

SPORT

Will Shakib's return make the difference?

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite losing the first Test in Chattogram, Bangladesh have gained some confidence from the of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan as they take on Babar Azam's Pakistan side in the second and final Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

Shakib, who has recovered from a hamstring injury sustained during Bangladesh's Super 12 game against West Indies in the T20 World Cup, missed both the T20I series and the first Test against Pakistan. He was seen spending hours in the nets and seemed determined to make an impact against Pakistan not only through his often outstanding performances, but also by lending his wealth of experience and boosting the morale of the Tigers.

The 34-year-old's presence also gives the team management the luxury of opting for an extra bowler or a batsman in their attempt to form a good combination for the crucial Mirpur Test.

"It is easier when Shakib is back in the team. So far I have seen him doing well. Given his return, we are thinking of having four bowlers and seven batters in the playing eleven," skipper Mominul Haque said during a virtual pre-match press meet

yesterday.

Bangladesh will certainly require Shakib's experience with the bat, with the Tigers' top-order being abysmal.

They were reduced to 49 for four in the first innings of the first Test and were reeling on 25 for four in the second innings against the quality fast-bowling attack featuring Shaheen Afridi and Hasan Ali. They eventually folded for just 157 in the second innings, setting a meagre 202-run target that saw them crash to an eight-wicket defeat. Shakib is both the leading run-scorer and wicket-taker in Tests in Mirpur and Bangladesh will desperately require him to share responsibility in the batting department alongside the experienced Mushfiqur Rahim and in-form Liton Das.

"When he [Shakib Al Hasan] comes, I become relaxed. Both his batting and bowling are important and his presence in the team combination is very positive for us," Mominul added.

The star cricketer will also approach the milestones of achieving a rare all-round double of 4000 runs and 200 wickets in Test cricket. Shakib requires 67 runs to join an elite list that features Garry Sobers, Ian Botham, Kapil Dev, Jacques Kallis and Daniel Vettori.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



▶ Shakib Al Hasan is the leading run-scorer and leading wicket-taker in Tests in Mirpur. In 17 matches, Shakib has aggregated 1313 runs (average 45.28) and bagged 63 wickets (average 31.21) in Mirpur.

▶ Mirpur may also witness Shakib accomplishing a rare all-round double – of 4000 runs and 200 wickets. Only five players have accomplished this feat in Test cricket before Shakib. Shakib is only 67 runs behind from joining the august company of Garry Sobers, Ian Botham, Kapil Dev, Jacques Kallis and Daniel Vettori.

▶ Pakistan is Shakib's most and least favourite opponent at the same time. With the bat, Shakib averages 68.66 – his best performance against any opponent. With the ball, Shakib averages 63.88 – his worst performance against any opponent.

The curious case of Mirpur

SPORTS REPORTER



"It is tough to predict," Bangladesh Test skipper Mominul Haque remarked when asked how the wicket might play during their second Test against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

The conditions in Mirpur have not yet sided with Bangladesh in the Test format as the Tigers failed to live up to the demands at a venue known in the country as the home of cricket. In a total of 21 matches at the venue, Bangladesh have won only six, while drawing three and losing the other 12.

Mominul's predicament at assuming the conditions the Tigers may face today was not surprising because home skipper have often dealt with such dilemmas in the past. At times, skipper have failed to recognise the nature of the pitch at the toss and ended up making the wrong call. Such was the case back in 2015 when Mushfiqur Rahim opted to field first in Mirpur only to see Pakistan post a mammoth 557 for eight before declaring. The hosts were thumped by 328 runs in that game, in what was the last Test Bangladesh played against Pakistan at home.

It goes without saying that the toss today will have a huge impact. As the trend goes, teams winning the toss and opting to bat first in Mirpur have a 56.25 win percentage.

The few wins that the Tigers had in Mirpur were all on tailor-made tracks that suited

SUMMARY OF RESULTS AT MIRPUR

	Played	Won	Lost	Draw	Win%
Bangladesh	21	6	12	3	28.57
Pakistan	2	2	0	0	100%

**Bangladesh lost the only Test they played in Mirpur in February this year against West Indies by 17 runs.

TOSS IMPACT IN MIRPUR

	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	Win%
Won the toss & batted first	16	9	5	2	56.25%
Won the toss & bowled first	5	2	2	1	40.00%

Average total in last 5 Tests in Mirpur
1st innings: 385, 2nd innings: 276

PACE VS SPIN IN LAST 5 TESTS IN MIRPUR

	WKTS	AVG	RPO	SR
Pace	43	32.23	2.84	67.93
Spin	120	27.68	3.15	52.59

AVERAGE RUNS SCORED & WICKETS LOST ON EACH DAY IN MIRPUR (IN LAST 5 TESTS)

1st day: 258/7	3rd day: 248/10	5th day: 148/7
2nd day: 278/9	4th day: 256/11	

spinners. Historic wins against England (in 2016) and Australia (in 2017) and Bangladesh registering their biggest margin win in the format against West Indies (an innings and 184-run win in 2018) all came on spinning surfaces.

That spin-friendly Mirpur has been

Bangladesh's downfall as well.

The last Test at the venue saw Bangladesh strangled by the spin web of West Indies' Rahkeem Cornwall and Jomel Warrican. Even after a decent start, Bangladesh found themselves 17 runs short as Mehedi Hasan Miraz's fighting 31 came to an end when he nicked a Warrican delivery and was brilliantly caught at slip by Cornwall.

Spin will probably once again be the dominant factor in the second Test as spinners have scalped a total of 120 wickets as opposed to pacers' 43 in the last five games in Mirpur.

