



PHOTO: STAR/COLLECTED

Dot balls remain a cause for concern

SPORTS REPORTER

It was a batting fiasco in the first ODI in Dunedin which saw Bangladesh get thumped while the whole unit's abysmal failure in the fielding department saw the second match in Christchurch slip away from the Tigers.

And even though Bangladesh have already lost the three-match ODI series, the Tamim Iqbal-led troop will be hoping now to repeat these scenarios in order to salvage some pride and finish with a first-ever win against the hosts on New Zealand soil.

The batting debacle and fielding catastrophe might have come to the fore in the first two ODIs, but the Tigers would also need to deeply work on and rectify another aspect of their game if they hope to turn the tide in the third ODI in Wellington tomorrow.

Amid heavy criticism about batting and fielding, what might have missed the general fans' eyes was the alarming rate of

dot balls played by the Tigers in both ODIs. It was even learned that the dot ball issue was also raised and remained a topic of discussion in the Tigers' team meeting after the second ODI.

Facing a total of 251 deliveries (41.5 overs), Bangladesh batsmen played 185 dots -- more than 73 per cent of the balls faced -- in the first ODI, a pathetic display reflected in the score of 131 all out.

But even though the Tigers scored 271 for six in Christchurch, they still played 168 dot balls in 50 overs -- 56 per cent of the total deliveries faced. Everyone rued the two dropped catches -- those by Mushfiqur Rahim behind the stumps and by Mahedi Hasan off his own bowling. Needless to say that those two dropped chances could have turned the game decisively in favour of Bangladesh, but things could have been much harder to begin with for New Zealand had Bangladesh batters been a bit more agile and proactive in rotating the strike and put on a much stiffer target to chase.



Can Tigers capture the essence of a champion?

BISHWAJIT ROY

Around the time that the Tigers reached Wellington yesterday -- again aiming to clinch their first-ever win against New Zealand in their backyard when they play the last ODI of the three-match series on Friday -- Shakib Al Hasan was getting back to business and preparing himself for the upcoming Indian Premier League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur after returning home from the United States on Monday night.

The two contrasting scenarios perhaps best epitomise the current debate surrounding country's best cricketer even though the premier all-rounder skipped the New Zealand tour after being granted paternity leave.

Amid all the recent chaos, the main question is about Shakib's preference of foreign

franchise leagues to national duty, disregarding the fact that a preference for cash-rich franchise leagues over national duty is actually a global phenomenon.

Nothing could have been better for the Tigers than if they had Shakib's services in New Zealand or if they knew that the champion performer would be available for the next tour in Sri Lanka. But, in the new reality, they have to shine without their best player because it is unlikely that Shakib will be available for all their international engagements in the coming days.

A good and healthy conclusion to the current debates cannot be expected, but the onus lies on the Bangladesh Cricket Board to act with true professionalism in order to find a fine balance.

Shakib, arguably the best cricketer Bangladesh has ever produced, achieved everything through his own volition. It is unthinkable,

especially for a cricketing country like Bangladesh, that they will fill his vacuum overnight.

The left-hander has proved time and again that he can single-handedly turn the tide in favour of his side, but contrasting outcomes provide a good idea that team effort ultimately plays a key role in success.

Shakib's stupendous performances in the 2019 World Cup were not good enough to bring the Tigers any success because they could not play as a team. On the flipside, a good team effort brought the Tigers close to a win against New Zealand in their last ODI.

There has been no shortage of controversy in his colorful career, but if Shakib's teammates can take one leaf from the all-rounder's book, then it should be about his on field intensity and unquestionable professional approach. He has already left a legacy for the future cricketers, showing them the

way to become established as a world-beater. The way he prepares himself mentally and visualises the game and reads the opponent is exemplary.

On the occasion of his 34th birthday yesterday, Shakib's teammates congratulated him overwhelmingly on Facebook, hailing him as an inspiration and Bangladesh's greatest cricketer.

