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e-mail: sports@thedailystar.net
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PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Liton Das was framed in similar fashion numerous times as the right-hander played some magnificent strokes -- like the one pictured above -- on way to his second ODI ton and a career-best 126 before retiring hurt against Zimbabwe in Sylhet yesterday.

'Nervousness' brings the best out of unhurried Liton

MAZHAR UDDIN *from Sylhet*

When it comes to talent, there were never any doubts about Liton Das, who was highly rated even before making his international debut in 2015. The questions surrounding him were always about consistency.

The stylish wicketkeeper-batsman has all the shots in the book in his arsenal and, more importantly, when Liton gets going, it is a tough prospect for any opponent as the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium witnessed yesterday.

His masterclass against Zimbabwe in the first ODI was one of those days when the right-hander showed how a composed approach could help him find success.

Liton smashed his second ODI hundred, which helped Bangladesh post their highest-ever total of 321 for six against Zimbabwe and eventually clinch a comprehensive 169-run win.

However, the right-hander had to retire hurt after having cramps during the 37th over for a magnificent 105-ball 126 that featured 13 fours and three sixes.

Liton was confident from the get-go and smote his first boundary with a cracking drive towards cover region to Chris Mpofu after Bangladesh had opted to bat.

The highlight of Liton's innings was the way he paced it, with a mixture of aggression and sensibility that was quite unlike him. The right-hander previously tended to throw away his wicket after getting set.

The 25-year-old, who batted at number five in the World Cup, returned to his actual position and opened the innings. His maiden hundred had come batting at opening slot, against India in the final of the Asia Cup in 2018.

Interestingly, Liton revealed that he was nervous before the start of the game and that helped him focus more yesterday.

"Many might not have noticed, but I have been nervous since last night [Saturday]. I haven't played the fifty-over format for a long time. I missed the Sri Lanka tour after the World Cup. I also knew that I was going to open the innings today (Sunday), which added more pressure to the back of my mind. I think that nervousness worked positively for me as long I was at the crease because I was more focused," said Liton yesterday.

When asked to compare his two centuries, the cricketer said that it required the same amount of focus to hit a ton against any opponent.

"Centuries are always right at the top for me. Yes, the first hundred was in the Asia Cup final, which was a big match. This game might not be as big as that, but it was big for me personally. If you think of a team effort, we could easily win against Zimbabwe. But that was not the case in the Asia Cup. But to score a hundred, I had to keep the same focus and I had to remain focused today as well," he said.

There has certainly been a change in Liton's personality over the past two years and the cricketer said that it was a change in mentality that had helped him develop his game.

"Now I know what I have to do to score a hundred in international cricket. I have to bat till the 30th over. It played in the back of my mind that I would not hurry and look for singles after reaching my fifty. I will also look to score boundaries if there is a bad ball and I was nervous at the start, but once I got set, I tried to bat till the 30th over."

BD-ZIM SCOREBOARD

BANGLADESH	R/B	4s/6s
Liton rtd hurt	126/105	13/2
Tamim lbw b Madhevere	24/43	2/0
Nazmul lbw b Mutombodzi	29/38	1/2
Mushfiqur c Mutumbami b Tiripano	19/26	0/0
Mahmudullah lbw b Mpofu	32/28	2/1
Mithun lbw b Mpofu	50/41	5/1
Saifuddin not out	28/15	0/3
Mehedi c Kamunhukamwe b Mumba	7/4	0/1
Mashrafe not out	0/0	0/0
Extras: (lb-1, w-5)	6	
Total: (For 6 wkts in 50 overs)	321	

Did not bat: Taijul, Mustafizur.

Fall of wickets: 1-60, 2-140, 3-182, 3-206*, 4-274, 5-289, 6-298.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mpofu	10	0	68	2
Mumba	8	0	45	1
Madhevere	8	0	48	1
Tiripano	7	0	56	1
Raza	10	0	56	0
Mutombodzi	7	0	47	1

