

Disillusion affecting Shakib's Test motivation?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

There have been insinuations, remarks and opinions regarding all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's involvement in Test cricket from the media, cricket experts and even board officials.

Looking back, Shakib had missed a few Tests in recent years, lending credibility to arguments about his lack of interest in Tests. Opting out of the New Zealand tour and the consequent drama has put these arguments back in focus. However, there exist finer points between the two arguments that 'Shakib doesn't want to play Tests' and 'Shakib doesn't enjoy Tests'.

The second Test against Pakistan in Dhaka, which Bangladesh came very close to grinding out a draw from yesterday, showcased Shakib's enjoyment but also the demotivating factors.

Shakib played one of his very special knocks under pressure, but in the end the result did not go in Bangladesh's favour. When that happens, how does Shakib feel?

Shakib's ability to not allow anyone to dictate terms was once again on display as he did not let the bowlers feel they were on top of him for a moment. How he dealt with spinners was exemplary. The Pakistan spin duo had a general plan for the Bangladesh batters, getting the ball to pitch right in front of the bat and getting that slight turn to do the trick for them.

Shakib was able to adjust remarkably



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

within the same delivery, from a front foot to a slightly back foot stance. He did not need to release shots like Mushfiqur Rahim for instance, but was able to make adjustments late to keep scoring. From a pressure situation, Shakib had a groove about him which took Bangladesh close to a result.

A pivotal moment came when Mehedi got out to another sweep in the second innings which saw Pakistan come back into the game. As soon as the umpire had signaled not out and Pakistan went for

the review, Shakib vehemently chastised Mehedi for playing that shot. Mehedi's two dismissals were significant to the fate of the match.

Without arguing in Shakib's favour, when a good player sees the supporting cast fail alongside the team processes, any player has a tendency to be demotivated.

Shakib's long-term mentor Nazmul Abedeen Fahim analysed the scenario for The Daily Star.

"In the first innings, he counter-attacked to avoid the follow-on due to

match scenario. In the second innings, I was relieved to see that he wanted to play good cricket. What he did was very difficult because he needed to be in the groove for a long period of time. Unless you love the game and the challenge, you can't do that. One of his best innings," Fahim said.

"If he was careless, he wouldn't be able to play like that," he said.

However, once Miraj got out, Shakib changed too, even playing a lofted shot over mid-off that fell short, pointing to his dwindling morale.

"Take the case of Mahmudullah Riyad. He was told some 17 months before his Test retirement that he wouldn't be considered [for Tests]. How demotivated must he have felt? But his decision was like shooting yourself in the foot. It became an emotional thing and players are going through such demotivation at the moment," Fahim dictated.

It cannot be argued that there exists a gap in quality between the generation of the Big Five and the current crop of players.

When there are no correct procedures and the existence of haphazard selection process alongside bad results on the pitch, players will find a way to relieve workload or responsibility.

That may very well be the phase Shakib's Test career is going through. Not a lack of enjoyment but an existence of demotivation.

Non-existent top-order the only shocking thing!

NABID YEASIN



Bangladesh failed to put up a decent fight against Pakistan in the two-Test series, which concluded yesterday with the hosts' dramatic innings and eight-run defeat at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

What was more agonising than seeing the Tigers fall to an unfathomable defeat in a Test that had one entire day washed out and only 6.2 overs bowled on another day was how the fragility of Bangladesh's top-order was once brutally exposed again in front of the whole world.

The events that had transpired in the past few days should serve only to amplify pre-existing concerns regarding the country's cricketing future. 48, 19, 34 and 21 were the scores accumulated by the top four batters in the four innings of the two Tests.

On three occasions, Bangladesh's top-order was picked to pieces by the pace threat of Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi and Hasan Ali. Then it was inexperienced off-spinner Sajid Khan who single-handedly dismantled the entire batting line-up.

Closely scrutinising Bangladesh's batting, especially the top-order, would go a long way to showing how the Tigers were never in contention in any of the two Test matches against Pakistan.

While Shaheen and Hasan's pace, swing and bounce dumbfounded the Tigers' and depicted an age-old problem of not being technically solid enough to negotiate quality fast bowling, enabling a three-Test old Sajid to turn into a menace reflected deep flaws in the batters' thought process and approach.

In the second Test, Sajid ended with figures of 12 for 128, his career-best in the format. The off-spinner will probably be excited to tour the country in the future as well given how Bangladesh made his work easier by throwing wickets away in nonsensical manner at a point of a game when patience was the need of the hour.

The only two times that Bangladesh looked to be in control of the matches were when their middle-order clicked. Once when Mushfiqur Rahim and Liton Das instigated a fightback with a 206-run stand in the Chattogram Test and the other was yesterday when Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur, Liton and Mehedi Hasan Miraz compensated with a few decent partnerships after a horrible top-order collapse that forced Bangladesh to follow-on.

To sum it up in a sentence, Bangladesh's top-order was non-existent throughout the series. It was on the two rare occasions that the middle-order had somewhat saved the Tigers' face.

What is concerning is that Bangladesh, without much time to reflect on what went wrong in the Pakistan series, are now headed for a Two-Test series away to New Zealand, a side that the Tigers could never beat in their backyard in any format. They will also be without premier all-rounder Shakib, who had almost salvaged a draw yesterday with his 63-run knock.

However, the most horrifying part is that in the very little time that Bangladesh skipper Mominul Haque probably had to ponder and admit the flaws during the post-match presser, the 30-year-old ended up saying that not only was their batting approach justified but also that any questions regarding it were shocking.



Pakistan skipper Babar Azam (R) impersonates Mushfiqur Rahim (C) to the amusement of the former's teammates as the Bangladesh batter shadow practises following a block during the final day of the Dhaka Test yesterday. Mushfiqur played a gritty knock of 48, only to be dismissed through a run-out as Bangladesh's hopes of salvaging a draw faded.

