

SPORTS



Although rain periodically interrupted the fourth day of the one-off Test between Bangladesh and Afghanistan, it did not hinder the visitors' charge towards a likely victory. Most teams celebrate after the win but as seen above, Afghan skipper Rashid Khan (C) and Co. seemed quite certain of the outcome in Chattogram yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

No problem in planning: Shakib

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram



The fate of the ongoing one-off Test match between Bangladesh and Afghanistan was pretty clear after Saturday's third day, with the hosts having only themselves to blame for being on the verge of losing to newcomers in the Test arena.

Skipper Shakib Al Hasan had said after the second day that the pitch was exactly the opposite of what they wanted, yet the visiting bowlers in Rashid Khan, Mohammad Nabi, Zahir Khan and Qais Ahmed had much more success than the home spinners -- after the team management decided to name an eleven without a pacer -- in their own conditions. Their ploy on the fourth day yesterday, to pair left-handed and right-handed batsmen regardless of where the players normally bat, continued in the vein of their captain's words or their tactics not quite making sense.

Set a huge target of 398, Bangladesh sent out the right-handed Liton Das to open the innings instead of Soumya Sarkar with the left-handed Shadman Islam and stuck to the strategy for the first four batsmen.

It was right-hander Mosaddek Hossain, who had never batted above number seven, and not regular number three Mominul Haque who strode out at the fall of Liton's wicket. After Mosaddek failed to implement the plan -- which presumably was to disrupt the Afghans' bowling rhythm -- and succumbed to a suicidal stroke, fellow right-hander Mushfiqur Rahim took his place. The Tigers finally abandoned their right-left tactic when Mushfiqur departed and the left-handed Mominul came out.

Even Afghanistan wicketkeeper Afsar Zazai was surprised by the shuffling around of batsmen.

"I think they were trying to make right and left combination because of Nabi, so with two left-handers at the crease it's easy to get them [out]. I think that was their planning but we didn't care about it that much. It's good but it didn't work for them. I was asking one of their batsmen whether Soumya Sarkar was injured. He said no. Then I asked why he hadn't come to bat and he didn't answer," Zazai told reporters after the day's play.

Shakib was also asked about the not-so-fruitful ploy, and the champion cricketer tried to defend it by saying that their game plan was right but the execution went wrong.

"The thing was they had a pace bowler while Nabi was supposed to bowl from the other end. The pace bowler might hold for four-five overs and contain runs to make the ball a bit older. The good thing about having a right-left combination is that, if you noticed, Nabi did not pick up a wicket in the first spell, while he did manage to pick a wicket in the first spell of the first innings. We didn't get success because those who were supposed to play big innings were unable to do that. It's not that there was a problem in the planning.

"I even discussed yesterday [Saturday] whether we should send two right-handers and I wanted Mosaddek to open the innings. As it was not entirely my decision, Shadman went out to open and he batted well. We came to the ground with that plan in the team meeting this morning and everyone had faith in it," said Shakib.

OUT OF THE BOX, OUT OF THE GAME



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'We played with a lot of fear'

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram

For the second time in four days of the one-off Test match against Afghanistan, Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan came to the press conference to negotiate questions from the media. The Tigers were on the verge of the humiliation of losing a Test against the newest member of the Test fraternity at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. Unlike the second day of the Test when Shakib blamed the pitch for being the opposite of what they expected, yesterday the skipper was rather keen to face the media. Even after the media manager called off the 20-minute-long press conference Shakib, with a smile on his face, was eager to continue fielding questions from the media. Excerpts of the lively press conference are given below:

Question (Q): Apart from captain's press conferences, we don't often see you face the media. As captain, are you trying to take the pressure off your teammates? **Shakib Al Hasan (SAH):** You can say it is a way to release the pressure from teammates, but the pressure on the field will remain. **Q:** The BCB president in Dhaka said that there was a mistake in planning. What do you think? **SAH:** When results don't go your way and the plan is not executed, there will be such talk. As we were unable to execute the plan, in such a position it's natural to say that there was a mistake in planning.

