh on the second day of the first Test at Seddon Park as the New Zealanders dominated the Tigers' bowlers throughout the day. There was hardly anything to cheer about for the visitors or the very small contingent of Bangladesh supporters, apart from some rare dismissals yesterday. Just after Mehedi Hasan Miraz dismissed Henry Nicholls, the disk jockey at the ground -- who seem to understand the situation pretty well -- played Rihanna's famous track 'Found love in a hopeless place'. This unexpected love and sympathy from the home DJ would surely have encouraged the Tigers and for the crowd, it was a perfect song at just the right moment.



Shakib in line for NZ trip?

Set to undergo X-Ray soon

SPORTS REPORTER

With the Bangladesh cricket team not having the best of times on their ongoing tour of New Zealand, there have inevitably been rumours that injured Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan will join the team in time to feature in the third Test against the hosts starting from March 16. With many other players this rumour could be dismissed as an idle one, but it is a little different with Bangladesh's ace all-rounder and arguably most important cricketer.

Shakib fractured his left little finger while leading Dhaka Dynamites in the Bangladesh Premier League final against Comilla Victorians on February 8 and was ruled out of the ODI leg of the New Zealand tour in the eleventh hour.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chief physician Debashish Chowdhury had said in the aftermath of the injury that Shakib would need to take three weeks' rest and his situation -- how soon he could return to sporting activity -- could be assessed after an additional X-Ray in the first week of March. Shakib's three weeks were completed yesterday, and Chowdhury informed The Daily Star that an X-Ray is in the offing today or tomorrow.

Shakib's injuries have been a nebulous matter, as proved when he put his 2019 World Cup participation in doubt by saying that a flare-up of a pre-existing injury to the same finger during last September's Asia Cup could take him six months to recover. He was however back in action against West Indies at home in November. A lot will depend, therefore, on how Shakib responds to rehabilitation in order to play one of the few remaining international games before this summer's World Cup.

BD-NZ SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH: First innings/R/B4s/6s			
Tamim c Williamson	126/128	21/1	
b Grandhomme	24/32	3/0	
Shadman b Boult	12/46	0/1	
Mominul c Watling b Wagner	8/24	1/0	
Mithun c Latham b Wagner	1/9	0/0	
Soumya c Watling b Southee	22/43	5/0	
Mahmudullah c Boult b Wagner	29/58	4/0	
Liton c Boult b Wagner	10/6	1/1	
Mehedi c Nicholls b Wagner	2/4	0/0	
Jayed c Watling b Southee	0/0	0/0	
Khaled b Southee	0/0	0/0	
Ebadot not out	0	0	
Extras:	0	0	
Total: (all out in 59.2 overs)	234		
Fall of wickets: 1-57, 2-121, 3-147, 4-149, 5-180, 6-207, 7-217, 8-226, 9-234, 10-234.			
NEW ZEALAND: First innings R/B 4s/6s			
Raval c Khaled b Mahmudullah	132/220	19/1	
Latham c Mithun b Soumya	161/248	17/3	
Williamson not out	93/132	9/0	
Taylor lbw b Soumya	4/19	0/0	
Nicholls b Mehedi	53/81	7/0	
Wagner not out	1/9	0/0	
Extras: (lb 5, nb 1, w 1)	7		
Total: (For 4 wickets in 118 overs) 451			
Fall of wickets: 1-254, 2-333, 3-349, 4-449.			
Bowler			
Jayed	23	4	65
Ebadot	21	4	77
Khaled	22	6	84
Soumya	19	1	57
Mehedi	31	2	149
Mahmudullah	1	0	3
Mominul	1	0	11

Kohli backs Rahul

India's first ODI against Australia today

REUTERS, Undated

India captain Virat Kohli welcomed Lokesh Rahul's return to form and backed the batsman to push for World Cup selection with strong performances in the one-day international series against Australia starting on today.

A slump in form and a brief suspension for making inappropriate comments on a television show had threatened Rahul's chances of World Cup selection.

Yet he responded with scores of 50 and 47 in last month's two-match home Twenty20 series against Australia, which the tourists won 2-0.

