



Bangladesh opener Shadman Islam plays a shot through the leg side during his 154-ball 59 on the opening day of the first Test against West Indies at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Shadman shines on comeback

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Left-handed opener Shadman Islam is among the few cricketers who is labeled a Test specialist for the Tigers given his ability to stay at the crease for a long period of time.

He did prove his worth after his debut against the West Indies back in 2018, scoring 76 runs in the first innings. More importantly, he faced 199 balls for that knock.

But the scenario was totally different this time around as he struck a second Test fifty upon making a comeback to the side against the same opposition yesterday.

"Obviously it feels good to be back in the side and I tried to give my best for the team. It would have

great if I could have converted that into a big one," Shadman told the media after the end of the first day, with the hosts on 242 for 5.

The 25-year-old recovered from a wrist injury and missed two Tests against Pakistan and Zimbabwe last year following a string of failures in the couple of Tests prior to that.

The team management had to wait till the morning of the Test to decide whether they would add another opener, right-handed Saif Hasan who made his debut in the absence of Shadman.

He showed his hunger during this period and despite the glitz and glamour of the limited-overs domestic competitions that took place in that time, Shadman opted to work silently at Fatullah.

Shadman's hard work seems to be paying off and he faced

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SHADMAN ISLAM
BANGLADESH OPENER

the Windies pacers with a lot of patience.

Despite losing his experienced partner Tamim Iqbal early on the innings, Shadman displayed great maturity while facing short-pitched

deliveries angling into his body.

Shadman reached his second Test fifty off 128 balls and just when it looked like the left hander had the opportunity to make it big, he departed in an unfortunate manner.

Left-arm spinner Jomel Warrican trapped him leg before while he attempted a sweep. Replays later showed that the ball would go on to miss the leg stump by a distance, but Shadman opted not to take a review.

"Obviously taking a review was on but I felt that the ball was in line and would go on to hit the stump. That is the reason I didn't take the review and obviously, I was disappointed once I went to the dressing room. I think it's part of the game and we have to accept it," he said.

Prolonged partnerships the missing ingredient

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram



The saying that partnerships are key applies even more strongly for batting teams in the longest format and carrying on to make a big score after being set at the crease becomes even more vital.

But Bangladesh did the opposite as they returned to Test cricket after nearly a year's gap ever since skipper Mominul Haque won the toss and elected to bat on the opening day of the first Test against West Indies at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

The visitors will be satisfied to have sent five Bangladesh batsmen back on the first day while the hosts will be hoping that an unbeaten 49-run partnership between Shakib Al Hasan and Liton Das grows when Bangladesh resume on 242 for 5.

Shakib remained composed for his unbeaten 92-ball 39 while Liton was fortunate early in his innings but later settled and was not out on 34 off 58 balls.

The scenario was disappointing for the hosts ever since Tamim Iqbal's early dismissal when he chopped an incoming Kemar Roach delivery onto the stumps after scoring nine.

Left-hander Shadman Islam showed his talent on his comeback to the side as he occupied the crease well.

He and left-hander Nazmul Hossain Shanto started to build a partnership on a pitch that had very little for the Windies seamers. But a lapse in concentration after getting set at the crease was witnessed among all the batters who got dismissed on the first day despite getting starts.

It started with Nazmul, who had a terrible misunderstanding with Shadman after looking for the second run which was never there. He was run out on 25 to end a promising 43-run first-wicket stand. Bangladesh went to lunch on 69 for 2, with Shadman and skipper Mominul starting the rebuilding process.

And just when it seemed the hosts might have completed a session without

losing a wicket, there was a double blow.

Mominul fell first for 26, ending his partnership with Shadman at 53, after being unable to resist the temptation from a tossed-up delivery from left-arm spinner Jomel Warrican that was lofted to short mid-wicket.

The left-arm spinner was the pick of the bowlers for the visitors, scalping three wickets. He trapped Shadman leg before just after he had reached his second fifty in Tests.