Q: Your take on the way Mosaddek Hossain got out? **SAH:** To be honest, among all of us who batted in the first innings Mosaddek looked most comfortable against their spinners. As we were mostly facing the spinners, we planned on the previous day about sending him up the order. He also has the experience of playing big innings -- he scored four or five double hundreds in first-class cricket. If we want to chase a 400-plus total, we need someone who has the experience of playing big innings. As long he was at the crease in both innings, he batted well but I



Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan needed shielding from the rain in Chattogram yesterday but would have probably preferred protection from the media following a dismal fourth day of the one-off Test against Afghanistan. PHOTO: STAR

have to admit that he was unable to execute and failed.

Q: Overall, what is the problem of the batsmen -- is it in technique or mentality?

SAH: You can say both as we don't play wrist-spinners, so that's something new, whether it's left or right-arm bowlers. Naturally there is the matter of adjusting, although we planned accordingly

by playing such bowlers in the nets. But until you get the success in a match, those practices won't work. I won't say that there was any problem in our approach, but I would say there was huge problem in execution. When you are not able to execute and you are unable to play with a big heart, you will play a bowler in fear. Even the coach [Russell Domingo] said

to play with an open heart and I think that we played with a lot of fear. At the end of the day, it's a cricket match and it's obviously important for us, but at times we take so much pressure that it's difficult to perform and when we are unable to do that, the pressure mounts. **Q:** How far is it possible to go on the fifth day?

SAH: How many runs do we need? 270? So both [himself and Soumya Sarkar] need to score hundreds. Not just hundreds, we have to score 120 and 150 (smiles).

Q: Is that possible?

SAH: Nothing is impossible... let's see. The other thing is the rain, that can help us... let's see.

Q: What's your take on the body language of the Afghanistan team, who are playing just their third Test?

SAH: Good, but we were unable to push them to a position where they would have to show their character and if we were able to do that, we would have known about their character. If we were able to score 200 for two, we could have tested their character and determination tomorrow [Monday].

Q: Is there a lack of ability? **SAH:** Everyone has the ability as apart from Shadman Islam, there is no one in the team who hasn't played a role to win a match in the past. As they have done that, it means that they have the ability. The thing is, you have the talent and are able to replicate that on the field, while on the other hand someone has the talent but is unable to prove that. That's a very fine line, but that sets a big player and a small cricketer apart.

'Must capitalise on Afghan slowness without the ball'

SPORTS REPORTER



Former Bangladesh captain Mamunul Islam is thinking of securing points against

Afghanistan in their opening match of the joint qualifiers for the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup by taking advantage of Afghanistan's weaknesses during off-the-ball situations.

182nd-ranked Bangladesh will begin their campaign tomorrow in Dushanbe, Tajikistan by squaring off against 149th-ranked Afghanistan, who are coming into the match on the back of a 6-0 defeat against Qatar. This will be the first meeting between the two sides since the 2015 SAFF Championship in India where Afghanistan won 4-0.

"Afghanistan are a strong opponent, who have chosen to compete in the Central Asian Zone of AFC in a bid to climb up the ladder. So it is not going to be an easy match for us. We must respect them. But the positive thing is we will play at a neutral venue.

"Afghanistan are more dangerous with the ball because they go on attack swiftly but they are a little slow without the ball and we want to



MAMUNUL ISLAM

capitalise on that weakness to launch attacks on the break," Mamunul said over phone after completing yesterday's training session in Dushanbe.

"They have just arrived here today [Sunday] after playing against Qatar and they may be tired after playing a tough match and the travel. On the other hand, we will be fresh and we have to give our best if we want to get points against them," said Mamunul, who scored the winning goal against Afghanistan during

the 2014 Asian Games in Incheon, South Korea.

The 30-year-old midfielder believes the current condition of the team is good and that are improving every day ahead of the Afghanistan tie.

"Everyone knows we are the lowest-ranked side in the group and it has both a negative and a positive side. Actually, we want to increase our FIFA ranking by beating the higher-ranked sides in the World Cup Qualifiers. The condition of the team is good and we are improving day by day," the Abahani midfielder said. "We lost the first practice match due to fatigue from long travel, but we bounced back well in the second practice match."