ZIMBABWE	R/B	4s/6s
Kamunhukamwe b Saifuddin	1/10	0/0
Chibhabha c Mahmudullah b Mashrafe	10/22	1/0
Chakabva lbw b Saifuddin	11/18	1/0
Taylor b Taijul	8/15	1/0
Madhevere c Mashrafe b Mehedi	35/44	5/0
Raza c Mahmudullah b Mustafizur	18/32	2/0
Mutumbami run out	17/14	0/2
Mutombodzi c Saifuddin b Mashrafe	24/47	3/0
Tiripano c & b Mehidi	2/13	0/0
Mumba b Saifuddin	13/12	1/1
Mpofu not out	9/8	0/0
Extras: (lb-1, w-3)	4	
Total: (All out in 39.1 overs)	152	

Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-23, 3-23, 4-44, 5-79, 6-84, 7-106, 8-109, 9-130, 10-152.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mustafizur	6	0	22	1
Saifuddin	7	0	22	3
Mashrafe	6.1	0	35	2
Taijul	9	2	27	1
Mehedi	8	1	33	2
Mahmudullah	3	0	12	0

Result: Bangladesh won by 169 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Liton Das.

Saifuddin closer to being the genuine article

SPORTS REPORTER *from Sylhet*

Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo had previously said that he missed a seaming all-rounder like Mohammad Saifuddin, who could add variety to the Tigers' line-up.

Perhaps knowing the ability of the young all-rounder, the South African kept an eye on 23-year-old, who made his return to international cricket after suffering a back injury more than five months ago during a T20I against Afghanistan.

Saifuddin, who played his last ODI against Pakistan at Lord's at the ICC World Cup last year, made an impressive return to the fifty-over format against Zimbabwe in the first of the three-match series in Sylhet yesterday.

The cricketer showed his mettle as a genuine seaming all-rounder that the team management have been looking for with his handy seaming skills both with the new ball and in the death overs, combined with his ability to hit big shots.

His first impact came with the bat when Bangladesh required some big hits in the final stage of the innings. Saifuddin, coming in at number seven with 19 balls left in the innings, did exactly what the Tigers were looking for.

The left-hander hit three sixes off Chris Mpofu in the final over of the innings, which yielded 22 runs and helped Bangladesh post their highest ODI total: 321.

During his 15-ball 28-run cameo, the left-hander played proper cricketing strokes. His hits down the ground off the full face of the bat reflected his ability to take on bowlers. His big-hitting abilities at the end were something that the Bangladesh team management felt the team was missing over the years.

The cricketer from Feni was then instrumental with the new ball and picked up the first wicket when Zimbabwe opener Tinashe Kamunhukamwe dragged the ball onto his stumps off a beautiful length delivery.

The right-arm seamer, who was getting consistent swing with the new ball, then trapped Regis Chakabva leg before when the right hander went for a rather fancy slog sweep.

Saifuddin went on to scalp his third wicket by dismissing Carl Mumba and ended up with figures of three for 22 from seven overs.

Saifuddin's presence on the field was also noticeable as he was seen diving all around and saving crucial runs. His body language yesterday was also definitely something worth discussing.

Yes, there are questions regarding the strength of the Zimbabwe side. But as the buzz this series has been to create a good cricketing culture, it is also a platform for Domingo to have a look at youngsters like Saifuddin.

These are still early days for Saifuddin, but if the cricketer can improve his skills further, Bangladesh's hopes of finding a world class all-rounder after Shakib Al Hasan will certainly be looking brighter.

PHOTO: STAR

For over five months, Bangladesh did not only miss the trademark two-arms-open celebration of Mohammad Saifuddin, the Tigers also missed a perfect seaming all-rounder. Saifuddin returned to international scene and showed his class, smashing a quick-fire 28 before taking three with the ball against Zimbabwe in Sylhet yesterday.

Mash's '100' as captain

Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza clinched a unique record, becoming the fifth bowler in ODI history to bag 100 wickets as captain.

He entered a coveted list with only Imran Khan, Wasim Akram, Shaun Pollock and most recently West Indies captain Jason Holder for company. Mashrafe had been waiting on the brink of clinching the record for a long time, having scalped 97 before the 2019 World Cup. However, his dismal record in the World Cup, where he managed a solitary wicket saw his record delayed and the he missed the tour of Sri Lanka through injury.

All eyes were on the Bangladesh captain before the start of the series against Zimbabwe yesterday and he clinched his first wicket since the World Cup with the wicket of Chamu Chibhabha after nearly eight months. He then went on to bag the last Zimbabwe wicket to fall, finishing with figures of 2 for 35 and in the process also bagging the unique record.