However, the left-hander might have felt disappointed to not opt for a review once he returned to the dressing room and saw the replays of the ball missing leg stump by a huge margin.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH

First innings-242 for 5 in 90 overs (Shadman 59, Tamim 9, Shanto 25, Mominul 26, Mushfiqu 38, Shakib 39 not out, Liton 34 not out, extras 12; Roach 1-44, Warrican 3-58)

The Tigers once again lost two wickets in a session and went to tea on 140 for four.

The third and final session arguably remained the most productive one for the hosts, as they added 102. It would have been even better had they not lost Mushfiqu Rahim for 38.

The experienced wicketkeeper-batsman was involved in yet another fifty-plus stand with Shakib but he too failed to cash in.

It was Warrican again denting the Tigers batting line-up as he managed to take an outside edge from Mushfiqu.

No Bangabandhu Gold Cup; WC qualifiers in Qatar?

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) wants to complete the first phase of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) before starting the national team's camp for the proposed matches of World Cup Qualifiers due to uncertainty over Bangabandhu Gold Cup.

As per the BFF calendar and BPL fixtures, the league was supposed to remain suspended from February 23 to late April for the preparation and engagement of the national team in Bangabandhu Gold Cup and World Cup Qualifiers and engagement of the clubs in AFC Cup. However, things have changed due to the unavailability of teams and sponsors for Bangabandhu Gold Cup.

"It is not possible to hold the Bangabandhu Gold Cup in March as we did not get positive feedback from the nations we communicated with. Some of them have travel restrictions, some have domestic commitments while some are not willing to spend a quarantine period," BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem told The Daily Star yesterday, adding they have managed only fifty percent of sponsors for the tournament.

The BFF is likely to officially announce the postponement of the tournament on Saturday.

"The league is supposed to be suspended from February 23 after the 10th round of matches, but I have been instructed to prepare the schedule for the last three

rounds of the first phase," professional league committee manager Zaber Bin Taher Ansari told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the BFF is mentally preparing to play the three remaining home matches of the World Cup Qualifiers -- against Afghanistan, India and Oman -- at a centralised venue overseas.

Even though the official schedule of the matches is yet to be disclosed, the game's local governing body is in an uncomfortable position as Afghanistan have expressed their unwillingness to travel to Bangladesh in March due to coronavirus concerns.

"The AFC has sent us a letter asking us to submit our opinion within February 10 regarding the remaining matches of the World Cup Qualifiers as it wants to complete the group stage by June if it can't arrange the matches in March due to travel restrictions, time-frame of quarantine period or worsening situation of coronavirus," Shohag said.

Qatar have already proposed to host the remaining Group E matches from March 24 to April 4.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin had, on Saturday, told this reporter that they are likely to forego home advantage and agree on playing in Qatar as India, Afghanistan and Oman have already agreed to playing at a single venue.

Bangladesh coach Jamie Day wants to start the camp from the first week of March with an eye on friendly matches in March's FIFA Window, however, the BFF is still waiting to learn the fate of the World Cup Qualifiers.



Still no country for pace bowlers

NABID YEASIN from Chattogram

While not very auspicious, the picture was also not ominous for Bangladesh at the end of Day One of the first Test against the West Indies at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

A few unfortunate incidents and lapses of concentration cost the Tigers five wickets but with premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and the elegant Liton Das at the crease, the team management could somewhat relax as their plan for this game seemed to be working just fine.

If the form book holds, Bangladesh should get their first points in the World Test Championship (WTC) against a depleted West Indies missing many of their regular starters. It will only be a shock if Mominul Haque's troops fail in achieving that.

Another 2-0 series win over the Caribbean outfit, a significant leap in the Tigers' position in the WTC table, spinners bagging fifters or returning even better figures and batsmen reaching landmarks -- Bangladesh will probably be able to put tick marks beside all those boxes after the series and be hailed for a deserving Test series win that saw all of the team management's ploys come to fruition.

