

Another half-baked plan backfiring on Tigers

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Looking on from the other side of the West Indies heist in the final day of the Chattogram Test, it would be easy to question the quality or capabilities of Bangladesh's Test side. There is, however, a far more seminal causality to such results as the Tigers were once again hounded at home by a visiting side they perhaps did not fully appreciate in terms of strength; results at home Tests against Zimbabwe and Afghanistan come to mind. This result was resounding to say the least. More often than not, in the game's longest format, the Tigers are losing out on finding meaning even in victory.

Take nothing away from the indomitable spirit that Windies have shown in this Test nor how Kyle Mayers went against the grain and kept going to complete what was a monumental task. For four days, the Tigers had remained on top of things but brisk swift gale wind took the match away from



Bangladesh's ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan returned to Dhaka yesterday along with his other teammates after a heartbreaking defeat in the first Test against West Indies in Chattogram. Shakib will miss the second Test, starting from February 11 in Mirpur, after failing to recover from an injury sustained during the first Test.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

them inside a day. It would be hard to miss the fact that a win was taken for granted. As skipper Mominul Haque had said following the match, at no point in time had the thought of defeat come to their minds. It could be construed as optimism or positivity but coming from one of the team's think tank, it also signals underlying complacency.

In another scenario, with ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan not being injured and Mustafizur Rahman not being warned, a different outcome was plausible but that would still have seen the problem carry on to the next match -- that dependency and not knowing of a Plan B when their Plan A was not working.

Even in planning, what the Tigers attempted was half-hearted which went behind their current fitness or stamina level not being up to five-day Tests. The players looked tired and uninspired on day five and the team's tactical viewpoints in planning for the match compounded that issue.

Shakib, who had previously suffered an injury during the ODIs, and Mustafizur, who had returned to the Test line-up after being dropped in home Test against Afghanistan in September 2019,

were both included in the line-up. Based on form, the selections make perfect sense but there were other things that could have been considered. Picking a line-up with four spinners, maybe there was a belief that Shakib will not have to be bowling at his peak. With only seamer in Mustafizur, who became less effective after getting his second warning for treading on the danger zone, the Tigers had no real threat to claw at Windies on the last day.

Most uninspiring of all was that the Tigers banked on their remaining three spinners, who can quickly turn ineffective in a pitch not tailor-made to their quality; Taijul Islam alone bowled more than 75 overs in the match. Bangladesh had five seamers in the squad, yet, for all the talk of giving opportunity to pacers, they picked just one. It backfired immensely.

"What happens is that when there is turn in the wicket or there is unusual behaviour from the wicket, we bowl with a lot of motivation. But what about a plan B when the wicket is behaving alright? There was a lacking there," Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a mentor to many of the stalwarts such as Shakib and Mushfiqur Rahim, told The Daily Star while analysing the match.

Asked about picking just one pacer, he said: "Obviously picking one pacer was not good enough. We should have had two pacers and also wickets should be such where they can have an impact. What happens is that, with Tests taking place after such a long time, it demotivates pacers when they aren't picked and wills them towards shorter versions like T20s."

One cannot simply plan a Test line-up with half-hearted motivation of what they want to achieve not in terms of results but of process. "We had assumed that we will win and that they [Windies] were not strong enough. In the recent past, we have seen how India, despite being bundled out for 36 runs, won the Test series in Australia. It should be a big lesson for everybody. Historically, there is no limit to what will happen or not," Fahim opined.

This is not the first time this sort of half-baked plans backfired on the Tigers. The thinking mirrors what happened against Zimbabwe in 2018 or Afghanistan more recently where they focused too much on how much the pitch will deteriorate and banked on spin. It is a perpetual loop that has gone on and must be reconsidered.

Hasan fires Pakistan to end 17-year drought

AGENCIES



Medium pacer Hasan Ali took a maiden haul to help Pakistan win its first series against South Africa since 2003 with a 95-run victory in the second Test on the fifth and final day in Rawalpindi yesterday.

Hasan finished with 5-60 to record his best match figures of 11-114 and help dismiss South Africa -- who were set a daunting 370 to chase -- for 274 before the tea break.

Hasan's new-ball partner Shaheen Shah Afridi finished with 4-51, while spinner Yasir Shah took the last wicket to spark jubilation among the Pakistan players. Opener Aiden Markram scored a fighting 108 and Temba Bavuma 61. Hasan ripped through the tourists' batting order, which lost seven wickets for just 33 runs with the second new ball.

"It was outstanding from Hasan because he has awareness and took advantage of the experience of playing here (in Rawalpindi)," Pakistan captain

Babar Azam said at the post-match presentation.

"At one stage we thought the game could've gone either way. But we knew, one wicket and we can come back into the game again. And then we did that with the new ball."

Azam said they can get even better after a historic first series win against South Africa since 2003. "It's a welcome sign but we have to further improve," said an elated Azam, who was leading Pakistan for the first time. "It was a much needed win and the best part of this series win is that now we are number five in Test rankings."

