

Shakib's decade of excellence

MAZHAR UDDIN

Unlike individual sports like tennis, golf, or even racing, cricket is a team sport which requires a collective approach to win matches on most occasions, if not all.

But even in cricket, there are some players whose consistent excellence have reached such heights that they regularly help their sides win matches almost single-handedly -- or as single-handedly as possible in a team sport.

Over the last decade, Bangladesh have made big strides in international cricket, especially in the fifty-over format in which the Tigers have established themselves as a force to reckon with.

And there is one particular cricketer who has lifted himself to a world-class standard over the last 10 years or so consistently for



Bangladesh and he is none other than Shakib Al Hasan. His impact both as a cricketer and also as a global figure from Bangladesh is something no sportsman of the country has achieved.

Shakib has taken himself and Bangladesh cricket to the next level by performing brilliantly and helping win matches on bigger stages. That was no easy task for someone playing for a side that -- especially when Shakib started his journey to consistently being at the top of the all-rounders' rankings -- was inexperienced compared to other top cricketing nations.

More importantly, Shakib remained consistent with his performances with both bat and ball.

Once again, his contributions were recognised by the governing body of world cricket after the ICC announced the teams of the decade in all three formats recently. Shakib was the only Bangladeshi in the ICC's teams as the champion all-rounder was named in the Men's ODI team of the decade.

His teammates are luminaries such as MS Dhoni, Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, David Warner, Ben

Stokes, or AB de Villiers. For many in the country, with memories of humiliations past still fresh in the mind, this may seem like high prestige, but it is to Shakib's immense credit that his place in rarefied company is not surprising. Such has been his impact for Bangladesh over a sustained period -- while his stats hold up to scrutiny even when seen in isolation -- that it is natural that he is rubbing shoulders with the sport's greats.

An intangible impact of his exploits is that he enabled other Bangladeshis to believe that it is possible to conquer the world if you have the focus and determination.

His rise is not a surprise for those who know Shakib well. The ace all-rounder hardly shows any emotions, regardless of whether he is at the highest or lowest point of his career, and that sets him apart.

Shakib perhaps has seen it all in his career. In the space of just six months, he put in the greatest all-rounder performance in World Cup history by scoring 606 runs and picking up 11 wickets, and then was suspended for a year after being found guilty of failing to report corrupt approaches from a bookie.

But even the darkest phase of his career was not able to overshadow the glow of his achievements over a stellar career. The latest recognition was the selection in the team of the decade, and be it for positive things or negative, Shakib remains the one Bangladeshi player at the centre of everyone's attention.



Australia players congratulate Ajinkya Rahane (C), who led India from the front to a dominant eight-wicket win in Melbourne yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

'One of the great comebacks'

AGENCIES



India coach Ravi Shastri hailed his team's eight-wicket win over Australia on Tuesday as one of the great comebacks of all time, praising their character after a crushing loss in the first Test last week.

Despite missing superstar Virat Kohli, the Indians outplayed the hosts in Melbourne to silence their critics after being dismissed for 36 in Adelaide on their way to an eight-wicket defeat. The four-Test series is level at 1-1.

"I think this will go down in the annals of Indian cricket, world cricket, as one of the great comebacks in the history of the

game away from us in Adelaide, but we still have a lot to learn," Rahane said in the post-match presentation.

Australia captain Tim Paine said: "We are very disappointed, we played pretty poor cricket, pretty sloppy cricket, for the majority of the match." "That's to take nothing away from India; they put us under pressure and forced us into making a number of mistakes, especially with the bat, and in the field, and when you do that against good side it makes it very hard to win."

"You've got to give the Indian attack credit, they've bowled beautifully to us, there's no doubt about that," Paine told the host broadcaster after the match.

Meanwhile, Sydney will remain the

"What a win this is, absolutely amazing effort by the whole team. Couldn't be happier for the boys and specially Jinks (Rahane) who led the team to victory amazingly."

VIKAS KOHLI

"(Australia) made 191 there (in Adelaide), 195 and 200 here. That's not batting in Test match cricket. And the worry I've got is how long it takes them to get those runs. That's my issue."

RICKY PONTING

game," said Shastri after they levelled the series 1-1.

"To be rolled over for 36, then three days later to get up and be ready to punch was outstanding. "I think the boys deserve all the credit for showing real character."

"To win a Test match without Virat, Rohit, Ishant & Shami is a terrific achievement. Loved the resilience and character shown by the team to put behind the loss in the 1st test and level the series. Brilliant win," tweeted batting great Sachin Tendulkar.

Shastri paid particular tribute to Rahane, who in contrast to Kohli is a less flamboyant captain, but equally effective.

"He is a very shrewd leader, he has a good understanding of the game, he's a good reader of the game," he said. "And I thought his calm composure out there in the middle, it helped the debutants and I think it helped the bowlers as well. It was a calming influence."

Rahane, meanwhile, said that India still need to learn.

"The talk was all about showing attitude, intent and character. One hour took the

venue for Australia's third Test against India, starting from January 7, despite the Covid-19 outbreak in the city's northern beach suburbs. Cricket Australia (CA) said on Tuesday.

Australia's most populous state of New South Wales (NSW) reported three new cases on Tuesday but CA decided against changing the venue.

