



## Owning up and correcting the process is the only way forward

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI

Dark clouds are hovering above Bangladesh Cricket for the past few days following the whitewash inflicted on the Tigers by the West Indies. The usual motifs and thematic passages were once again at play following the 17-run defeat in the Dhaka Test as the hosts were bundled out for 213 on a fourth day Mirpur wicket in two sessions.

The blame game, the need for an explanation for this latest kerfuffle and variations of these particular themes began re-enacting themselves as the board president Nazmul Hassan looked for familiar answers to past debacles like the lone Test against Afghanistan. It was all very familiar.

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, however, would have averted scrutiny that follows big series defeats as he had performed up to expectations in the ODIs and then also in the first Test until his injury rendered him unable to take the field. The Tigers cataclysmically dismantled with Shakib gone. There was, however, no sign that Shakib, who will skip the tour of New Zealand to attend the birth of his third child, had been under any duress due to latest failings of his team. But as part of the unit, the criticism often is felt even if it does not fall squarely on his shoulders.

For the record, the BCB president a day before had pondered why a spinning track was necessary while there were five pacemen in the squad and also the cause for failings in Test format from experienced batsmen. He said that he did not know about the tactics or strategies that the team were going to implement but the assertions were that there were failures in planning and the players and management will

have to answer. With criticism levelled at the experienced players' aversion to playing first-class cricket, Shakib, who was attending a program yesterday arranged by social purpose organisation Friendship, said: "Whoever said that, it was his opinion. I don't want to give my opinion here and don't think this is the platform to give such opinion. Talking or mudslinging is not something I am good at or what I would like to do."

Mudslinging is one familiar aspect in Bangladesh cricket; another one is the lack of justification of decisions or having anything that resembles a process. "There is no right or wrong in cricket. Every decision taken is done by the coach, captain and board to win. When things don't go well, you ask questions. But there are times when something goes right but the process was wrong. When there is a victory you don't ask these questions. You also have a responsibility to ask questions during those scenarios," Shakib told the reporters present. From entrenched positions there are a few ways that these things usually go. While the cricketers had raised their voice against the misgivings of the domestic structure, the BCB usually countered such instances with their habit of shifting blame. While the accountability of responsibility should not be a thorn for the cricketers alone, however, given shot selections of some of the country's most experienced batsmen -- like Mushfiqur Rahim playing a reverse sweep in the first innings of the second Test during a crucial phase of the game -- the accountability must come from everyone concerned who have a job to do in their respective roles. Are the roles defined or is mudslinging all we have?

## If not from errors, learn from opposition

MAZHAR UDDIN

Bangladesh were the clear favourites ahead of the two-match Test series against the West Indies after the majority of the Caribbean side's top cricketers opted out of the tour.

There was a big gulf in experience between the hosts and the visitors -- West Indies fielded three debutants in the form of Kyle Mayers, Nkrumah Bonner and Shayne Moseley in the first Test in Chattogram. There were at least five more cricketers who had played less than 10 Tests in the Windies playing 11. On the other hand, no Bangladeshi player made a debut in the Test series and the majority have been playing international cricket for at least two years.

When it came to execution on the field however, the West Indies were streets ahead of the hosts in both matches and the 2-0 result was justification that the better team

emerged victors.

Whether it was the historic three-wicket win in the first Test in Chattogram -- where debutant Mayers struck an unbeaten double ton to help chase down a record 395 -- or the dramatic 17-run win in the second Test in Dhaka, the relatively inexperienced Caribbean side fared better than the Tigers.

The West Indies were also far ahead of the Tigers in terms of displaying the requisite temperament, patience and proper execution of the game plan in all three departments.

There was much talk about utilising home conditions and the hosts banked on the spinners, expecting the pitch to favour them as the team management opted to pick just one specialist seamer in both Tests. But the play backfired as the pitch was not according to the home spinners' expectations who mostly rely on rank turners to get sharp spin.

And with no Plan B in place, together with a lack of skill to undo batsmen on a flat surface, Bangladesh spinners

struggled to pose any sort of threat to an inexperienced West Indies batting lineup.

When Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan and Mehedi Hasan Miraz finally came to the party and helped bundle out West Indies for just 117 in the second innings of the second Test in Mirpur, the Bangladesh batsmen were undone by disciplined spin bowling as Rahkeem Cornwall, Jomel Warrican and part-timer Kraigg Brathwaite rattled through the batting line-up in the fourth innings.

After reaching 59 for no loss in chase of 231, Bangladesh's batsmen failed to emulate the patience, temperament and gumption of their much less experienced Caribbean counterparts.

Despite the Mirpur pitch not deteriorating significantly on the fourth day, the Tigers were unable to bat even one and a half sessions to take the game till the fifth day.

In fact, Bangladesh managed to add just two century partnerships in

the two Tests while the West Indies added three of those in crucial situations. Bangladesh on the other hand managed to bat just one session without losing a wicket in the two Tests.

Although there was hardly anything for the seamers, Shannon Gabriel came up with the short-ball strategy and tested the Bangladesh batsmen often, adding dimensions to the visiting bowling attack that the hosts can only dream of.