Even though Mamunul is a bit concerned with the defence in absence of veterans such as Tapu Barman and Nasiruddin Chowdhury, he is confident that the others will fill the vacuum.

"We will miss the services of Tapu and Nasir, but I believe other defenders will try to prove their worth in the match," said Mamunul, who missed the last two AFC Cup matches against April 25 SC for his club Abahani due to an injury, but is now fit for the match against Afghanistan.



Bangladesh skipper Akbar Ali (L) and batsman Shamim Hossain remained unbeaten on 98 and 45 respectively as the young Tigers raced to a six-wicket win over Nepal in an Under-19s Asia Cup match yesterday. PHOTO: ACC

U-19s reach Asia Cup semis

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh moved into the semifinals of the Under-19s Asia Cup following a six-wicket victory over Nepal -- their second win in two matches -- in Colombo yesterday.

Skipper Akbar Ali scored an unbeaten 98 off 82 deliveries to guide the boys in red and green to the target of 262 with four balls to spare. Shamim Hossain remained unbeaten on 45 while Towhid Hridoy (60) and Mahmudul Hasan Joy (40) made valuable contributions to the innings.

Earlier, put in to field first, Nepal posted 261 for the loss of eight wickets, thanks to P Sarraf's 81 and S Jhona's 56. Tanzim Hasan Sakib and Shajhin Alam took two wickets each for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh had won their opening match against the UAE by the same margin. Bangladesh will next face Sri Lanka, who too have qualified for the last four from the same group, in the last match of Group B on Tuesday to decide who will emerge as group champions. India and Afghanistan have made it to the last four from Group A.

BD-AFG SCOREBOARD

AFGHANISTAN: First innings 342 (Rahmat 102, Asghar 92, Zazai 41, Rashid 51; Tajlul 4-116, Shakib 2-64, Nayeem 2-43)				
AFGHANISTAN: 2nd innings R/B 4s/6s (overnight 237 for 8)				
Ihsanullah lbw b Shakib	4/3	1/0		
Ibrahim c Mominul b Nayeem	87/208	6/4		
Rahmat c & b Shakib	0/1	0/0		
Hashmatullah c Soumya b Nayeem	12/37	2/0		
Asghar c Shakib b Tajlul	50/108	4/2		
Zazai not out	48/110	3/1		
Nabi c Mominul b Mehedi	8/13	0/1		
Rashid b Tajlul	24/22	6/0		
Qais lbw b Shakib	14/26	2/0		
Yamin run out	9/11	0/1		
Zahir c Mominul b Mehedi	0/2	0/0		
Extras (b-4)	4			
Total: (All out in 90.1 overs)	260			
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-4, 3-28, 4-136, 5-171, 6-180, 7-210, 8-235, 9-260, 10-260.				
Bowler				
Shakib	19	3	58	3
Mehedi	12.1	3	35	2
Tajlul	28	6	86	2
Nayeem	17	2	61	2
Mominul	10	6	13	0
Mosaddek	4	1	3	0
AFGHANISTAN: First innings 205 (Mominul 52, Liton 33, Mosaddek 48 not out; Rashid 5-55; Nabi 3-56)				
BANGLADESH: 2nd innings R/B 4s/6s				
Liton lbw b Zahir	9/30	0/0		
Shadman lbw b Nabi	41/114	4/0		
Mosaddek c Asghar b Zahir	12/17	0/0		
Mushfiqur lbw b Rashid	23/25	4/0		
Mominul lbw b Rashid	39/48	4/0		
Shakib not out	3/8	0/0		
Mahmudullah c Ibrahim b Rashid	7/21	0/0		
Soumya not out	0/5	0/0		
Extras (lb-2)	2			
Total: (For 6 wks in 44.2 overs)	136			
Yet to bat: Mehedi, Tajlul, Nayeem.				
Fall of wickets: 1-30, 2-52, 3-78, 4-82, 5-106, 6-125.				
Bowler				
Yamin	0	1	14	0
Nabi	17.2	4	38	1
Rashid	13	0	46	3
Zahir	10	0	36	2