

SPORT

Taskin's discipline pays huge dividends

SPORTS REPORTER

Taskin Ahmed was lucky to get a chance to bowl after coming in as ODI cricket's first-ever concussion substitute when he replaced Mohammad Saifuddin in the second match against Sri Lanka, but the seamer utilised that opportunity at a time when it was required most.

The 26-year-old had been dropped from the second game after going wicketless in the first game for the concession of 62 runs from nine overs. But the pacer, who has been in fine rhythm since his comeback to the international circuit earlier this year, displayed promise and maturity as a bowler at the second time of asking.

He has been a touch unlucky as well, with catches dropped off his bowling regularly, but the encouraging part is that Taskin managed to focus on the process rather than the outcome.

That led to the performance in the second ODI, when, although he went wicketless, Taskin drew praise for bowling a very good line and length and conceding just 27 in his eight overs in defence of a modest 246-run total.

But despite bowling brilliantly, it was important that Taskin got among the wickets to gain confidence and the tall pacer finally broke the jinx by picking up his third four-wicket haul in ODIs yesterday.

On a pitch in the third ODI that was not ideal for seamers with the ball coming onto the batsmen pretty well, Taskin's effort took a lot of discipline, especially considering that he did not have the best of starts. When he was introduced into the attack in the ninth over of the innings, the seamer's wayward bowling cost 12 runs.

But with Bangladesh desperate to break the dangerous opening stand between Kusal Perera and Danushka Gunathilaka, Taskin was the one who finally provided the all-important breakthrough, setting up Gunathilaka with two-short pitched delivery to start the over. The left-hander, unaware of the trap, went for an expansive shot as Taskin pushed the length further up. Gunathilaka was undone by the change of length and only managed to get inside and hit the timber.

The presence of mind from Taskin reflects maturity. He realised the nature of the surface early on and changed his length to force the batsman to play around the off stump.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Sri Lanka: 286 for 6 in 50 overs (Gunathilaka 39, Perera 120, Mendis 22, Dhananjaya 55 not out, Hasaranga 18, extras 17; Shoriful 1-56, Taskin 4-46)

Bangladesh: 189 all out in 42.3 overs (Tamim 17, Mushfiqur 28, Mosaddek 51, Mahmudullah 53, Afif 16, extras 11; Chameera 5-16, Hasaranga 2-47, Mendis 2-40)

Result: Sri Lanka won by 97 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Dushmantha Chameera.

Player-of-the-series: Mushfiqur Rahim.

Taskin also removed Pathum Nissanka in the same over with a beautiful length delivery outside off, with the right-hander caught in two minds and only managing a knick to the keeper.

Taskin once again provided the breakthrough for the Tigers in his second spell. This time Kusal Mendis was undone by some extra pace from Taskin as the right-hander skied a banded-in delivery to give a simple catch at mid-off.

It was an ideal game for Taskin, who bowled in various situations and once again made an impact in the death overs. He picked up his fourth wicket in the 49th over of the innings to end with figures of four for 46 from nine overs.



Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed celebrates after taking the wicket of Pathum Nissanka during the third and final ODI against Sri Lanka in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'I don't point fingers at youngsters'

SPORTS REPORTERS

Sri Lanka seemed to have found the right mixture of aggression and composure in their game in the final ODI and it culminated in them clinching 10 crucial points for the ODI Super League, welcome respite even as the series ended 2-1 in favour of Bangladesh.

"Badly needed win, but we lost the series. Our bowling department did a really good job. Our only concern in the first two games was the batting. Otherwise fielding and bowling we have done well. Some of the guys coming into touch is a good sign," Lankan captain Kusal Perera, who guided his team with a ton yesterday, said during the post-match presentations.

The Tigers had wanted to play the perfect game but in reality faced far

steeper circumstances with the bat yesterday. Their surrender was almost meek against Sri Lanka, ravaged by Dushmantha Chameera's fifer. Skipper Tamim Iqbal said there were areas that needed to be worked on.

