

HIGHEST PARTNERSHIP FOR THE 9TH WICKET

- 195- MV Boucher and PL Symcox, South Africa v Pakistan, Johannesburg, 1998.
- 191- Mahmudullah and Taskin Ahmed, Bangladesh v Zimbabwe, Harare, 2021.
- 190-Asif Iqbal and Intikhab Alam, Pakistan v England, The Oval, 1967.
- 184- Mahmudullah and Abul Hasan, Bangladesh v West Indies, Khulna, 2012.
- 180-JP Duminy and DW Steyn, South Africa v Australia, Melbourne, 2008.



Mahmudullah thrives in spite of role

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Mahmudullah's Test career might be seeing a reversal of fortunes after a determined century against Zimbabwe was instrumental to Bangladesh being able to reverse their own fate in the ongoing one-off Test at Harare.

Last year, following a string of low-key Test scores, the management decided it was time for Mahmudullah to take a break from Tests. Coming back in to the side after 16 months, the right-hander --only included in the side due to Tamim Iqbal and Mushfiqur Rahim missing out through injury concerns -- grabbed the opportunity with both hands, stringing together a career-best score of 150.

However, the fact that Mahmudullah always finds himself in such positions where he is required to stage a rescue act also shows the precariousness of the role he has been asked to play for the Test side.

Easily one of the most technically solid batsman in the side, Mahmudullah's form in Tests belies his calibre. If damage control is a role, that is the one Mahmudullah had been bestowed with because his batting order has required him to play a certain way over the course of his Test career.

Usually when he comes into bat, he finds the team under immense pressure. On the first day of the Harare Test, that was the position he found himself in with Bangladesh crumbling to 132 for six.

With Liton Das at the crease and only Mehedi Miraz to come as the other recognised batsman, Mahmudullah's role had to be a rescue act. That he was able to

shine under such circumstances following his return to the Test side is, however, an exception given that it is easier to wilt -- as Bangladesh have done in the past -- when such situations arise.

Mahmudullah watched the deliveries closely, taking time to get his eye in while the Zimbabwe seamers felt the wind at their backs after removing Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan and then Mominul Haque.

He had to lay the foundation for his own knock by first talking Liton through his innings. His determination to be there, the grit shown in a patiently confident knock, also allowed his partner to grind things out.

He took time to get acclimatised to the faster track, showing soft hands and getting on top of deliveries and showed the signs of a man looking to revive his Test career. With first Liton and then Taskin Ahmed as a partner, he took Bangladesh to a position of strength after a stuttering beginning.

However, a team featuring nine batsmen in the lineup is not a solution any Test side going for a win would find productive and Mahmudullah may not find the same support in other instances such as this.

Mahmudullah and Taskin would go on to string together a 191-run stand -- the second-highest ninth-wicket partnership in Tests, playing out more than 40 overs.

The gargantuan task of batting with a tail-ender during a long partnership has its own kind of pressure and Mahmudullah came up with the right answers this time.

However, the question remains whether the task of disaster management is what his role will keep on being while the management judges his performances without considering the difficulty of that role in a team like Bangladesh.



Record 9th-wicket stand puts Tigers on solid ground

SPORTS REPORTER



In the second day, Bangladesh made a dramatic comeback riding on Mahmudullah Riyad's magnificent unbeaten century and Taskin Ahmed's maiden Test fifty where the pair added a record 191 runs in the ninth-wicket stand against Zimbabwe in the lone Test at the Harare Sports Club Ground yesterday.

It was a display of sheer determination and patience from both Mahmudullah and Taskin that helped Bangladesh to post a big first-innings total of 468 runs. That total had seemed a farfetched reality after the first day where the visitors were struggling on 294 for 8.

Zimbabwe also replied strong with the bat and ended the day on 114 for 1, where Shakib Al Hasan picked up the wicket of opener Milton Shumba on 41, as the hosts trail by 354 runs on their first innings.

But it was the partnership between Mahmudullah and Taskin that stole all the limelight as the duo walked out with a humongous task when they resumed the

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH: First innings-468 all out in 126 overs (Shadman 23, Mominul 70, Liton 95, Mahmudullah 150 not out, Taskin 75, extras 39; Muzarabani 4-94, Tiripano 2-58, Nyauchi 2-92)
ZIMBABWE: First innings- 114 for one in 41 overs (Shumba 41, Kaitano 33 not out, Taylor 37 not out, extras 3; Shakib 1-43)

second day and ended up registering the highest ninth-wicket stand for Bangladesh, surpassing the previous record of 184 runs between Mahmudullah and Abul Hasan against Pakistan back in 2012.

When Taskin was eventually dismissed on 75 off 134 balls laced with eleven boundaries, the pair were just four runs shy of the 195 runs stand for the highest ever ninth-wicket partnership in Test history between the South African Mark Boucher and Pat Symcox against Pakistan back in 1995.