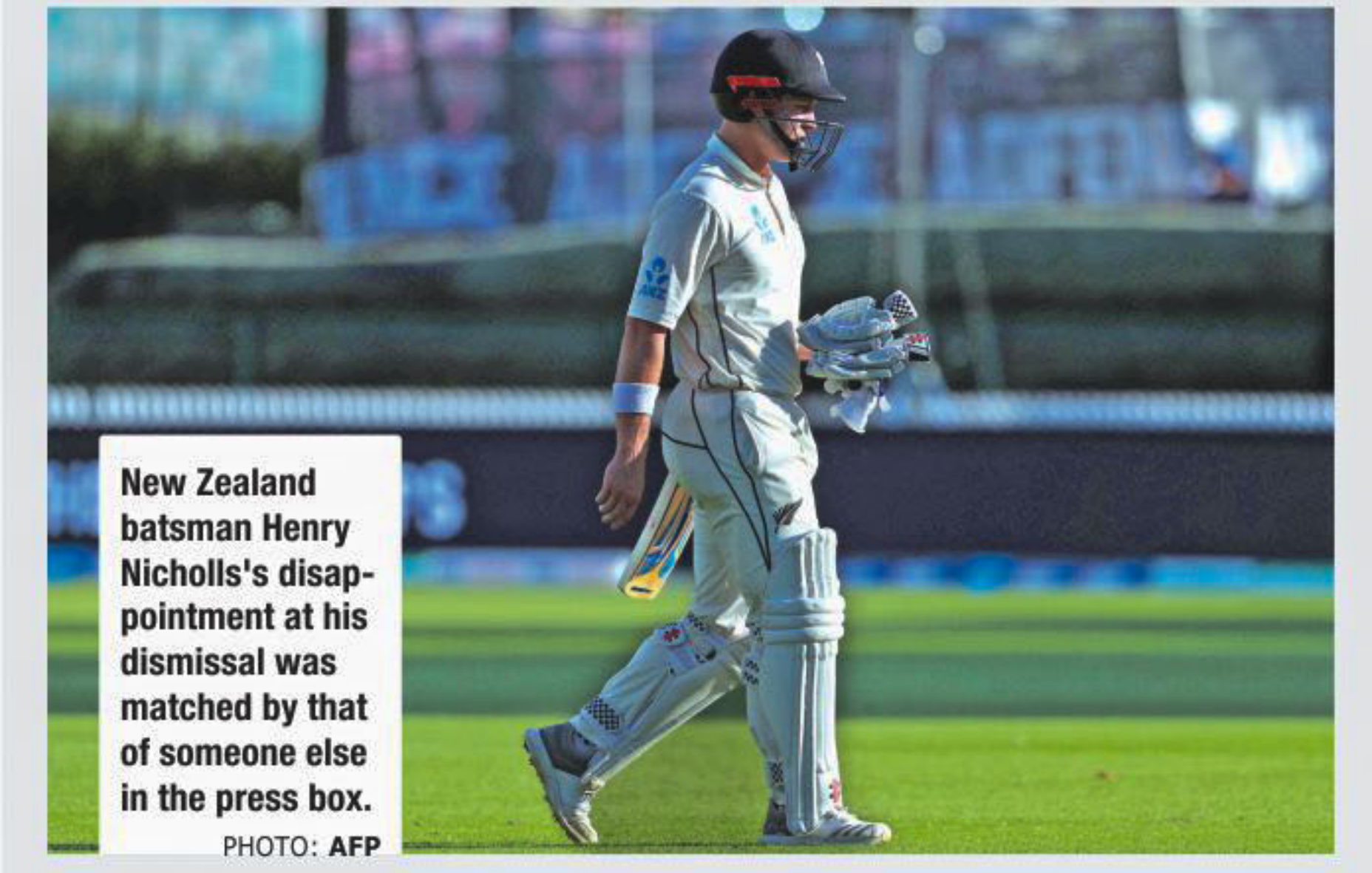
Rahul has been given another opportunity to make a case for inclusion as a reserve opener or a number four at the World Cup in England and Wales starting in May and Kohli said the 26-year-old was on a "different level" at his best.

"It's difficult to find a consistent player, who can play good cricketing shots and still win games at a strike-rate of over 140 or 150," Kohli said ahead of the first of a five-match ODI series in Hyderabad. "It'll be interesting to see what happens in the final World Cup squad. Definitely, he's made a strong case for himself. It's good he's in great nick and hopefully he can carry it forward."

"We'll have to work out the batting combination to try and give game-time to guys we want to. But, I don't see the bowling combination changing."

Australia skipper Aaron Finch said regular wicketkeeper Alex Carey would take the gloves in Hyderabad after being overlooked for the T20s while adding that Glenn Maxwell, who scored 56 and an unbeaten 113 in the two T20s, could be promoted from number seven.

"His two knocks here were unbelievable... he'll get an opportunity a bit higher up the order, no doubt," Finch said. "Whether that's six, whether it's five - I'm not sure yet. But he'll get an opportunity a bit higher than seven."



New Zealand batsman Henry Nicholls's disappointment at his dismissal was matched by that of someone else in the press box.

PHOTO: AFP

Smith okay post surgery

AFP, Sydney

Steve Smith has returned to the nets after elbow surgery, and the former Australian captain and his deputy David Warner to be fit for the Indian Premier League.

Smith went under the knife in January after dropping out of the Bangladesh Premier League with a ligament problem. He has been in a brace since, but picked up a bat again and had a session at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Thursday.