"As I said at the end of the last game and beginning of this game, we have won the series but I thought we never played a complete game. We



Kusal Perera.....120

didn't play to our potential in this series. After winning the series, I can tell you there are a few areas to work on."

Tamim felt Sri Lanka were allowed

to get away with some missed chances in the field and they proved costly.

"They had a very attacking mindset coming into this game and we helped them do that. We bowled too short. We didn't grab our opportunities, missed two catches at important times, and could have probably got 30 runs less to chase," Tamim felt.

Mosaddek Hossain and Mahmudullah Riyad fifties flattered to deceive that there were no difference-making performances from the young names. Asked if it was a worry, Tamim said: "It is, but I am someone who keeps believing in youngsters. I don't point fingers at them, because I know how hard they try."

Despite no rescue mission from Mushfiqur Rahim in the final ODI, he said he really enjoyed the pressure. "Sri Lanka are not an easy side to play against, they never give up and come hard. I really enjoyed (the pressure); Mushfiqur said.

The national football team reached Qatar yesterday to take part in next month's World Cup and Asia Cup qualifiers. Coach Jamie Day will not have a full-strength squad to choose from due to injuries and Covid-19 infections. Day, however, may find solace in not receiving further blows as all 23 players and officials returned negative Covid-19 tests.



PHOTO: BFF



HIGH-STAKES and a battle of mind games

KHALID HOSSAIN



Apart from the playing style, the only predictable feature of Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola's game is the unpredictability of his starting eleven and consequently the formation, especially when it comes to huge occasions such as the Champions League final.

Like all great forms of sports, football too has the essence of chess in some of its strategic aspects. If observed through the lens of chess tactics, in every cohesive move during a match—starting from the goal-kick, followed by many passes and moves that may lead to a goal -- a game of rapid chess can be perceived as being played.

In the biggest stages of football, such as the Champions League knockout rounds or the World Cup final, a master tactician can decide the final outcome based on minuscule observations and the resulting adjustments, which is consequence of constantly simulating myriad possibilities in his mind throughout the match.

Being a pioneer in tactical innovation, Guardiola will characteristically trust his own philosophy and instincts and may leave to tinker on his system dynamics till the last minute, as he previously showed during his time as Barcelona coach where he won two Champions League trophies in a quite convincing fashion, and both against Manchester United led by Sir Alex Ferguson -- one of the greatest managers and tacticians the

Manchester City and Chelsea have only faced each other once in a European tie before -- in the semi-finals of the 1970-71 European Cup Winners' Cup. Chelsea won 1-0 in both the home and away legs against the Citizens, who at the time were the holders of the competition.

Tuchel had never beaten Guardiola as a coach before taking charge of Chelsea. His record against the Spaniard with Mainz and Dortmund was D2 L3 with two goals scored and 11 conceded. In the most recent two meetings, Tuchel's Chelsea won 1-0 and 2-1 respectively against Guardiola's City.

game has ever seen.

Someone like Guardiola is analogous to a chess Grandmaster who keeps revisiting his moves even when the game is well within his grasp -- such is his perfectionist nature and obsession with the game. We have seen Pep play with a radical striker-less formation, as well as deploying false roles at important positions -- the false wingers and full-backs, the false 9s and 10s for instances -- which ended up bamboozling the opponent.

In the blue half of Manchester, he has the necessary arsenal to execute his vision, and most importantly he has acquired the faith of his players, in leaps and bounds over the years, to blindly trust him on the night of one of the biggest stages in any sport.

Even though this scintillating City side look to be theoretically favourites, however historically, the outcome in this great game is not always decided on paper

beforehand.

After all, it all inevitably boils down to what legendary Dutchman Johan Cruyff once said: "Football is a game of mistakes. Whoever makes the fewest mistakes wins."

