



## Mustafizur's decline and Tigers' Test troubles

SAKIB SUBHAN

 More than any other cricketer in Bangladesh's history, Mustafizur Rahman has been treated with kid gloves by the Bangladesh team management, and with good reason. When he made an immediate impact upon arriving on the international scene with ODI series-winning performances in 2015 against India and South Africa, Mustafizur gave Bangladesh that rare commodity -- a bowler who can run through sides and make renowned batsmen look foolish. That success persisted through the 2016 World Twenty20, his debut IPL season for Sunrisers Hyderabad, and a fine debut performance for Sussex Sharks in 2016, before a shoulder injury laid him low.

Three years on, when he was not among the three Bangladesh pacers picked for the second Test against India in Kolkata on November 22, it signalled the end of perhaps the longest honeymoon period in Bangladesh cricket. It also revealed much about the state of the country's pace bowling in Tests that its most celebrated pacer was not deemed good enough, or able enough, to represent the country in the longest format.

Mustafizur's initial impact was tied to his mystery element, namely his slower cutters that were very hard to distinguish from his stock seam-up deliveries. However, as is the case with most mystery bowlers, batsmen around the world see footage and gradually work out the mystery. That happened with Mustafizur too, but he had enough going for him -- he was initially accurate and displayed an uncanny ability to predict the batsman's intentions -- to suggest that his slower cutters would not be the sole source of his incisiveness.

Instead, his development has stagnated since he emerged from his shoulder surgery. He is still one of Bangladesh's best in ODI cricket, but there is decline there too. His figures were outlandish in his first year of international cricket, when in 11 ODIs he picked up 30 wickets at an average of 13.83 and an economy rate of just 4.38 per over. His average is now, after 56 matches, still an



excellent 22.97 and economy of 5.24.

In the World Cup this year, he did pick 20 wickets but none came in the first 25 overs of the innings. His economy rate was 6.7 runs per over, better only than Mohammad Saifuddin's 7.18 among regular bowlers who played more than five matches. These stats tell the story that was evident to those who watched the matches -- that Mustafizur was still relying on taking wickets with his variations when the slog was on, instead of providing breakthroughs that would give Bangladesh an early advantage, as he did in his early days. His economy rate suggests that the wickets were more bought than taken.

The story is markedly different in Tests. He had taken four wickets against South Africa in his debut Test, and after his first two matches his average was an impressive 14.5. In his next 11 Tests, that average has ballooned to 38.62 for the addition of just 24 more wickets.

Then there is a rumoured lack of eagerness to play the longer format. He has played just 31 first-class matches since his debut in April 2014, and 13 of those were Tests. Before the tour of India, he sat out the opening round of the National Cricket League (NCL), following a visit to national team physio Julian Calefato, even though he was initially declared fit and



Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman was a force to be reckoned with following his debut in 2015. However, even though the Fizz is still relatively successful in ODIs, he has seen a sharp decline in Tests, being reduced to carrying drinks while less renowned teammates fought it out in the Tigers' two-match series against India.

PHOTO: BCB & AFP FILE

named in the NCL squad for Khulna.

The recent two-Test series in India was a lesson in how taking wickets is an art in Test cricket, with Indian pace trio of Ishant Sharma, Mohammad Shami and Umesh Yadav making hay against Bangladesh. Indeed, Bangladesh pacers Ebadot Hossain (26 first-class matches since 2016) and Abu Jayed (83 first-class matches since 2010) also impressed, banking on the experience they have garnered of working batsmen out in the longer version.

Mustafizur, cooling his heels while less celebrated teammates were making the pink ball talk in Kolkata, exemplified the problem

with Bangladesh's Test cricket. When his usual tricks ceased being as effective as they once were, instead of adapting and developing new skills in the one format that puts the onus on bowlers to take wickets, he has seemingly continued to rely on ODIs success.

Luckily for him, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) also places much greater importance on ODI cricket. Unluckily for him, perhaps, a continued focus on the shorter formats may see an erosion of his efficacy that has already been seen at the World Cup, and such scenes as the one seen in Kolkata may become more common.



New Zealand's Neil Wagner (R) took an eight-wicket match haul in the first Test against England, which ended in an innings and 65-run defeat for the visitors at Mount Maunganui yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Wagner leads Kiwis' crushing win

AFP, Mount Maunganui

New Zealand said their comprehensive innings victory over England was among their very best after Neil Wagner's five-wicket burst sealed the first Test in Mount Maunganui on Monday.

The tireless left-arm took the last two England wickets in successive balls for a five-wicket haul and to complete the rout by an innings and 65 runs late on the final day.