Media instigated Mashrafe: Hassan

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hassan yesterday said that media personnel went a bit too far during the pre-match press conference on Saturday, when Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza reacted angrily to one particular question.

During the pre-match press conference on the eve of the first Bangladesh-Zimbabwe ODI in Sylhet, a reporter had asked about Mashrafe's 'sense of self-respect' during a question about him continuing to play despite declining form. A visibly irritated Mashrafe responded by saying that he was not a thief and had nothing to be ashamed of.

"Seeing his press conference I felt that you people instigated him too much. This is the time when you should have been more supportive, but instead you hurt him. We should not be discussing anything about it. He already made clear what he wants," said Hassan during a press-conference in Sylhet yesterday.

Mashrafe's captaincy and place in the team has generated a lot of speculation, especially after the 36-year-old led the Tigers to an eighth-place finish in the World Cup last summer.

Mashrafe, who took two wickets yesterday against Zimbabwe in Sylhet, etched his name in the records book as he became only the fifth player to have scalped 100 ODI wickets as captain.

"The board will decide who will become captain. And when he [Mashrafe] retires is his decision. So let him decide," concluded Hassan.

Lee appointed Tigers' new trainer

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced the appointment of Nicholas Trevor Lee as its head of physical performance, a post that has been vacant since former fitness and conditioning trainer Mario Villavarayan parted ways with the board at the end of February this year.

Lee, who will start working on his new role from this March, has agreed a three-year term with the BCB which will end in April 2023.

Before joining the BCB, Lee worked as the strength and conditioning coach of Sri Lanka from 2016. Prior to his role with Sri Lanka, the Englishman also worked as a strength and conditioning coach for Sussex.

Earlier, Villavarayan and the BCB mutually agreed to part ways after the former had received an offer to work as the physio of IPL side Sunrisers Hyderabad.

SA, Eng seal semi spots

REUTERS, *Sydney*

South Africa and England registered comfortable victories against Pakistan and West Indies respectively in their Group B matches on Sunday to seal their spots in the semifinals of the Women's Twenty20 World Cup.

Group A leaders India were the first to reach the last four and the final place will go to the winner of Monday's clash between hosts Australia and their trans-Tasman rivals New Zealand.

After South Africa registered a 17-run win against Pakistan, England thumped West Indies by 46 runs to claim their third win and climb to the top of Group B on net run-rate. South Africa, however, have a game in hand against the Caribbean side.

Laura Wolvaardt did not get a chance to bat in the previous two matches but made a brisk, unbeaten half-century to help South Africa to a win over Pakistan.

NZ leave India reeling

AFP, *Christchurch*

New Zealand fast bowler Trent Boult said his side's "pack" mentality had left India reeling a day two of the second Test on which 16 wickets fell including another cheap dismissal for Virat Kohli in Christchurch on Sunday.

At stumps India led by just 97 lead with only four wickets remaining and three days to play.

Kohli's side dismissed New Zealand for 235 to take a seven-run first innings lead, but they stuttered to 90 for six at stumps with Boult taking three for 12 off nine overs.

"It was a good feeling to see the back of him," Boult said of Kohli's dismissal.

"Obviously he's a big player for them and we were just try to put enough pressure on him, keep him quiet and it was nice to see him make a few errors."

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 242 and second innings 90 for 6 (Pujara 24, Kohli 14; Boult 3-12)

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 235 all out (Latham 52, Blundell 30, De Grandhomme 26, Jamieson 49, Wagner 21; Bumrah 3-62, Shami 4-81)

New Zealand pacer Trent Boult (R) celebrates one of his three wickets against India on the second day of the second Test yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Sri Lanka post 307 all out

AFP, *Pallekele*

Kusal Mendis and Dhananjaya de Silva smashed half-centuries as Sri Lanka posted 307 in the third ODI against West Indies on Sunday.

Mendis top-scored with 55 while De Silva hit 51 after Sri Lanka -- enjoying an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the three-match series -- elected to bat first in Kandy.

Paceman Alzarri Joseph claimed four wickets as Sri Lanka were bowled out in 50 overs.

SRI LANKA: 307 all out in 50 overs (Fernando 29, Karunaratne 44, Perera 44, Mendis 55, De Silva 51, Perera 38; Jospeh 4-65)