It was a matter of survival for the experienced Mahmudullah, who was the last-minute inclusion in the Test squad and was making a comeback to the Test team after 16 months, as the right-hander went on to struck his fifth Test

hundred just when it mattered the most.

Mahmudullah who completes his twelve years in Test cricket today eventually walked out unbeaten on 150 off 278 balls that featured 17 boundaries and a maximum.

It was also his 50th Test match for the Tigers and the veteran performer has surely made the occasion special with a statement in style.

On the other hand, Taskin's skills with the bat were a surprise package considering his limitations as a batsman but the left-hander showed great resilience to give equal support to Mahmudullah from the other end.

The 26-year-old also enjoyed his time in the middle which reflected on his break-dance move after leaving a delivery from pacer Blessing Muzarabani and even had a face-off with the bowler on the follow-through.

Earlier resuming the day, Bangladesh added 110 runs in the first session and headed to lunch on 404 for 8. The visitors continued to frustrate the hosts in the next hour until Ebadot Hossain became Muzarabani's fourth victim of the innings as Bangladesh were eventually bundled out with Mahmudullah remaining unbeaten at the other end.



England exults over Euros

REUTERS

Gary Neville called for a national celebration after England reached a major final for the first time in 55 years with a 2-1 win over Denmark at Euro 2020 on Wednesday.

Former players and TV pundits were full of praise for Gareth Southgate's side, who have the chance to add another trophy to England's 1966 World Cup after beating the Danes in extra time.

With coverage spread over both the front and back pages, several English papers headlined their main stories with the word "Finally", after England ended their long wait to reach the final of a major men's tournament.

Italy await on Monday, 1am (Bangladesh Standard Time) at London's Wembley stadium, in front of a crowd limited to some 66,000 -- two-thirds its capacity.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson tweeted that Gareth Southgate's squad had "played their hearts out". "Now to the final. Let's bring it home," he said.

There was talk of awarding a knighthood to Southgate and key players such as winger Raheem Sterling, and calls for the government to declare a national holiday on Monday should England triumph against Italy.

"We have never done this before in our lifetimes," former England defender Neville said on ITV. "We have had so much pain, so much dismay and so much let-down, and now we are going to a final."

"For the next few days those lads have got to focus, but we don't have to. This country is absolutely bouncing. National

holiday, enjoy yourselves."

Former England striker Gary Lineker said it had "been a long time coming". "It's finally happened. I was doubting I'd ever see it again in my lifetime at one point," Lineker added.

Geoff Hurst, England's hat-trick hero from the 1966 final, applauded the team's "fantastic" result. "Wow! We're in the final. Brilliant game. Well done England.



Fantastic," Hurst tweeted, adding the hashtag 'Football's Coming Home'.

Former England midfielder Karen Carney described Southgate's squad as "a family" after they celebrated the win in front of almost 60,000 fans at Wembley.

There was plenty of praise for manager Gareth Southgate, who has carried the pain of his penalty shoot-out miss at the semi-finals of Euro 96 and often been criticised for his tactics.

"We've given our fans and our nation a fantastic night and the journey carries on for another four days," Southgate said.

"We've said we want to create memories ... I've said to the young ones (players) 'it isn't always like this.'"

MESSI V NEYMAR

The stage at the historic Maracana stadium is set for an epic showdown (on Sunday, 6:00am BST) between the two giants of the footballing world -- Brazil and Argentina -- as they look to bag the highly prestigious Copa America trophy of 2021. What makes this clash between the South American powerhouses even more mouth-watering is that the two most popular and technically gifted players -- Lionel Messi and Neymar -- are featuring for their respective teams. Messi and Neymar have a great mutual admiration towards each other despite having met as archrivals on the field in their national colours on many occasions.

Let us look back at the times when these two talismans played against each other:

IN INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL:

The first time the two met in a friendly in 2010, Messi's last minute winner helped seal a 1-0 win for La Albiceleste. The following encounter, also a friendly, in 2012, the world witnessed the 34-year-old Barca legend score an outstanding hat trick to secure the victory for his side in a 4-3 thriller. Then Neymar had the upper hand

in the following two encounters, the first in a friendly in 2014 where his counterpart missed a penalty and then in 2016 World Cup Qualifier, Neymar's goal contributed to an emphatic 3-0 win over the sky blue and whites. Now fast forward to 2021, the two maestros meet again in the biggest game of their international career so far.

IN CLUB COMPETITIONS:

Before playing as teammates for Barcelona, Neymar and Messi played against each other in a Club World Cup final in 2011 where Messi's

Barcelona comfortably won the game 4-0 against Neymar's Santos by displaying a superior brand of football that made them European champions. Messi had scored twice in that game.

Interestingly, the two playmakers have not yet clashed with their current club sides- Barcelona and PSG. Messi and Neymar have met on the field as rivals

before, but this will be the biggest game in which they'll do it thus far, with a huge trophy on the line.