South Africa captain Quinton de Kock said: "We lost the big moments in the game and that cost us. When we get back home, we'll have to look at our performances and improve on the way forward."

Losing captain hoped his team will learn lessons from the defeat. "It's painful at the moment," said de Kock who had a lacklustre series, scoring just 46 in four innings. "When we get back home, we'll have to look at our performances and improve on the way forward."

HIGHLIGHT

- This is Pakistan's only second Test series win over South Africa in 12 attempts, having lost eight and drawn three.
- Pakistan last beat South Africa 1-0 in a two-match series at home in 2003.
- The series win also lifts Pakistan to fifth in international Test rankings -- the first time they have placed in the top five since January 2017. South Africa are pushed to sixth from fifth.



If he can't bowl from close to the stumps, his effectiveness decreases. He has to work on his technique to ensure he can bowl from close to the stumps without getting into the danger zone. But it will also take some time to achieve that. When he moves away, he is not only compromising on swing but compromising on pace as well and it also puts stress on his knee. He can occasionally come from wide of the crease but that can't be his stock delivery.

NAZMUL ABDEEN FAHIM ON MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN



'WE WOULD BRING MESSI ON IF WE NEEDED HIM'

Lionel Messi came off the bench to haul Barcelona back from a goal down to a 3-2 win against Real Betis in La Liga on Sunday. Barca coach Ronald Koeman took the surprising decision to leave Messi out and in-form Frenkie de Jong out of his starting lineup. "Above all I made the rotations because the players are exhausted," Koeman said. "I discussed resting Leo with him yesterday and we agreed we would bring him on if we needed him. He came on and changed the game, he brought life to our play," he added.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Kings extend winning streak

SPORTS REPORTER



Leaders Bashundhara Kings maintained their hundred percent winning record in Bangladesh Premier League when they notched up an emphatic 3-0 win over visiting Muktijoddha Sangsads at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

The seventh straight win helped holders Kings to shoot up their points to 21, six more than second-placed Sheikh Jamal DC, who, however, have played two matches less.

Meanwhile, it was Muktijoddha Sangsads' fourth straight loss and they stay on 10th in the 13-team table with three points.

Kings, who toiled hard for a win in their previous game against Chattogram Abahani, faced no trouble in securing victory yesterday in front of a packed home crowd. The charges of Oscar

Bruzon took the lead in the 10th minute through a placing shot from Robson Da Silva, who darted into the box from the right flank to strike his sixth league goal.

The Federation Cup champions kept creating chances. Raul



Bashundhara Kings' Brazilian midfielder Robson Da Silva put his side ahead in the 10th minute with a placing shot during an emphatic 3-0 win against Muktijoddha Sangsads in a Bangladesh Premier League match at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Becerra, however, squandered an opportunity in the first half.

Becerra made amends and increased the lead one minute into the first-half stoppage time with another placing shot after Robson back-heeled a Biplu through-pass

to make space for Becerra inside the box. After resumption, Kings kept creating chances and took control of the game. In the 75th minute, substitute striker Towhidul Alam Sabuz wrapped it up with a tap in after Becerra squared a Robson grounder in front of the post.

BARIDHARA HOLD CTG ABAHANI

A second-half stoppage-time strike from substitute Kawsar Ali Rabbi helped Chattogram Abahani play out a 2-2 draw against Uttar Baridhara Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Chattogram Abahani, who led the 2019-20 league table before it got canceled, have this time been struggling for consistency as they could secure only two points in last four matches. They stay on seventh position jointly with Rahmatganj MFS with eight points from seven matches. Baridhara are 11th in the table with three points from six outings.



Djokovic begins title defence with easy win

Novak Djokovic got back to doing what he does best on Monday when he steamrollered Frenchman Jeremy Chardy 6-3, 6-1, 6-2 at Rod Laver Arena in the opening round of the Australian Open. Having come through two weeks of quarantine in Adelaide, and a brief but damaging spat with his hosts over the terms of the isolation, the world number one let his tennis do the talking as he eased to a 297th Grand Slam victory. Djokovic has won eight of his 17 major titles at Melbourne Park's main showcourt and, even with a smaller crowd than usual, the Serbian looked very much at home on the distinctive blue surface.

PHOTO: REUTERS

India face daunting task

REUTERS

A cautious England spared India the ignominy of a follow-on but set them a daunting 420-run victory target in the opening test at Chennai's MA Chidambaram Stadium on Monday.

England, who had posted a mammoth 578 in the first innings, bowled India out for 337 but



opted against enforcing the follow-on at Chennai's MA Chidambaram Stadium.

The tourists walked out to bat instead and were bowled out for 178 an hour before stumps, baffling many by their refusal to declare which would have given them more time to bowl out India. When England came out for their second innings, Ashwin dismissed Rory Burns with the very first ball and went on to claim 6-61 as England batted on with a safety-first approach.

The hosts finished the penultimate day on 39-1, still 381 behind the target.