

'Fielding makes a massive difference'

SPORTS REPORTER



Cricket is all about testing its practitioners' character and their fighting instinct. Those qualities were evident in spades yesterday as India fought brilliantly under testing conditions to draw the third Test against Australia on the fifth and final day in Sydney.

The Indian cricketers' strong will power and commitment, despite being bruised and battered by the Aussies, were clear to see as at no point did they look like giving away the game.

That mentality has not developed overnight. Instead, over years and generations, India have travelled a path that sees them where they are today. A drastic change in their cricketing culture and infrastructure has gradually developed the team into a powerful outfit at home and abroad, and in all three disciplines – batting, bowling and fielding.

The time has also come for Bangladesh to adapt and develop a culture that will allow them to become one of the better teams in world cricket, not just through skills but also the desire of each cricketer to compete with the best in any situation.

Much like the skills with ball and bat that was witnessed during the third Test between India and Australia, it was the fielding from both sides that set a world-class standard. Fielding is a major component of any team's success, because a well-oiled and skilled fielding unit means the opposition



Bangladesh batsman Liton Das seemed in his thoughts during the training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. If he was thinking about the resilience shown by India's batsmen in the Sydney Test, it ought to be good for the Tigers ahead of the West Indies series.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

is always under pressure and it also translates into a positive body language of the team as a whole.

Ahead of Bangladesh's first international assignment in more than 10 months in the form of the upcoming home series against the West Indies, fielding coach Ryan Cook is emphasising this aspect in the ongoing training camp.

"I think it [fielding] makes a massive difference to any game -- red ball or white ball. Obviously, the one-day games and the T20

games just become more amplified on the field but that doesn't make it [fielding] any less important in Test matches.

"It is important for all aspects of the game. In one-day cricket, you get tested for all things. You got to do catching, throwing, ground fielding which is under pressure for most of the time in 50-over cricket. So, I am looking forward to the challenge of that and I am sure the guys will be up for it," Cook told reporters yesterday.

With the long gap from cricket in mind, Cook said it is important to start from the basics and raise intensity as the series comes closer as rust can lead to injuries. "I think a lot of the guys have got great attitudes now. They are trying really hard in their fielding, they are asking for extra work, putting in some extra effort and energy. I like that. A lot of work still needs to be done on their technique, for catching especially and some ground fielding."

A magical day of Test cricket

AGENCIES



India pulled off one of the great Test cricket escapes, clinging on for a draw on the final day of the third Test against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

While their eventual finishing score looks routine – finishing five wickets down – it belies the incredible resistance shown by the Indian batsmen to keep the series tied at 1-1.

With three genuine tail-enders and an injured Ravindra Jadeja the only batsmen left, Ravichandran Ashwin and Hanuma Vihari put together an epic unbeaten 258-ball partnership – scoring only 62 runs – to set up a series-deciding showdown in Brisbane.

When Paine decided no result could be achieved with one over of the mandated final hours' worth to bowl, the stalemate produced vastly different reactions from the rival camps.

India's players beamed and congratulated one another, and metaphorically embraced their two warriors (in socially distanced fashion) as they left the field, while Australia's players bore the look of exhausted frustration.

India captain Ajinkya Rahane said his team's draw in the third test against Australia felt like a victory.

"As good as winning a test match," Rahane, leading the side as regular skipper Virat Kohli is away on paternity leave, told

reporters. "When you come abroad and play a match like this, it's special, it's as good as victory."

"Everyone has chipped in but credit to these two guys who batted over two-and-a-half hours till the end. We were actually counting down deliveries in the last five-six overs. We all were sure of Ashwin's ability as a batsman. Vihari has been batting really well throughout the series though he did not get any big score," he added.

"Our message during Tea was 'just hang in there, play one ball at a time, one over at a time. Let's not think too far ahead,'" continued Rahane.

Australia captain Tim Paine said he felt he had let down his bowlers with his wicketkeeping as India batted through the final day of the third Test for a draw.

Paine thought Australia's pace unit and spinner Nathan Lyon had created enough chances to bowl out the tourists for a win and a 2-1 series lead if only the rest of the team had taken their catches.

"I'm bitterly disappointed, I pride myself on my wicketkeeping and I probably haven't had many worse days than that today. It's a horrible feeling knowing that our fast bowlers and our spinner bowled their hearts out and gave everything to the team," he told reporters.

"I certainly feel that I let them down and I've got to wear that. But I'm a big boy and I get another chance next week," he added.

Both teams fly on Tuesday to Brisbane, where the fourth, and potentially decisive, Test starts on Friday.



Hanuma Vihari and Ravichandran Ashwin showed plenty of grit in battling some high-quality bowling after Tea, earning India a dramatic draw in Sydney Test yesterday.

PHOTO: TWITTER



Govt project set to give women's sports a boost

MOSTAFA SHABUI

"I have been playing cricket at the Bogura Shaheed Chandu Stadium since I was eight. My father's only dream is to see me in the women's national team. And he tries his best to help me carry on my studies alongside cricket," said Sraboni Rani Shil, a 14-year-old from the northern district.

But it is not possible for Sraboni's father Ranjit Chandra Shil, an employee of a local barbershop, to get his daughter admitted to a well-facilitated cricket academy as he can barely save enough to pay for his daughter's daily transportation cost to and from the stadium for cricket practice.

Ranjit's dream of seeing his daughter get into a well-facilitated cricket academy and subsequently play for the women's team one day could now well come true as Sraboni became one of the 400 primarily selected potential women players from across the country for a two-year long training under the development of women trainees' project 2020-2021, an initiative of the government taken through the BKSP.

