

Year after year, series after series, we returned empty-handed from New Zealand. It is one of the toughest things in cricket nowadays to beat New Zealand in their home. And we showed that we can!



TAMIM IQBAL

Can Bangladesh cricket harness the spark?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh eclipsed the peak of their cricketing excellence, going against the grain of their past efforts in New Zealand to clinch their very first win against the hosts by an eight-wicket margin.

Bangladesh cricket, since their pivotal ICC trophy win more than 24 years ago which got them into international cricket and to their first cricket World Cup in 1999, no Bangladesh side has shown the meritocracy needed to win a match in the hardest format of the game quite like Mominul Haque's men. The win against Pakistan in that 1999 World Cup, the show of force in their defeat of a strong India outfit in 2007 World Cup, knocking England out in 2015 World Cup before beating England and Australia at home in Tests had been in contention for Bangladesh's most glorious moment in cricket. But the fight, and most importantly application, shown against the world Test champions over five days, is easily Bangladesh's greatest achievement in cricket.

The win was Bangladesh's first in New Zealand against the hosts in 33 attempts and that too with a few key players missing and relatively inexperienced faces in the grandest format. The times have not been easy in Bangladesh cricket. A World Cup debacle in Dubai compounded the problems with distrust among players and management. Through the quarantine issues in the new normal and inadequate preparation in New Zealand, the team gelled under the most intense of testing scenarios, accomplishing the most unexpected.

"It was a big help to not have expectations," Mominul declared at the post-match press conference, not showing the same excitement befalling the moment. However, he did not fail to understand the magnitude of it. "I don't know whether your expectations will rise, thinking we will win the next Test. It's better not to expect so much. What you said, that expectation wasn't there from you guys (the media), we are thankful for that. Also, don't expect now that in two or three years we will become one of the world's top five or six sides," Mominul issued a word of warning to everyone concerned.

His words revealed a certain caution tinged with hope for the future. Having climbed the unassailable peak in 20 years since their first tour of New Zealand, the maturity and Test application shown in their greatest ever performance in any format, the captain's remarks harken back to some of the tremendous achievements in the past and how preciously scarce they were. Even as some achievements inspired generations, they did not impact our cricket in a process-oriented way. Thus, even through this victory, where Mominul said he was only 'focused on the process', the lack of that very thing in the country's cricketing structure will likely not change, and thus the dream first Test at Mount Maunganui may just remain another achievement without continuation.

Ebadot Hossain talked about inspiring the next generation with this win. Mominul drew a clearer picture later. "We have been able to find belief that we can play well and fight in foreign soil and it was important to show that."



The synergic process OF THE TIGERS

"It was all teamwork, everyone was keen to win this match. Everyone contributed in all departments," skipper Mominul Haque said, resolute in the belief that a collective effort and burning desire to win were the primary ingredients behind Bangladesh's historic maiden Test victory over New Zealand in Mount Maunganui yesterday. To substantiate his statement, we looked at each player's contribution, beyond just the numbers, in ensuring a historic win:

Ashfaq Ul Mushfiq

Shadman Islam, seeing out the new ball: Despite not scoring big runs, Shadman's 43-run opening stand with Mahmudul Hasan Joy till the 19th over was enough time for the new ball to wear, making life easier for the middle-order batters.

Mahmudul Hasan Joy, promise and patience: Playing in only his second Test, 21-year-old Joy's patient 228-ball stay that yielded 78 runs further hinted at a bright future. The youngster's demonstration of resilience against world-class bowlers also saw him bat until the third day.

Nazmul Hossain Shanto, keeping the momentum going: In his 104-run stand with Joy for the second wicket, Shanto was the aggressor. His knock of 64 runs was laced with seven boundaries and a maximum, which built the base for the Tigers to go on to amass a large total.

Mominul Haque, the quiet believer: Mominul played one of his greatest knocks anywhere and he did it through tremendous willpower and guts. Playing an 88-run knock off 244 balls, the skipper endured turmoil numerous times but managed to overcome them each time. When Bangladesh needed five wickets, his message was to believe

in the same process with the ball that they had followed throughout the match.

Mushfiqur Rahim, experience and grit: The most experienced batter in the squad came down to bat in the first innings when the Kiwi pacers looked ominous. But the diminutive wicketkeeper-batsman scored 19 runs in 18 patient overs alongside Mominul as the threat from the opposition slowly fizzled.