PHOTO: STAR

'No excuses', Mominul says before defending batters

SPORTS REPORTER



A horrible batting display from the batters saw Bangladesh hit a new low in the longest format of the game as the hosts lost 13 wickets on an eventful fifth and final day to

crash to an innings and eight-run defeat to Pakistan in Mirpur yesterday.

Despite rain washing away almost seven sessions of the Test, Bangladesh were in trouble after being bundled out for 87 in the first innings in reply to Pakistan's 300 for 4 and being forced to follow-on. However, the questionable approach from the batters remained unchanged as the Tigers folded for 205 in the second innings.

"It was very disappointing, especially



were 25 for four in the second innings. It was difficult to bat out there but despite that Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib [Al Hasan] and Liton [Das] did well," said Mominul.

Interestingly, Mominul seemed to disagree with the notion that Bangladesh's batters had played aggressive cricket in the first innings, when a majority of the batters threw their wickets away chasing expansive strokes.

"I don't think everyone was out playing aggressive shots and I will support Mushfiqur, Liton and everyone. If you noticed, everyone was trying to play according to the merit of the ball. Unfortunately, they were unable to connect. It's very difficult to play too defensively on such wickets but ultimately my dismissal was very ugly because it was not right to look for a single from such a situation," he said.

Mominul was also questioned about the pressure of being the captain of a Test side that had been unable to improve over the years, but he said he was eager to take on tougher challenges,

including the upcoming two-Test tour of New Zealand.

Sajid Khan ended up picking 12 wickets during the game and Pakistan skipper Babar Azam opined that the off-spinner's eight-wicket haul in the first innings was the turning point of the game.

"I think the turning point was Sajid's spell, the way he picked up eight wickets in the first innings. That gave us momentum. I must also praise the seamers like Shaheen Afridi and Hasan Ali for picking up those early wickets in the second innings," Babar said.

With a second Test win, Pakistan completed a clean sweep on the tour, having earlier won the three-match T20I series. According to Babar, a total team effort helped his side maintain their purple patch.

"When you have a clear mindset and look to win, I think results go your way. My message was to put the effort and stick to the plan and just express yourself with a positive frame of mind," he said.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN

First Innings- 300 for 4 declared in 98.3 overs (Babar 76, Azhar 56, Fawad 50 not out, Rizwan 53 not out; Tajjul 2-73, Khaled 1-49, Ebadot 1-88)

BANGLADESH

First Innings- 87 all out & Second Innings- 205 all out in 84.4 overs (Shakib 63, Mushfiqur 48, Liton 45; Sajid 4-86, Hasan 2-37, Afridi 2-31)

RESULT

Pakistan won by an innings and 8 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Sajid Khan.
Player-of-the-series: Abid Ali.

the top four. It was a bad day since yesterday (Tuesday), when we lost seven wickets for just 71 runs. There is nothing to make excuses for. I think we batted very poorly and once again we



Mahmud in as Tigers leave for New Zealand

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) replaced all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan with uncapped Fazle Mahmud for the upcoming two-Test tour of New Zealand, for which the Tigers were scheduled to leave in the early hours of Thursday.

The Bangladesh squad was scheduled to depart for Dubai, UAE on way to New Zealand at 1:00am. The decision from the BCB comes after Shakib had opted out of the New Zealand series, part of the 2021-2023 cycle of the ICC World Test Championship, citing family reasons.

Shakib, however, was initially included in the 18-member squad for the tour despite verbally communicating his unavailability to the BCB. The board granted Shakib's leave application eventually. Shakib's absence opened the door for Mahmud, who earned a maiden call-up to the Test squad following a stellar showing in the recently concluded National Cricket League (NCL) in which the 33-year-old finished as the leading scorer with 630 runs at an average of 60.30.

The left-hander had previously featured in two ODIs for Bangladesh against Zimbabwe in 2018, failing to leave a mark as he was dismissed for ducks in both matches. The Bangladesh team, meanwhile, were boosted by the inclusion of Sri Lankan spin legend Rangana Herath, who has agreed to a two-year term extension as spin bowling coach and is set to join the squad in New Zealand.

Herath was the team's spin consultant for the away series against Zimbabwe this year followed by home series against Australia and New Zealand and the ICC Twenty20 World Cup.

Cummins savours 'dream start'

REUTERS

Pat Cummins needed only a few hours to crush 65 years of Australian scepticism over fast-bowling captains as he torched England with a five-wicket haul in the opening day of the Ashes on Wednesday.

Cummins replaced Tim Paine in the top job last month after the wicketkeeper resigned abruptly over a 'sexting' scandal, becoming the first quick to lead the side since Ray Lindwall captained for one Test in the mid-1950s against India.

There was plenty of concern over how Cummins would handle stepping up in the pressure of an Ashes series, but the 28-year-old strolled off with team-best figures of 5-38, having helped roll England for 147 by tea.

"Pretty crazy ... it's all gone to plan so far," Cummins said. "You're always in the



game on the morning of day one. "The body felt decent. I've bowled better before and haven't got as many rewards."

Though vice-captain under Paine, Australian media pundits had fretted over how Cummins would juggle captaincy and bowling. Cummins said he would lean heavily on vice-captain Steve Smith, who led the test side for over 30 matches before losing his job amid the 2018 Newlands ball-tampering scandal.

Cummins said he had plenty of good advice from his team mates on day one but in truth he had few big decisions to make or crises to overcome.

England skipper Joe Root won the toss, sparing Cummins the conundrum of whether to bat or bowl on a grassy wicket.

"It's tradition that if you bowl first and it doesn't work out you get hounded whereas if you bat first and it doesn't come off you kind of get left alone," he said.