"We have met regularly over the past week to assess the unfolding public health situation in Sydney and gauge its impact on border restrictions around the country," CA's interim chief executive Nick Hockley said in a statement.

"To that end, we have made the decision to keep the New Year's Test at the SCG (Sydney Cricket Ground)."

"We are confident that both this match, and the fourth test in Brisbane, will play out in a safe and successful manner." The Melbourne Cricket Ground was kept on standby to host back-to-back matches against India, who won the traditional Boxing Day test at the MCG by eight wickets on Tuesday.

SA complete innings victory

AGENCIES

Seam bowlers Wiaan Mulder and Lutho Sipamla took two wickets each as South Africa bowled injury-hit Sri Lanka out for 180 to complete a handsome victory by an innings and 45 runs on day four of the first Test at Centurion Park yesterday.

The tourists resumed their second innings on 65 for two on a wicket that provided plenty of assistance for the seam bowlers and when dangerous opener Kusal Perera was out for 64, their hopes of saving the Test were realistically over.

"A Test match is never easy. It's been a year since we've won one so it feels good at this moment," said South Africa captain Quinton de Kock.

Faf du Plessis was adjudged man of the match. "Personally I'm very proud of my CV, which is 199, which unfortunately one short, but it's always good to contribute in a big way to set your team up for a win... I haven't played a red-ball game in almost a year. For me it was just making sure I get back to the basics of Test cricket," said Faf.

Saif SC, Baridhara through

SPORTS REPORTER



Title contenders Saif SC edged past Arambagh KS with a single-goal win to advance into the quarterfinals of Walton Federation Cup in their final group-stage match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

With their third successive win, Saif SC emerged champions of Group B. Meanwhile, Uttar Baridhara thrashed Brothers Union 3-0 in the day's first game to finish second in the same group, clearing group stages of any tournament for the first time.

Having won the first two matches, Saif SC's Belgian coach Paul Put rested five regular players. But despite that move, Saif SC never seemed to be in trouble against Arambagh, who had to win the contest in order to qualify. Saif SC came close to breaking the deadlock on a few occasions in the first half while Arambagh could make just one mentionable attacking move. Saif SC's altered forward line-up failed to hit the target until Arifur Rahman came from the bench to score with his first touch in the 57th minute from the left flank, thanks to a deflection off a defender inside the danger area.

And that single goal was good enough for Saif SC as well as Uttar Baridhara Club, who, despite winning their match against Brothers



Saif Sporting Club's forward Arifur Rahman (2nd from R) celebrates the all-important goal against Arambagh in yesterday's Federation Cup match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

earlier, would not have qualified to the knockout stages had Arambagh won.

Uttar Baridhara Club started from where they had left off against Arambagh in their previous game as they took only 13 minutes to take the lead against Brothers. The Gopibagh-based outfit let three past them on the day as they crashed out of the Federation Cup, losing all three of their group-stage encounters and conceding as many as 11 goals.

Uttar Baridhara could have taken the lead sooner had national striker Suman Reza not missed a sitter from inside the six-yard box before Uzbek midfielder Evgeniy Kochnev

put them ahead in the 13th minute following a fumble from a Brothers defender.

Suman made amends later as he doubled their lead in the 26th minute, making most of a through-pass from Egyptian forward Abdel Khalek Hammad.

Suman, however, squandered another opportunity in the 32nd minute.

Egyptian defender Abdel Rahim wrapped up the victory for Uttar Baridhara in the 59th minute with a brilliant placing shot in between two defenders after he chested down a cross from Abdel Khalek Hammad from the right flank.

John Reid passes away

AGENCIES

John Fulton Reid, one of New Zealand's finest test batsmen, has died of cancer aged 64. The left-hander scored 1296 runs at an average of 46.28 from 19 Tests between 1979 and 1986, second behind Kane Williamson among compatriots to play more than 20 innings.

The pinnacle of his playing career arguably came in November 1985 during New Zealand's innings-and-41-run victory against Australia at the pacy 'Gabbra. Reid and Martin Crowe combined for a then-record 224-run third-wicket stand which helped their side to 553 for seven declared. Sir Richard Hadlee did the rest with 15 wickets for 123.

Reid was technically adept at the crease, and exuded particular elegance against spin.



SOUTHEE JOINS 300 CLUB

Swing king Tim Southee became the third New Zealander to reach 300 Test wickets as the Black Caps closed in on victory on the fourth day of the first cricket Test against Pakistan in Mount Maunganui. He sits behind only Sir Richard Hadlee (431) and Daniel Vettori (362) on New Zealand's all-time list. "It is special," Southee said. "Obviously not many people have been able to do it and the two that have are two of our greatest ever cricketers. It's nice to be in that bracket with those guys."

PHOTO: TWITTER

'Cavani is definitely a starter'

REUTERS

Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said striker Edinson Cavani is far too talented to be considered an impact substitute and the 33-year-old is likely to start more frequently as the Premier League season progresses.

Seven of Cavani's eight league appearances since he joined from Paris St Germain in October have come from the bench, though he has been in the starting lineup for several cup games.

"He's definitely a starter. You don't classify a player of that quality as anything else," Solskjaer told reporters. "We have plenty of starters. More than 11 and that's the thing when you're at United."

"We have good competition for places."

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