While England captain Joe Root lamented a disappointing batting effort, and the lack of a bowler with Wagner's application, New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson celebrated his side's match-winning innings of 615 for nine declared.

"It's certainly right up there in terms of a tough, grinding Test victory."

BJ Watling's 205 and Mitchell Santner's 126 laid the platform for New Zealand's colossal 262-run first-innings lead.

England, resuming the final day at 55 for three and needing to bat through to stumps to save the Test, progressed patiently to 121 for four before New Zealand removed the last six wickets for 76 runs.

Wagner finished with five for 44 while Santner took three for 53.

"We saw the wicket deteriorate and

knew if you could hit the wicket hard you would get some variable bounce. That allowed us to make the breakthroughs," Williamson said, admitting that he had concerns about how the match would finish.

England have experience and some world-class players who've batted out draws before. If they were better than us today they were going to be able to save it. It did come down to the wire."

Root said England did not help themselves with the way they batted.

"Clearly some of the shots today were not good. Everyone's very aware of that. You can't fault effort but I put my hand up as well, that ball was treated with far too much respect."

Root said the England bowlers also needed to learn from the effort Wagner put in.

"He runs in all day and makes sure every ball means something," Root said, adding there were times England quick Jofra Archer could "unleash a little bit more".

### SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 353

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 615-9 decl

ENGLAND: Second innings 197 all out

(Burns 31, Denly 35, Stokes 28, Curran 29 not out, Archer 30; Santner 3-53, Wagner 5-44)

Result: New Zealand won by an innings and 65 runs.

Player-of-the-match: BJ Watling.

## BPL in focus after debacle

SPORTS REPORTER



The same old autopsy has been going on following the Bangladesh cricket team's ignominious performance in the just-concluded two-match Test series on the much-desired tour of India. If Bangladesh cricket's past trends are anything to go by, then the gloom will not persist for long, especially as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced the full fixtures of the Bangabandhu BPL T20.

Four players, including Test captain Mominul Haque and Mahmudullah Riyad returned home on Sunday and the rest are expected to return by tomorrow and there is little doubt that the focus will now shift to the seventh edition of the BPL. The seven participating teams -- Dhaka Platoon, Khulna Tigers, Rajshahi Royals, Rangpur Rangers, Sylhet Thunder, Cumilla Warriors and Chattogram Challengers -- have already formed their squads through a players' draft on November 17.

The BPL will start from December 11 with Chattogram Challengers taking on Sylhet Thunder and Cumilla Warriors squaring off against Rangpur Rangers on the opening day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. The final is scheduled to take place at the same venue on January 17 next year. The tournament will take place in three cities -- Dhaka, Chattogram and Sylhet.

With January 18 being allotted as a reserve day for the final, the national team's departure for Pakistan -- the Tigers' next international assignment before a home series against

### HIGHLIGHTS

**O** The Bangabandhu BPL will get underway from December 11 with Chattogram Challengers taking on Sylhet Thunder and Cumilla Warriors locking horns with Rangpur Rangers on the opening day in Mirpur. The final will be held at the same venue on January 17, 2020.

**O** The reserve day for the final is January 18, the same day that Bangladesh are scheduled to go to Pakistan on January 18 for a Test and T20I tour. The tour will only go ahead if the BCB gets a security clearance to tour Pakistan.

Zimbabwe in March -- may be delayed by one or two days if the BCB get a security clearance for the two-Test and three-T20I series in Pakistan.

"Bangladesh are scheduled to go to Pakistan on January 18 but everything will depend on the security clearance. Before our women's team's visit to Pakistan -- the Tigers' next international assignment before a home series against

we are yet to get a clearance about the national team," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

"There is our Bangladesh High Commission... a government security team has already visited Pakistan, the International Cricket Council (ICC) also makes an independent assessment, so when we get the green signal from all of them, we will go ahead with the tour," he added.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan however was hopeful about the tour taking place. "As two of our teams recently visited Pakistan, you can say we will get the clearance if any abnormal situation does not arise in the meantime. But we have to wait for the official clearance report," Hassan told reporters while talking about Bangladesh's Test series debacle in India, regarding which he promised to disclose their short and long-term plans for improvement in Test cricket.

Recently Sri Lanka, without their main players, toured Pakistan for a bilateral series for the first time in a decade since the 2009 attack on the team bus in Lahore, although it was only for limited-overs cricket. Some sources have suggested that Bangladesh could also confirm their tour of Pakistan only for the three T20Is as players and officials were not eager to stay there for a prolonged period.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo and other foreign coaching staff have gone for vacation following the India series and according to the BCB CEO they will return during the middle of the BPL T20.

