

'I had the belief that I could score big'

SPORTS REPORTER

A batsman springing up and punching the air before kissing their helmet and raising the bat towards a clamouring crowd or applauding teammates is a very common scenario in cricket after a batsman reaches the most-desired three-figure mark. Celebrations become even more rigorous if the ton is a maiden one.

However, no such celebrations were seen from Najmul Hossain Shanto after he reached his maiden international century with an exquisite drive through extra cover for a boundary off a Dhananjaya de Silva delivery.

Shanto remained unbeaten on 126 off 288 deliveries to help Bangladesh amass 302 for two and finish the opening day of their first Test against Sri Lanka in Kandy on top.

"I had the belief that I could score big. So I did not think of it [the century] as something to be very excited about. I need to bat tomorrow and [I'm thinking of] batting long. I will play a lot of matches in the future if I stay healthy and get opportunities. So I do not think it is something to be very excited about," Shanto said about his landmark score at the post-day Zoom presser yesterday.

Shanto's post-century calm reflected the demeanor that was a constant feature of his innings yesterday. Shanto walked in after Bangladesh had lost opener Saif Hassan in just the second over of the game, with pacers still getting movement off the pitch.

Not only did he have to tackle the initial pace and swing from the Lankan pacers, the left-hander had to put aside all the pressure of not being able to score runs in recent



series. After all, Shanto had faced tremendous backlash after scoring a total of just 40 runs in his new number three position in the four innings played during the Tigers' last Test series against West Indies earlier this year.

What changed from the last series to this? Shanto explained: "I was mentally relaxed a lot [more than I was during the West Indies series]. I did not think about scoring a lot of runs. I just enjoyed my batting. I played each ball according to its merit. I did not think about how many balls I faced or how many runs I scored," Shanto added.

The left-hander also thought yesterday's knock was the result of the hard work he had been putting in over the past few months.

"I don't think I had anything to prove [through the century]. I believed in myself, that I could score runs. I worked hard the last five-six months. Maybe I did not get the result [right away] but I had the belief that I could score big. So I don't think I had anything to prove," the 22-year-old said.



Bangladesh batsman Najmul Hossain Shanto drives one powerfully on way to an unbeaten 126 on the first day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal (2nd from L) looks back at his partner after being dismissed for 90 by Sri Lanka pacer Vishwa Fernando (2nd from R) in Kandy yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Tigers tick all the right boxes

SPORTS REPORTER



A healthy 302 for 2 on the scoreboard after the end of the first day of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy yesterday reflected the Tigers' team management's positive intent.

That intent, first displayed by forming a balanced playing eleven that included three pacers and two spinners, was coupled with a proper cricketing approach from batsmen on a green top after Bangladesh had elected to bat. Even their execution when shifting gears according to the situation was evident.

Mominul Haque and his troops were under immense pressure after their recent disappointments, especially in the Test format, and the first day of the first Test will definitely be a confidence booster for the Tigers moving forward.

By the end of the first day, Najmul Hossain Shanto had recorded a maiden Test hundred, with the left-hander unbeaten on 126. He will surely be looking to get even more runs alongside skipper Mominul Haque, who was unbeaten on 64 as the pair added an unbeaten 150 runs for the third wicket.

The foundation was laid right at the top after an early hiccup saw Bangladesh lose opener Saif Hasan for a duck in his third Test. However, the experienced Tamim Iqbal steadied things with Najmul again.

Tamim will likely be disappointed that his attempted false shot off Vishwa Fernando was caught at slips and cost his wicket just ten runs shy of a tenth hundred. But until his departure for 90 off 101 balls, which included 15 gorgeous boundaries, it was all class.

The green top encouraged the hosts to bank on three seamers in their line-up the

Lankan bowlers' ploy of pitching the ball right up to the batsmen did not work as they would have hoped.

Both Najmul and Tamim were keen to come forward and meet the ball in front of their eyes, helping them negotiate the likes of Suranga Lakmal, Lahiru Kuara and Fernando. Tamim remained positive with his shot-making and played some delightful drives all across the ground.