Pacer Mustafizur Rahman perfectly wrote: "Shakib Al Hasan - the name of inspiration. An elder brother. You are very special to us. Learning lots of things from you. You are one of my inspirations. On this special day, I am wishing you a very happy birthday. May Almighty bless you always!"

If Mustafizur and his teammates can take the on-field inspiration from their very special cricketer, then there is no doubt they can rewrite history in New Zealand and in future games.

Blatter handed new ban

REUTERS, Manchester

Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter has been handed a further six years and eight months ban from the game and fined a million Swiss francs (\$1.07 million) by the body's Ethics Committee after a probe into massive bonus payments.

Blatter's current ban from the game was due to expire in October but the latest ban, for ethics code violations, will take effect from that point.

The latest investigation looked into World Cup bonus payments made to Blatter and a number of former top FIFA officials including former general secretary Jerome Valcke, former vice-president Julio Grondona and ex-finance director Markus Kattner.

The trio have denied any wrongdoing.

The decisions can be appealed to the Sport of Arbitration for Court in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Day looking for more new faces after debutants impress

SPORTS REPORTER



The men in red and green had a splendid day at the hotel premises in Kathmandu yesterday after making a winning start to the Three Nations Cup, with head coach Jamie Day also expressing satisfaction over the performance.

Jamal Bhuiyan and Co split into different groups and had different recovery sessions. Gym, swimming and stretching sessions were all on offer yesterday ahead of their return to training with the ball today before Saturday's final group match against hosts Nepal.

The players and coaching staff appeared tranquil in videos sent by the Bangladesh Football Federation, although there was bad news for right-back Bishwanath Ghosh, who is returning home today after being ruled out for at least two weeks due to a thigh injury sustained in the second half against Kyrgyzstan.

Day was pleased by the performance of the three debutants in the first game and



was eager to see more fresh players against Nepal.

"It is a tournament where I can look at different players and give opportunities to new players. Obviously everyone will be happy when you win, but there is no reason to relax or get nervous ahead of the next game. It is enough that we look into more different, new players in the next game against Nepal," Day told reporters at the hotel premises.

"They have done very well. I am pleased with the three new players because they never played international football before. I think they need more matches before they can be judged because it has been just one game," the English coach said. "[Mehedi Hasan] Royal also did well but he looked a bit tired in the second half, which is something that can happen to new players. He needs to step it up for international

matches, which are different and a bit quicker. Rimon [Hossain] was fantastic for the national team. [Habibur Rahman] Shohag has also done well and he defended well when we needed to."

Rimon was ecstatic at being given the full 90 minutes whereas Royal and Shohag were replaced in the second half.

"I felt great because the coach kept faith in me throughout the 90 minutes. I tried to give as much as I could give in the match. I hope I can perform better in the next match and return home with good results," said the Bashundhara Kings left-back, who also played at right-back position after Bishwanath's injury.

Matin, too, was pleased to have played an important role up front after returning to the national following a one-year gap.

"I tried my best after returning to the playing even [since being excluded from the squad following an injury sustained during the Bangabandhu Gold Cup]. We needed this victory and we all tried to get it. Hopefully we do better in the next matches."

Nasir refreshingly coy about upturn

SPORTS REPORTER



The name Nasir Hossain used to evoke images of a genuine all-rounder for the Tigers over the years in the past, but that same name nowadays is mostly related to off-field controversies more than any performance on the field.

Even Nasir's recent wedding was not short of controversy, but the 29-year-old confidently announced that he wanted to score 800-1,000 runs in six Bangabandhu National Cricket League ahead of the start of the first-class competition.

Nasir, who played his last international game in 2018, was on the path to doing justice to his words. He started off with his eighth first-class ton in the opening round of Tier 1. The right-hander was seven runs short of a century and resumed the third day leading a lone fight for Rangpur Division against Dhaka Division. Despite his ton, his side folded for 230 at BKSP yesterday.