Liton Das, flash with substance: Cuts, pulls, drives, defence or even when it came to simply leaving the ball, Liton's 86 laced with 10 boundaries was a demonstration of elegant batting. His 158-run partnership with Mominul also proved pivotal as the visitors amassed 458.

Yasir Ali, a useful cameo: After a dominant display with the bat on the third day, Bangladesh lost their two set batters in Mominul and Liton. Historically, their tail-enders tend to collapse but Yasir Ali's 26 and Mehedi Hasan Miraz's 47 ensured this time would be different.

Mehedi Hasan Miraz, all-round brilliance: Alongside his performance with the bat, Miraz bagged three big wickets in the first innings to help the Tigers to put pressure on the Kiwi batters.

He also became the third Bangladeshi to score 1000 runs and pick up 100 wickets.

Taskin Ahmed, the workhorse: Taskin may not have scalped many wickets, but his consistency and desire to put the process first had a huge impact throughout the match. He not only contained runs but also put pressure on the New Zealand batters, leading to opportunities for other to utilize.

Shoriful Islam, resilience and maturity: Playing his second Test, Shoriful showed great resilience and maturity, providing breakthroughs when New Zealand were looking dangerous. Despite not picking any wickets in the second innings, he showed consistency and contained runs and one cannot forget his brilliant catch to send back Kyle Jamieson on the fifth morning.

Ebadot Hossain, the soldier who stood tall: Ebadot's emphatic six-wicket haul in the second innings turned the game on its head as it enabled the hosts to skittle out the Kiwis for 169 on the final day.

Tajjul Islam, the super sub: Although he came on as a substitute, Tajjul had a huge impact on the game with an absolute blinder of a catch in the outfield to get rid of Trent Boult.



"We did it," that's probably what Mushfiqur Rahim was whispering to Bangladesh Test skipper Mominul Haque as the most experienced pair in the squad walk off the ground after ensuring the Tigers' greatest ever triumph in their cricketing history.

PHOTO: AFP

What they said

"I congratulate the Bangladesh team for their outstanding success in New Zealand. We all know how teams struggle in difficult New Zealand conditions. I especially congratulate the young members of the team who have put up a collective performance. The batters batted brilliantly in the sporting track but also credit goes to the pacers who showed if there is something for the seamers, they can deliver and Ebadot proved that."

Former Bangladesh skipper Naimur Rahman

"Honestly, I have no words to describe the feelings. Being a selector and also as a former player, I think this is the biggest achievement for us in Test cricket. I have witnessed the inaugural Test match from the ground along with a few good matches but to me, this will remain right at the top of the list. It was a collective effort from all the players and it will be difficult to find one negative aspect from this game as everything was positive for us."

BCB selector Habibul Bashar



"We will only celebrate this win and it will go for the whole day [yesterday]. But from tomorrow [Thursday], we will think about cricket again. We have achieved a number of milestones over the years but one thing I can say is that this is the biggest achievement so far in Bangladesh's cricket history."

Bangladesh team director Khaled Mahmud

"Definitely this win will help us to build the structure of a Test playing nation which we have been yearning for since getting the Test status 21 years ago. Since I am still playing, I will definitely say things did improve in first-class competition recently but this win can help us boost morale and work further towards the development of domestic cricket."

Former Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraf

"It will surely go down as one of the great Test wins!! A team with little funding and a small first pool of players to choose from."

Former England captain Michael Vaughan

RECORDS GALORE FOR BANGLADESH

- With this win, Bangladesh ended New Zealand's incredible run of eight Test series wins on home soil since 2017. Bangladesh now lead the two-match series 1-0.
- Before yesterday's win, Bangladesh had lost all the 32 matches that they played against New Zealand across formats in their backyard.
- This is Bangladesh's only sixth win away from home in 60 Tests.
- Bangladesh's first win over New Zealand in 16 Tests played between each other.
- It is also Bangladesh's first win over a side ranked in the top five of the Test rankings away from home.
- Bangladesh ended New Zealand's 17-match unbeaten run in home Tests.
- After 2011, this is the first time that an Asian side beat New Zealand in a Test in their home.
- Ebadot Hossain's six for 46 in 21 overs is the best bowling figure by a Bangladeshi pacer in an innings in away Tests.
- It was the first time after 47 Tests that a Bangladeshi pacer bagged a fiver in the format.