Amid all these success stories, the one aspect that may get swept under the rug is how the pacers were once again denied an opportunity in Tests. Bangladesh's 18-member squad

for the Test series included the spin quartet of Shakib Al Hasan, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Nayeem Hasan and Tajul Islam alongside five pacers -- Mustafizur Rahman, Abu Jayed, Ebadot Hossain, Hasan Mahmud and Taskin Ahmed.

However, the team management stuck with the spinners as all four of them started in the Chattogram Test and the only paceman who got the nod was Mustafizur with the four other fast men left sulking on the sidelines. And the think tank's approach for the match will probably be proven right when the likes of Mehedi and Shakib start reaping the rewards from a slow and dry Chattogram pitch and have the Windies batsmen caught in their spin web.

But what happens on the periphery of the on-field spin-dominance? What is going on in the minds of young Hasan, Taskin, Jayed, Ebadot who were overlooked as the team management decided to heed to the need of the pitch's condition in order to fulfil the mission of winning? What is young pacer Shoriful Islam, an exciting prospect who was not in the Test squad but is probably watching the game on TV, thinking of his future in the Bangladesh team?

Are they wondering what difference a fourth spinner could possibly make that would outweigh the benefit of giving a pacer the much-needed experience of Test-match bowling?

It would not be irrational for the likes of young Shoriful and Hasan to wonder where they would have been had they chosen a different role in cricket. Even the one pacer that Bangladesh picked could just be doing his bit for the spinners. Ahead of the Test series, Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo had talked about Mustafizur's ability to create rough patches on the pitch that he said would help bring the spinners into play.

Bangladesh's first-choice Test pacer has been jayed for a while now. And even though Mustafizur has shown improvements recently as he learned and successfully implemented the skill of bringing the ball back into the right-handers, it would not be a surprise if he was considered ahead of the regular choice Jayed only for his ability to aid spinners.

If that is the case and pacers are either left on the sidelines or used just to make life easier for a spin quartet, Bangladesh may gain points and credit for winning matches at home against certain opponents but their long-term vision of developing a robust Test culture will remain just that -- a vision and something that sounds good during press conferences.

Maybe it is time to actually realise that the most crucial part of developing a Test culture is to find the right blend of spin and pace so that the team can overcome hurdles both home and overseas.

Pakistan look to end 17-year wait

AGENCIES

Pakistan will look to end a 17-year wait for a series win against South Africa and leapfrog the Proteas in the rankings in the second Test starting Today.

Victory would be poignant for Pakistan, who are hosting their biggest Test series since the deadly 2009 militant attack on Sri Lanka's team halted international tours.

Pakistan, whose lone series win over South Africa was at home in 2003, start as favourites in Rawalpindi after last week's thumping seven-wicket win in Karachi.

They stand to rise two places to fifth in the rankings with a series



victory, while defeat would push South Africa down from fifth to sixth.

"The morale of the team is high. Our preparations have been great. We have spent a lot of time in the nets and the players look to be in good nick. Everyone has gained confidence from our victory in the first Test. We are focused on playing the next match in the same way we played the first match. We can't take the opposition easy because we know that they can bounce back. We are ready for it," said Pakistan captain Babar Azam.

"The wicket in Rawalpindi seems similar to Karachi. The weather might be a little different though. The conditions here are always different and we are keeping that in mind. I don't think four seamers can play here but we will see the conditions and decide what's best for the team," he added.



Juventus superstar Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring his first goal during a 2-1 comeback win over Inter Milan in the Coppa Italia semi-final first leg clash at San Siro on Tuesday. Ronaldo, however, appeared unhappy when he was substituted on the 76th minute. "I told him that he had to come off because we have an important game on Saturday (against AS Roma in Serie A), so it's right to let him catch his breath," coach Andrea Pirlo explained.

PHOTO: TWITTER