"In our country, girls are lagging behind boys in sports. Therefore, the government took this initiative through BKSP to find talented women players across the country, especially from the grassroots. This is one of the priority projects of the government," said colonel AKM Majharul Haque, director of training for BKSP.

"We also have girls/women players in our regular academic program, but they are limited in numbers. Everybody does not get the chance to get admitted here. Therefore, we are going to start the two-year training project on large scale," added Majharul.

Among the 400 selected players, 32 (age 14-19) have been split into two groups for archery; 200 players (in two groups of age 12-14 and 15-17) have been selected for cricket; 120 players (in two groups of age 14-15 and 15-17) have been selected for

football and 48 (age 14-18) selected for hockey.

The first phase of the BKSP camp will start in January and will end in March while the second phase of the camp will resume from April and will continue till June. After the completion of the second phase, BKSP will select 200 players for the final and the longest phase, which will start from August this year and will end in October next year.

Depending on their performances and abilities, the trainees will get the opportunity to get admitted at the BKSP.

A 10-storey hostel with a modern gymnasium and swimming pool and other facilities has already been built in the BKSP premises in Savar for this project. Moreover, BKSP's ground number 4 has also been allocated for providing training to players under this project.

The selected players will get residential training with food, education and sports equipment free of cost. The players will be trained under high-skill national and international trainers during these two years, said a notice of BKSP, published on their website last November.

The trainees will also be allowed to attend their academic (educational institutions) examinations while receiving evening academic lessons at the BKSP.

And if the words of the BKSP training director Majharul holds true, women's sports in the country will have a different outlook in the coming years.

"Under this project, we aim to provide good training to these players so that some of them can join the national team directly. Besides, the pipeline of these (above mentioned) four disciplines will be stronger due to this project.

"We have already signed with some foreign coaches for this project. The honourable Prime Minister will inaugurate the project this month," said Majharul.

The custodian of Kings' fortune

Anisur Rahman Zico played a key role in each of the four title triumphs of Bashundhara Kings since 2018. The 23-year-old goalkeeper was solid under the bar throughout the just-concluded Federation Cup, especially in the final against Saif SC, where he made at least six excellent saves. The national team's custodian from Cox's Bazar spoke to The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman regarding Kings' success as well as his preparations and future plans.

DS: What is the secret behind Bashundhara Kings' Fed Cup success?

AR: The management of Kings is following everything in a professional manner. The club management is providing all types of facilities needed to be champions. Besides, we were the first team this season to start pre-season training. The high-profile coaching staff worked really hard to bring all the players in shape.

DS: How challenging was it to win the title after a long lay-off?

AR: As there was no training and matches since the postponement of football in the middle of March last year, it was really challenging for everyone to get back in form. It was also a challenge for us, the local players, to have a good understanding and combination with four new foreign players. We were a bit worried about what was going to happen but we grew confident after playing some practice matches before the start of the tournament.

DS: How will you evaluate the Federation Cup campaign, which started almost 10 months after the break?



AR: The Federation Cup was overall a good tournament because Saif SC did really well this time. Besides, there were quality foreign players in every team and there was no way to underestimate any team except for Brothers Union, who were on the back-foot due to shortage of preparation. All the footballers initially struggled to get back to rhythm in training, but the fitness of players was not bad at the start of the tournament.

DS: You had a good contribution in

each of Kings' triumphs including Sunday's Fed Cup final. How do you continue to improve yourself?

AR: I always follow world-class goalkeepers and prepare myself in that way. I'm not satisfied with only club training; I also do individual training to improve myself. There are still many things to learn and develop. I think playing more international matches is important for me to get sharper under the bar. I would like to play in overseas leagues if I get a better offer

compared to Kings. I once had an offer from a Turkish second division side, but did not show interest due to my contract with the Kings.

DS: You conceded only one goal in five matches and made a string of saves in the final. Which forwards gave you a tough time during this tournament?

AR: The forwards from Sheikh Jamal, Abahani and Saif SC were really dangerous because those clubs roped in quality foreign forwards. Saif striker Kenneth Ngowke and Sulayman Sillah of Sheikh Jamal were really dangerous inside the box.

DS: How is the league going to be and what is your target in the league, which starts on Wednesday?

AR: I think the premier league is going to be a competitive one but I believe the race will be confined among four teams -- Kings, Abahani, Saif SC and Chattogram Abahani. I kept a cleansheet in 14 matches before, so this time my target will be to improve on that record as Kings have a better defence this time compared to the last season.



Ronaldo's relentless quest for records

REUTERS, ROME



Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo set another scoring record on Sunday as he became the first player to net at least 15 goals in each of the last 15 seasons in Europe's top five leagues.

The 35-year-old Portuguese fired a low diagonal shot into the bottom corner to seal a 3-1 win for his side against Sassuolo in stoppage time.

It took his tally to 15 goals in 13 Serie A appearances this season, a goal landmark he has reached every year since the 2006-07 campaign, during spells with Manchester United, Real Madrid and Juve.

Meanwhile, Cristiano Ronaldo became the joint-highest goalscorer in football history with that injury-time strike for Juventus against Sassuolo. The Portugal star joined Josef Bican at the top of the game's all-time scoring records – taking his career tally to an incredible 759 for club and country.

RONALDO'S CONSISTENCY

Season	Goals
2006-07	17
2007-08	31
2008-09	18
2009-10	26
2010-11	40
2011-12	46
2012-13	34
2013-14	31
2014-15	48
2015-16	35
2016-17	25
2017-18	26
2018-19	21
2019-20	31
2020-21	15* (Running)

TEAM	MATCHES	GOALS
Sporting	31	5
Man United	292	118
Real Madrid	438	450
Juventus	106	84
Portugal	170	102
Total	1037	759