

‘We were never in control’

Lack of vision reflected in opening struggles



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram

One could be tempted to take positives despite Bangladesh crashing to a convincing eight-wicket defeat in the first Test against Pakistan inside the first session of the final day to start the second cycle of the ICC World Test Championship with a defeat. Those thoughts could arise from the individual heroics at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram such as a maiden Test century from Liton Das in the first innings, which he followed up with a half-century in the second innings. Mushfiqur Rahim also scored 91 runs and together the duo put on a 206-run stand for the fifth-wicket in the first innings. Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam single-handedly spun out Pakistan with a seven-wicket haul, which gave the hosts a crucial 44-run lead, and debutant Yasir Ali impressed before suffering a concussion after scoring 36 runs in the second innings. However, skipper Mominul Haque's realisation was perhaps the most positive as he bemoaned the fact that individual performances have rarely ever been enough to win Bangladesh matches. "I have been noticing since taking up captaincy that individual performances have not helped us win games in any format. We don't have the kind of performer who can single-handedly win matches for us so we have to perform as a unit. If we could perform collectively... suppose after Taijul picked up seven wickets, if someone else bagged two or three in the second innings and gave him support or if the batters had played well in the second innings, that might have helped us. You can't get success as a team by only relying on individual heroics. When we play collectively, as a unit, we get favourable results," Mominul said. Even after the third day, it seemed Bangladesh were in control with their 44-run first-innings lead as they came out for their second essay. But, as in the first innings when the hosts were reduced to 49 for four, Bangladesh's

top order failed and the hosts were reduced to 25 for 4. "You guys might think positively, but I feel we were never in control. It was because Mushfiqur and Liton batted well that we got some momentum and then again from Taijul picking up those seven wickets. Courtesy of these individual performances, we were able to remain in the game till the fourth day. We might have gotten control if we were able to put up a partnership in the second innings. So I don't think we were in control," a disappointed Mominul added. Mominul also said that the Tigers needed to work on their mental fitness and admitted that they could hardly change their technique overnight, in time for the second and final Test starting in Mirpur on December 4. The 30-year-old also praised the nature of the pitch at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, terming it flat and blaming the top order, including himself, for the failure. "I should have batted with more responsibility. If you can score a big knock at number four, there is always a good chance to post a better total. If you lose four wickets inside the first ten overs in any format, it won't matter if you add a 200 or 300-run partnership. It won't help you post a big total. It's difficult to bowl after scoring 330 runs in the first innings on a flat wicket. It was because of Taijul's brilliance that we managed to make the comeback," he added.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH

First Innings- 330 all out & Second Innings- 157 all out

PAKISTAN

First Innings 286 all out & Second Innings - 203 for 2 in 58.3 overs (Abid 91, Shafique 73, Azhar 24 not out, Babar 13 not out; Taijul 1-89, Miraz 1-59)

RESULT: Pakistan won by 8 wickets.

PLAYER-OF-THE-MATCH: Abid Ali.

- » In the eight games played in the two cycles of the World Test Championship (WTC) so far, Bangladesh openers contributed only **17.79** per cent of the side's total runs.
- » In those eight games, Bangladesh team management employed five different opening pairs.
- » Both openers of Bangladesh were dismissed for a single-digit score in five of those innings.
- » The highest opening stand during this period was a **98**-run stand between Tamim Iqbal and Saif Hassan against Sri Lanka in Pallekele.

NABID YEASIN

"If you lose four wickets inside the first 10 overs in any format, it is very difficult to regain momentum. Even partnerships of 200 or 300 runs won't help you get a big score," was the realisation from Bangladesh Test captain Mominul Haque after an eight-wicket loss to Pakistan in the first Test in Chattogram. Mominul was spot on. It is the top order of Bangladesh, specifically the opening pair, that has been the discernible low point and the major reason behind the Tigers' failure in Tests and other formats. As opposed to Pakistan openers Abid Ali and debutant Abdullah Shafique -- who stitched together 100-run stands in both innings, only the second time that Pakistan openers have put on a hundred-run stand in both innings of a Test match since a Test against South Africa in 2003 -- Bangladesh's first four batters scored a total of 67 runs in the two innings combined. Even Mominul admitted that it was the gulf in quality between the opening pairs and top order that decided the outcome despite the fact that Mominul's troops went into the second innings with a 44-run lead. In particular, the opening fiasco has been an age-old problem for the Tigers in the format. In the eight games played in the two cycles of the World Test Championship (WTC) so far, five different opening pairs have contributed only 17.79 per cent of the side's total runs. Moreover, both of Bangladesh's openers were dismissed for