Under pressure after failing in the two Tests against West Indies at home earlier this year, Najmul showed that with a hint of caution early on, especially after he was lucky to be dropped by keeper Niroshan Dickwella at the bowling of Dhananjay De Silva when he was on 28.

But Najmul regained confidence and eventually began to dominate the Lankan

BRIEF SCORE

BANGLADESH: First innings-302 for 2 in 90 overs (Tamim 90, Saif 0, Najmul 126 not out, Mominul 64 not out, extras 22; Fernando 2-61)

bowlers, adding 144 runs with Tamim Iqbal -- Bangladesh's first 100-run-plus stand for the second wicket since 2018.

Najmul, who began to open up and play his shots, also showed a lot of patience too when he was in his nineties, facing 38 balls to get the 10 runs needed to achieve the feat.

It was also a refreshing sight to see Bangladesh not lose a wicket in the third and final session with Najmul and Mominul, who is searching for a maiden away ton, adding 102 runs and ticking all the right boxes.

However, it will be important to see whether the visitors can utilise the start and post a big first-innings total to take control of the game.

BFF seeks opinion of sports ministry

SPORTS REPORTER



With the country under a lockdown till April 28, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has sought opinion from the youth and sports ministry about resumption of Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) in the latter part of this month.

The second-phase of the top-tier professional league was supposed to get underway from April 9 but the ongoing lockdown forced the game's local governing body to defer the resumption. And as there is uncertainty whether the current lockdown will be extended, the BFF does not want to waste any more time taking into consideration the plight of the 13 participating clubs.

"We have sent a letter to our parent ministry to get their opinion as football is being played all over the world. Football is being played in India and IPL is also being played in India. From this point of view, our clubs want to play. We sought opinion from the ministry regarding what should we do in this situation as the clubs are pressing us to resume the league," BFF's senior vice-president and professional league committee chairman Abdus Salam Murshedy told The Daily Star yesterday.

It has been learnt that the BFF wants to restart the league on April 29, the day following the completion of the current phase of lockdown. They are planning to complete three to four rounds of

matches before going into break for Eid-ul-Azha and AFC Cup engagements of Bashundhara Kings and Abahani.

There was a discussion whether Abahani could play their AFC Cup play-off match against Eagles Club of Maldives on April 25 in India, but the Sky Blues do not see any possibility of that happening due to international flight restriction and crisis over obtaining Indian visas.

AFC is likely to hold two play-off matches among Abahani, Eagles and Bengaluru FC just before the start of the Group E matches in Maldives (May 14-20), and in that case the BFF will get all clubs together to start the league.

Though a few clubs want to restart the league after World Cup Qualifiers in June, Murshedy believes it would be tough for the clubs to bear the expense of the foreign players.

"If we want to resume the league after the World Cup Qualifiers, the expenses for the clubs will increase. So we want to complete at least three or four rounds of matches of the league before the start of AFC Cup and World Cup Qualifiers," Murshedy said, adding that they want to hold the league without spectators and maintaining health guidelines.

The game's local governing body has started vaccinating footballers of top two leagues, with some 180 BPL players and 141 BCL players already getting the first shots of Covishield.



SUPER LEAGUE SHELVED

'We don't like it and we don't want it'

AGENCIES



Majority of the 12 founding members have withdrawn from the European Super League, including Spain's Atletico Madrid and Italy's Inter Milan and all the six English Premier League clubs involved in the breakaway project.

The withdrawals came amid a storm of protests from fans, players, managers and governments, alongside threats of bans and sanctions from the game's European and world governing bodies UEFA and FIFA. Juventus chairman Andrea Agnelli has said the tournament cannot proceed anymore, while AC Milan have also indicated they are abandoning the project.

The project was announced on Sunday with 12 founding members but 48 hours later the English clubs capitulated under massive pressure from fans, politicians, soccer officials and even British royals.