Lastly, Bangladesh's body language was also questionable when they were put under pressure on the field, failing to utilise opportunities while West Indies grabbed almost everything that came their way.

Experience is supposed to help teams, players, selectors -- the whole cricketing setup -- to learn from mistakes, but that has not been true in the case of Bangladesh. Perhaps they can learn from a West Indies side that, despite being written off, went home the much superior outfit.

## ASHWIN SPECIAL flattens England

REUTERS



Ravichandran Ashwin does not know if he will play another Test at his home ground in Chennai and the

34-year-old was naturally thrilled to conjure an all-round performance that put India on course for a series-levelling victory against England yesterday.

Debate raged on the suitability of the turning track at the MA Chidambaram after England collapsed for 134 in their first innings with Ashwin leading the rout with figures of 5-43. He then returned to smash 106 in front of delirious home crowd to prove there was no demon in the pitch.

"I'm really thankful it's happened at my home ground," Ashwin told the broadcasters after the third day's play. "I don't know if I'm going to play another test here. I don't know when the next test is going to be here, but I'm super pleased." The off-spinner also removed Rory Burns in the first session as England, chasing a record 482, slumped to 53-3.

Along with skipper Virat Kohli, who



made 62, Ashwin showed how to play spin on a deteriorating track where the ball often kicked up dust on landing.

"After the last Test, we were talking about how we're going to counter (Jack) Leach and start bringing the sweep to the game," Ashwin said.



## Barty sweeps into quarterfinals, Nadal gathers strength



REUTERS, Melbourne

For a player who was all doom and gloom about his fitness on the eve of the Australian Open, Rafa Nadal emerged as an unlikely pillar of strength on day eight as injuries cut a swathe through the men's draw yesterday. Nadal's bid for a record 21st Grand Slam crown gathered pace with a 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 demolition of Fabio Fognini that pushed the Spaniard into his 13th quarter-final at Melbourne Park.

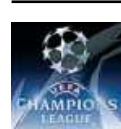
Meanwhile, world number one Ash Barty made light of the challenge of unseeded American Shelby Rogers to reach the quarterfinals for the third year in a row with a commanding 6-3, 6-4 victory.

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ROUND OF 16

The UEFA Champions League is back with a set of knock-out fixtures this week as Barcelona host Paris Saint-Germain in the first leg of the Round of 16 at the Camp Nou while RB Leipzig take on Liverpool in Europe's elite competition tonight in Budapest as the game was moved to Hungary from Leipzig due to travel restrictions between Germany and Britain because of Covid-19.

## Liverpool face tough trial against Leipzig

AGENCIES



Julian Nagelsmann and compatriot Jurgen Klopp will be on opposing benches again when

Leipzig and Liverpool meet in the UEFA Champions League round of 16. Klopp had left Dortmund for Liverpool before Nagelsmann made his name in the Bundesliga with Hoffenheim. Klopp's Reds beat Nagelsmann's Hoffenheim 6-3 on aggregate in the 2017-18 play-offs, but they can expect a closer encounter this time.

Liverpool might be slight favourites against RB Leipzig in Budapest but the Germans are boosted by a four-match winning run, Leipzig coach Julian Nagelsmann said yesterday.

The German side, last year's Champions League semi-finalists, have only conceded one goal in their last three league matches and one German Cup game and are second in the Bundesliga with the best defensive record. "We are in a good flow. We have won the last four matches while Liverpool have not won five out of their last seven," Nagelsmann said. Liverpool,

Champions League winners two seasons ago and last year's Premier League champions, are far from their best, having just lost three league games in a row for the

first time since 2014. Liverpool sit fourth in the Premier League, 13 points behind leaders Manchester City, after their loss to Leicester City. "A lot depends on the form

of the day," Nagelsmann said. "We know that Liverpool still are a very good team with world-class players. It is always difficult to defend against them."

## Can PSG exact revenge for La Remontada?

AGENCIES



With Neymar injured, the onus will be on Kylian Mbappe to carry the weight at the Camp Nou.

Barcelona have a good record against Paris Saint-Germain and have won four out of nine matches played between the two teams. Paris Saint-Germain have managed only two victories against Barcelona and will view this fixture as an opportunity to improve their record against the Catalan outfit.

The previous meeting between the two teams in 2017 Champions League last-16 tie gave rise to the famous 'La Remontada', Spanish for 'The Comeback', as Barcelona completed a historic 6-1 comeback to stun Paris Saint-Germain at the Camp Nou.

Over the past four years,

a series of controversies have produced a discernible level of bad blood between the two clubs and the resulting cold war is likely to have its fair share of ramifications on the pitch.

Barcelona are in excellent form in La Liga at the moment and their seven consecutive league victories have papered over some very disconcerting moments in knock-out games this season.

Paris Saint-Germain have also suffered from the occasional slip in their Ligue 1 title race and have a point to prove going into this game. The reigning French champions have troubled Barcelona in the past and will fancy their chances against the Blaugrana.