But Mominul rightly remained cautious in the pre-match presser on how over-dependence on spinners might backfire against Pakistan seeing that Bangladesh have never gotten the better of the sides from the subcontinent at this venue.

The conditions in Mirpur will also pose a threat to the fragile top-order of Bangladesh. While Pakistan's openers will be brimming with confidence following their dominant showing in the first Test, the Tigers' top-order -- which accumulated 67 runs in two combined innings on a flat Chattogram wicket -- will be trying to find their feet on a far more challenging surface.

With Shakib Al Hasan back in the side, Bangladesh will definitely be able to field a much more balanced side. But how this side will overcome the unpredictability that the Mirpur offers is what remains to be seen in the coming days.

Agarwal leads India's fightback

REUTERS, Mumbai



Mayank Agarwal hit an unbeaten 120 to lead India's fightback on the opening day of the second Test after Mumbai-born New Zealand spinner Ajaz Patel took all four wickets to fall.

India reached 221 for four at stumps with Agarwal and wicketkeeper-batsman Wriddhiman Saha, on 25, in the middle after the hosts elected to bat first on a weather-hit day when only 70 overs were possible.

Agarwal lifted India from a precarious 80-3 when Patel struck twice in one over with his left-arm spin to send back



Cheteshwar Pujara and skipper Virat Kohli for ducks.

Patel broke a 80-run opening stand between Agarwal and Shubman Gill, who made 44 before being caught by Ross Taylor, and India rapidly lost three wickets in the space of 16 deliveries.

Kohli lasted only four balls on his return to the team after stepping down from the Twenty20 captaincy and a short break following the World Cup, adjudged lbw by umpire Anil Chaudhary.

Moments earlier Patel had bowled struggling Pujara, also for nought. But Agarwal and first-match centurion Shreyas Iyer put on 80 runs between them to rebuild the innings. Patel struck again to get Iyer caught by wicketkeeper Tom Blundell for 18.

New batsman Saha took 17 deliveries to get off the mark but did so with a straight six off Patel and put on an unbeaten stand of 61 with Agarwal.

Agarwal reached his fourth Test hundred -- including two double centuries -- with a boundary off Daryl Mitchell and let out a roar amid raucous applause from the crowd.

Mendis, Embuldeniya spin Sri Lanka to 2-0 series win

AFP, Galle



Spinners Lasith Embuldeniya and Ramesh Mendis took all 10 wickets as Sri Lanka demolished the West Indies to win the second Test in Galle on Friday with a session to spare.

Chasing an improbable target of 297 to secure their maiden Test win on the island, the visitors lost only two wickets in the first session and looked determined to save the Test match.

But in a sensational collapse, they lost eight wickets for 40 runs after lunch to leave them all out for 132 and hand the hosts a 164-run victory.

Not a single batsman managed a half-century in the second innings with Nkrumah Bonner's 44 being the highest. Off-spinner Ramesh Mendis triggered the collapse when he

claimed three wickets in an over in the afternoon session.

He started off by breaking the 27-run third wicket partnership between Nkrumah Bonner and Shai Hope when Hope clipped one straight to Suranga Lakmal at square leg.

Then Roston Chase was superbly caught by Osada Fernando at short leg. Kyle Mayers survived the hat-trick ball but four balls later edged one to Dhananjaya de Silva at first slip.

It was a first 10 wicket Test for Mendis after he claimed career-best figures of six for 70 in the first innings. He has been the main tormentor for West Indies with 18 wickets in the series.

Playing just his fourth Test match, the 26-year-old Mendis has been a real find for Sri Lanka, bowling long spells and becoming his captain's most trusted bowler.

"One thing Ramesh does is

he spins the ball really big," said outgoing Sri Lanka head coach Mickey Arthur after he signed off with a win.

"We've just had to work on him being really consistent with his lines and with his lengths -- the attacking lines that he's worked on. I just think he's getting his just rewards now."

Mendis finished with a match bag of 11 wickets and was named Player of the Series, while Dhananjaya de Silva -- who hit an unbeaten 155 in Sri Lanka's second innings -- was declared the Man of the Match.

Mendis was well supported by left-arm orthodox spinner Lasith Embuldeniya, who also finished with a five-wicket haul in the second innings -- his fifth in Test cricket. Sri Lanka also collected 24 points on offer in the ICC Test Championship by winning both games. They had won the first Test by 187 runs.



'Possible for pacers to be effective in Mirpur'

AFP, Dhaka

Pakistan pace bowler Shaheen Afridi said on Friday he enjoyed bowling with Hasan Ali as the latter helped him put opponents under pressure in Test matches.

Afridi and Hasan have emerged as Pakistan's new pace bowling pair in 2021, taking 83 wickets in Tests between them. "I enjoy bowling with him. This year he has 39 wickets, I have 44. We bowl in partnership and plan between ourselves," Afridi told reporters in Dhaka ahead of the second Test against Bangladesh, starting Saturday.

If a batsman plays well, he added, the pair plan "how we can hold or confuse him. This is why I enjoy bowling with him. He is a fighter".

Hasan and Afridi shone in Pakistan's eight-wicket win over Bangladesh in the opening Test in Chittagong, each claiming five-fors.

Hasan finished with 5-51 in the first innings as Pakistan bowled out Bangladesh for 330 runs, while Afridi's 5-32 in the second innings kept the target within the visitors' reach. "The wickets in Asia are more or less slow. People say spinners get more assistance here. But if you are physically strong and have the strength it is possible to be effective here. You need to bowl in a partnership," Afridi added.

The hosts will be desperate to make a comeback in the second leg of the series, but Afridi promised them no let-up. "Momentum is good and the team combination is also brilliant," he said. "The boys are ready for the second Test. Of course, we will fight and end the series on a good note."