Agnelli however said he remained convinced about the merits of the Super League despite the overflying criticism.

Liverpool legend Dalglish took to Twitter on Tuesday, urging his longtime club to make the right choice despite the difficult times.

"The last few days have been difficult for everyone who loves Liverpool Football Club," Dalglish said, "and I really hope we do the right thing."

Shortly after Dalglish's post on social media, Liverpool's captain Henderson and the rest of Liverpool squad posted their own statement on social media in the wake of an emergency meeting on Tuesday.

Henderson led an emergency meeting of Premier League captains, and soon after confirmed that the players were against the idea of a Super League.

"We don't like it and we don't want it to happen," the statement said. "This is our collective position. Our commitment to this

football club and its supporters is absolute and unconditional. You'll Never Walk Alone."

Liverpool's principal owner John Henry apologised in a video on the club's website and social media on Wednesday.

"It goes without saying but should be said that the project put forward was never going to stand without the support of the fans," he said.

"I alone am responsible for the unnecessary negativity brought forward over the past couple of days. It's something

declaring the Super League dead in the water.

"This is the right result for football fans, clubs, and communities across the country. We must continue to protect our cherished national game," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said.

"What a beautiful day for football. Let's keep playing, let's keep fighting, let's keep dreaming," said Manchester City defender Benjamin Mendy.

The British press also cheered the move of the Premier League clubs and the news dominated the front page of



I won't forget. And shows the power the fans have today and will rightly continue to have."

"I don't think apologies are too great anyway, what happened should not have happened. What happened is the worst case of bullying from powerful people. Whether they (club owners) apologise or not is irrelevant to me," former Manchester United midfielder Nicky Butt following dramatic U-turn made by Europe's elite clubs.

"Super League is finished! Well done to all fans up & down the country!" said former Liverpool defender Jamie Carragher.

Players, fans and pundits celebrated the U-turns of the English teams, with some

Wednesday's newspapers.

"Their knees have gone all trembly," screamed the headline on the front page of the Daily Star while the banner on the i paper called the withdrawal as "Own Goal".

In Britain the Super League garnered ironic praise from the press for having done the impossible: uniting fans, players, politicians, and even members of the royal family in condemnation.

The Sun, one of the country's biggest tabloids, led the storm of celebrations over the collapse of the "despised" plans, with a front-page splash bidding "Cheerio, Cheerio" to the Super League and hailing the "victory for fans".

Rizwan shines as Pakistan beat Zimbabwe

REUTERS

In-form opener Mohammad Rizwan blazed an unbeaten half-century as Pakistan defeated hosts Zimbabwe by 11 runs in the first Twenty20 International at the Harare Sports Club on Wednesday.

Rizwan played a lone hand for his team with 82 not out as they posted 149 for seven in their 20 overs.

The home side, who have not qualified for the T20 World Cup in India later this year, were always just behind the rate and could only manage 138 for seven in reply.

After being sent in to bat, the Pakistan innings was dominated by Rizwan, who's unbeaten 82 came from 61 balls. No-one else scored more than 15, with off-spinner Wesley Madhevere the pick of the home bowling attack with 2-11 from two overs.

Zimbabwe were without their most experienced batsman Brendan Taylor, who pulled out of the game with a stomach bug.

The second match in the three-game series will be played at the same venue on Friday. The limited overs fixtures will be followed by two Tests.

Sunrisers outclass Kings by nine wickets

PTI, CHENNAI

Sunrisers Hyderabad outclassed Punjab Kings by nine wickets to snap their three-match losing streak in the IPL here on Wednesday.

Opting to bat, Punjab Kings were bundled out for a below-par 120, courtesy pacer Khaleel Ahmed (3/21) and spinner Abhishek Sharma (2/24), who shared five wickets between them.

Chasing the total, opener Jonny Bairstow (63 not out) first added 73 runs off 60 balls with David Warner (37) and then shared an unbeaten 48-run stand with Kane Williamson (16) to take SRH home in 18.4 overs.