That is where Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel, who is an experienced, master tactician in his own right, can seek inspiration. His side is flying high on confidence after having reached this far against the odds and moreover, winning the recent encounter against City in the Premier League by 2-1 at the last minute would have boosted their morale a great deal.

TEN 2

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

FINAL

MANCHESTER CITY VS CHELSEA

LIVE FROM 1:00 AM (SUNDAY)

Tuchel knows what it is like to play and win in big matches as well as what it is like to play against Guardiola. He knows that to destabilise the order of possession football, he would have to execute the element of chaos with timing and perfection -- with a threatening brand of counter-attacking football with ruthless execution.

The German coach certainly has the players with suitable technical skills and heart -- the likes of Mason Mount, N'Golo Kante, Antonio Rudiger-- to take the game by the scruff of the neck against Guardiola's mean machine, composed of the likes of Kevin

de Bruyne, Bernardo Silva, Riyad Mahrez and Phil Foden.

The German would be inclined to instruct his men to play a reactive game with intelligence and caution, and focus on delaying, if not preventing, City from setting up their desired, sustainable tempo; and when the opportunity presents itself, as it usually does in every match, jump in to capitalise on the mistakes made by the Premier League champions.

Chelsea's superior experience in playing Champion's League final in modern era should allow them play with lesser pressure compared to City, who are bound to face the ominous music when and if the events of the match do not proceed in their favour. City indeed have more at stake, compared to the Blues from London, due to underachievement at UCL and therefore City could be more prone to committing errors at crucial stages on Saturday night at the Estadio do Dragao in Porto.

Even if Tuchel fails to come up with fitting moves in the chess mind-games, he could introduce and force Guardiola to play something else altogether -- like a game of poker perhaps, and thus hope to create distraction and confusion in Guardiola's mind with the art of bluffing and deception, in order to psychologically induce unforced errors from his counterpart.

To wrap things up, here is another famous statement by Cruyff:

"Every disadvantage has its own advantage!"

PLAYERS TO WATCH

RUBEN DIAS

(MAN CITY)
Played- 10
Clearances & Tackles- 22
Blocks- 7
Balls Recovered- 49



KEVIN DE BRUYNE

(MAN CITY)
Played- 7, Assists- 4
Attempts- 20
Passing Accuracy- 347 (80%)



N'GOLU KANTE

(CHELSEA)
Played- 12, Tackles- 5
Balls Recovered- 49
Passing Accuracy- 340 (85%)



THIAGO SILVA

(CHELSEA)
Played- 7
Clearances & Tackles- 20
Blocks- 2
Balls Recovered- 43



Foden and Mount inject youthful zest



REUTERS

Europe's top clubs invest millions in signing players from all over the world but two of the key players in Saturday's Champions League final between Manchester City and Chelsea are a reminder that there is still value in home-grown talent.

City's Phil Foden and Chelsea's Mason Mount both head to Porto after seasons in which they moved from the 'promising



youngster' category into fully-fledged game-changers.

Both clubs have been criticized in recent years for failing to give opportunities to players from their academies but the investments of time and coaching expertise in the two attacking midfielders have paid off this term.

With both players in Gareth Southgate's England squad for Euro 2020, this could be the summer when they truly announce themselves on the global stage.

"It's [about] the quality of the players, trying to understand their skills, creating a good environment and a good mood, because football is not just tactics; it's emotions and relations between the lads and even with the backroom staff. This is the most important thing for a team to last for a long time, which has happened here for five years."

PEP GUARDIOLA
MANCHESTER CITY MANAGER

"As a child, you dream of these matches and it's like watching the moon -- it's so, so far away. Once you're in it, you're just in it. I don't hesitate to say that Man. City and Bayern have been the benchmark in Europe this season and last season. We are trying to close the gap and the good thing is, in football, you can close gaps in 90 minutes."

THOMAS TUCHEL
CHELSEA MANAGER