The full fixtures of the BPL will be available in the online version of this article at [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net)

### SHORT CORNER

#### Archer racially abused

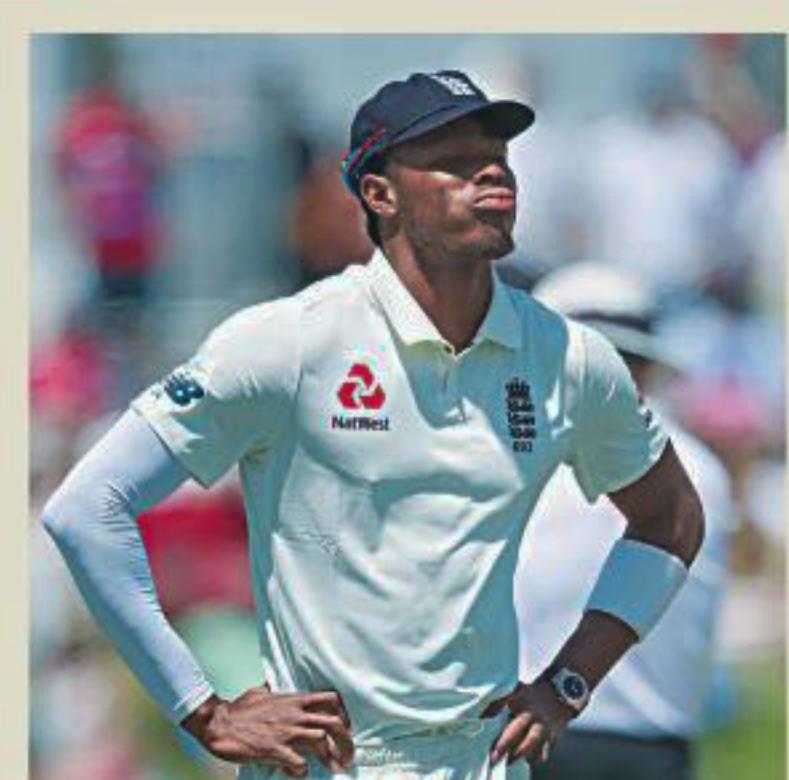
New Zealand Cricket bosses said Monday they will personally apologise to England fast bowler Jofra Archer after he was racially abused during the first Test in Mount Maunganui.

The Barbados-born Archer, considered one of the most promising all-rounders in world cricket, tweeted he was disturbed to hear racial insults "whilst battling to help save my team".

The 24-year-old featured in a late show of resistance with Sam Curran in a 59-run stand for the ninth wicket before New Zealand wrapped up the match for an innings and 65 runs victory.

"A bit disturbing hearing racial insults today whilst battling to help save my team, the crowd was been amazing this week except for that one guy," Archer tweeted.

New Zealand Cricket's (NZC) public affairs manager Richard Boock said there is "zero tolerance towards abusive or offensive language" at all cricket venues in



New Zealand.

NZC "will contact Mr. Archer tomorrow to apologise for the unacceptable experience, and to promise increased vigilance in the matter when the teams next meet in Hamilton", Boock said.

He said they will also examine CCTV footage in an attempt to identify the person responsible and will refer any relevant information to the police.

The second Test between New

Zealand and England starts in Hamilton on Friday.

#### Fans to get back ticket money for last two days

Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB) has decided to refund the money for tickets bought by fans for days 4 and 5 after the pink-ball Test ended inside three days as India crushed Bangladesh by an innings and 46 runs to sweep the series 2-0 on Monday.

This is one of the rare occasions when a cricket association is refunding money for the tickets bought by fans as the match got over early. The practice is usually followed by state boards across the world when matches get called off or abandoned due to rain or any other circumstance.

"The process of refunding the amounts for Day 4 and Day 5 Tickets has started. Messages would be sent to all online transactors who have booked only for these two days," the CAB said in a statement.

-- AGENCIES

#### Babar should bat at No 4: Imran Khan

AGENCIES, Lahore

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has weighed in on the ideal batting position for middle-order batsman Babar Azam in Test cricket.

According to details, the premier heaped praise on Babar and believes that he should be batting at number four position in the longest format of the game.

"PM Imran Khan messaged me to wish all the best to Babar Azam for the way he batted. He also mentioned that in his cricketing opinion Babar is such a good batsman, with great technique, that he should bat at number four eventually," Khan was quoted as saying by legendary Pakistan pacer Wasim Akram.