single digit scores on five occasions in those eight games. It is probably unfair to point fingers only at the openers, given that the national selection panel's process and thought are equally, if not more, at fault for the torrid aforementioned figures. The selection of Saif Hassan, whose weakness in negotiating pacey deliveries directed towards his body was brutally exposed by the likes of Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasan Ali in the Chattogram Test, raised a lot of questions. Saif's abysmal technique also served as definitive proof that Bangladesh's domestic circuit is nowhere near the international standard as the 23-year-old came into the squad boasting 3,000 runs in his first-class career. While Saif failed horribly, Pakistan opener Shafique made hay with two consecutive fifties on his debut despite getting a call to the squad after just four first-class outings. That not only goes to show the gulf between the two country's domestic structures, but also points out the selectors' inability to recognise talent that is fit and ready for the national outfit. The selectors added Mohammad Naim for the first time to the Test squad for the second game against Pakistan and it seems that the chop-and-change in the opening slot will continue. The only thing missing will be planned thinking about a problem that has been affecting the country's cricket for years.

Pakistan team outdo Tigers' individuals

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite Bangladesh's 44-run lead at the end of the first innings, what made the difference for Pakistan in their comfortable eight-wicket victory? The Tigers may have taken positives from individual performances from the likes of Liton Das and Taijul Islam that swung the momentum at some stages, but it was Pakistan's collective approach in every aspect that helped them bounce back and clinch an easy victory on the final day of the first Test at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. Pakistan's Hasan Ali was lethal with the ball in the first innings with a five-wicket-haul that deterred the Tigers from posting a bigger total. However, his pace-bowling partner Shaheen Shah Afridi also kept the pressure on the batters, plucking a couple of wickets. Their combined attack remained venomous in the second innings, only this time Afridi bagged a fiver while Hasan grabbed two wickets to set up an easy chase and Pakistan skipper Babar Azam singled them out for praise during the post-match presentation ceremony. "The way Bangladesh played in the first innings was really good but Shaheen and Hasan were outstanding. That's the beauty of Test cricket; it allows you to stage a comeback," Babar said.

After enduring a strenuous second day that saw him fail to scalp a single wicket, Taijul's seven-wicket-haul in the first session of the third day enabled Bangladesh to get a first-innings lead. But that appeared a lucky break as the hosts were unable to display consistency with the ball in the second innings. Pakistan's batters also ensured that they would measure up their bowlers' performance. Openers Abid Ali and Abdullah Shafique stitched together partnerships of over a hundred in both innings while half-centuries from debutant Shafique in both innings and Abid's magnificent knocks of 133 and 91 demonstrated their collective

approach come through when Babar struggled with the bat. Player-of-the-match Abid Ali did not forget to credit his batting partner's performance either. "Abdullah Shafique was making his debut, so we tried to stay at the crease, wait for bad balls and we succeeded in putting them away. He was outstanding. My best wishes are with him," the right-hander said. Although, Liton's maiden Test century in the first innings and a half-century in the second also gave the Tigers glimpses of hope, it cannot be denied that it was Pakistan's teamwork that undid Bangladesh in the first Test.



Tigers get Shakib boost for Mirpur Test

SQUAD

Mominul Haque (Captain), Shadman Islam, Saif Hassan, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Liton Das, Yasir Ali, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Abu Jayed Rahi, Nayeem Hasan, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Rejaur Rahman Raja, Khaled Ahmed, Shohidul Islam and Naim Sheikh.