That did not deter the all-rounder, who proved instrumental with his off-spin and bagged four wickets to bundle Dhaka out for 128 runs in their second innings.

The Daily Star attempted to get a reaction from Nasir over phone, but the cricketer, probably trying to keep himself away from everything and focus on his game, just said: "Please let me finish my job first."

Rated as one of the most talented cricketers of his generation, people close to Nasir believe only he can push himself to regain the confidence he once showed on the field.



TRIUMPHS FOR ABAHANI, BKSP

(L) Abahani players celebrate with the Women's Table Tennis League trophy following a comfortable 3-1 win over debutants Bangladesh Police in the final at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium yesterday. Even though Abahani's Samanta Hossain Tushi lost to Police's Nowrin Sultana Mahi in 3-1 sets, convincing victories for Sonam Sultana Soma and Sadia Rahman Mou ensured Abahani's title. (R) Meanwhile, Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) emerged unbeaten champions in the Women's Development Independence Cup hockey tournament following a 6-0 win against Narail District in the final at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday. Arpita Pal and Shantina Tudu scored braces while Sonia Khatun and Tarin Akter Khushi scored one apiece for the winners. Twelve district teams and BKSP, split into four groups, took part in the 11-day tournament.

PHOTO: STAR

Teams to arrive for kabaddi tourney

SPORTS REPORTER

Kenya and Poland are scheduled to arrive in the capital today to take part in the Bangabandhu Cup International Kabaddi tournament, which gets underway from March 28.

Sri Lanka and Nepal are scheduled to land here on Friday as the five-nation tournament, also including hosts Bangladesh, will be played at the Volleyball Stadium in Paltan.

Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation had last staged an international tournament in 2013 with the participation of some state and club teams from India alongside Bangladesh national team.

SCORES IN BRIEF

TIER 1	TIER 2
Khulna Division v Sylhet Division Khulna: First innings--375 all-out in 109.4 overs (Tushar 99, Imrul 90; Ebadot 3-79, Jayed 3-94) Sylhet: First Innings 134 all out and Second innings--250 for 5 in 83 overs (Zakir 118 not out; Mominul 2-30, Halim 2-40)	Barishal Division v Dhaka Metropolis Barishal: First innings--241 and Second innings--177 for 7 in 58 overs (Mominul 63, Salman 44; Shohidul 2-34, Hider 2-35) Dhaka Metropolis: First innings--413 (Marshall 112, Shohidul 106; Kamrul 2-49, Gazi 2-77)
Dhaka Division v Rangpur Division Dhaka: First innings--365 and Second innings--128 (Arafat Sunny Jr 40 not out; Nasir 4-21, Sohrwardi 3-26) Rangpur: First innings--230 all out in 93.4 overs (Nasir 115; Nazmul 4-89, Salauddin 2-12)	Chattogram Division v Rajshahi Division Chattogram: First innings--287 and Second innings--147 (Irfan 65; Towhid 3-19, Farhad 3-37) Rajshahi: First innings--152 and Second innings--147 for 5 in 50.5 overs (Junaid 51 not out; Irfan Hossain 2-35)

Many believe a lack of focus towards his game and a tendency to get distracted have been the biggest reasons for his downfall, but perhaps a more mature Nasir has learned from past mistakes. He termed this his comeback tournament as a player and his attitude so far seems in the right place.

There were also questions over his fitness as 29-year-old, once rated among Bangladesh's best fielders, even failed a fitness test ahead of last year's Bangabandhu T20 Cup.

The cricketer has been battling the effects of a torn ligament sustained in 2018 and despite undergoing surgery, Nasir is still not feeling a hundred per cent fit.

The other three games between Khulna-Sylhet, Chattogram-Rajshahi and Dhaka Metropolis-Barishal all are expected to produce a result on the fourth and final day today.