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are boosted by the return of all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and pacer Taskin Ahmed ahead of their second Test against Pakistan, starting from December 4 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Both the players recovered from injuries as the Minhajul Abedin-led selection panel announced an extended squad yesterday. Opener Mohammad Naim Sheikh received a maiden Test call-up following a dismal showing by the openers in the first Test in Chattogram that the Tigers lost by eight wickets. Selectors picked up another young opener despite Bangladesh Test captain Mominul Haque issuing a warning to the young players after losing the Chattogram

Test. Mominul said in the post-match press conference yesterday that they would have to go for experienced players if the young ones fail to deliver while particularly pointing his fingers towards opener Saif Hassan. "Say, if any young employee in your office fails to deliver, you have to go for a change. And if young employees fail, you have to go for the experienced ones," said Mominul. Shakib will make a comeback after recovering from a hamstring injury that he suffered during the Tigers' Super 12 encounter against West Indies in the ICC T20 World Cup. The star all-rounder, who also missed the three-match T20I series against Pakistan, was initially named for the first Test but was unable to recover in time.



Permaul's fifer puts SL in trouble

AFP, GALLE

Veerasammy Permaul's five-wicket haul put Sri Lanka in trouble with the West Indies' batting openers already chasing down the hosts' lead on day two of the second Test in Galle on Tuesday. Rain interrupted play half an hour before tea and it did not resume, in a match that has been plagued by inclement weather and bad light, with the tourists trailing by 135. Permaul's first long-format match in six years helped bowl out Sri Lanka for 204 on the second day with a career-best 5-35. The West Indies' decision to play two left-arm spin specialists proved a masterstroke against a side heavy with right-handed batters. Permaul and fellow left-arm spinner Jomel Warrican, who claimed 4-50, cut through the Sri Lankan order on a wicket with plenty of turn and bounce. "Great to bowl in tandem with Jomel. He kept things tight, putting pressure. We are pretty happy with the status quo," Permaul said. It was the fourth time in history that West Indies spinners claimed all 10 wickets in an innings. Off-spinner Roston Chase had claimed captain Dimuth Karunaratne on day one with Sri Lanka resuming overnight on 113.

‘It’s a moment I’ll never forget’

AFP, New Delhi

Rachin Ravindra became an unlikely hero for New Zealand with solid defence and the ability to soak in the pressure in his debut Test, and has been hailed as an all-round package. The 22-year-old stood firm with the lower order and finished with Ajaz Patel in a final-wicket stand that survived the final session's 52 balls to deny India a win. Ravindra's entry into the dressing room after the thrilling draw was met with praise from Williamson and Ross Taylor. "Guys that I have idolised and seen playing cricket for a long time, to be able to share a change room and chat about the game was amazing."

"It was a big relief because I was trying not to look at the scoreboard and how many overs to go, I was just thinking ball after ball, this is what I need to do. Trying to forget about everything, all external factors, but definitely a big relief seeing everyone high-fiving each other, seeing how happy everyone was, it was pretty cool. "It's a moment I'll never forget." Ravindra's first name -- Rachin -- is a mix of Indian greats Rahul Dravid and Sachin Tendulkar and both are an inspiration to the Kiwi. Tendulkar praised the efforts of Ravindra and Patel in what he called a "fascinating" Test. "Taking in the crowd and how loud they were and all the fielders around the bat is the kind of stuff you dream about as a kid," said the Wellington-born Ravindra, whose father migrated

to New Zealand from Bangalore. "You watch Test matches like that, and that's where your heroes and idols are made. Quite nerve-wracking. (but we) somehow managed to keep our nerves together which was a pretty special feeling. Taking up the sport at a young age, Ravindra was supported at home by his father Ravi Krishnamurthy, a software system architect who played some cricket in Bangalore. Krishnamurthy founded a cricket club in New Zealand -- Hutt Hawks -- to take players on tours to help them expand their experience. Ravindra said nothing would have been possible without his parents. "They are really proud. They are obviously trying to say to me 'try to stay level and everything', which is a nice little reminder," Ravindra said.

