



Bangladesh fast bowler Taskin Ahmed's bowling partner Shoriful Islam on one side and one of Tigers' key tactical minds in Shakib Al Hasan on the other, cheering for the pumped-up paceman after he broke the South Africa batters' resilience with a five-wicket haul, full of pace and guile, as the hosts collapsed to 154 all out in the series-deciding third one-day international at Supersport Park in Centurion yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

TASKIN RISES to the occasion

MAZHAR UDDIN

It takes immense willpower and focus for a cricketer to forgo a lucrative offer to play in the money-spinning Indian Premier League for the first time in his career and return the very next day to pick up a five-wicket haul.

The player in question is Taskin Ahmed, who has transformed his personality after being out of the national team for three years since the Tigers' previous tour of South Africa back in 2017.

The 26-year-old blew away the South African batting order in their den and ended with figures of five for 35 from nine overs, giving Bangladesh a huge opportunity to script history and get a maiden series win in South Africa with his heroics in the third and final ODI yesterday.

Interestingly, Taskin became the first away pacer in 10 years to scalp a filer in South Africa after Lasith Malinga had achieved the feat in 2012.

But Taskin's performance yesterday was neither unexpected nor surprising, given his mantra of sticking to the process and not thinking about outcomes, which has started to pay dividends in recent times.

After an impressive three-wicket haul in the first ODI, it was probably a good toss to lose for Tamim Iqbal as the hosts opted to bat on a Centurion pitch that had enough pace and bounce for

TASKIN'S BEST FIVE

- 5-28 against India, Mirpur, 2014
- 5-35 against South Africa, Centurion, 2022
- 4-46 against Sri Lanka, Mirpur, 2021
- 4-47 against Sri Lanka, Dambulla, 2017
- 4-59 against Afghanistan, Mirpur, 2016

Taskin to bank on.

Although South Africa made a flying start, racing to 46 in seven overs, the introduction of Taskin in the eighth saw the pacer immediately able to read the bounce offered by the surface.

After bowling two overs, Taskin swapped ends and picked up his first wicket by sending back Kyle Verreynne as the right-hander dragged a short and wide delivery from the seamer onto

the stumps.

In his next over, Taskin removed the dangerous Janneman Malan with some extra bounce. The right-hander moved towards the bowler, but was undone by some late movement away from his body, edging it to keeper Mushfiqur Rahim.

"I stuck to my process and basics and executed well and I am happy today (Wednesday). Yes, I got a bit of extra

bounce from the surface but I stuck to my process and line and length. I also tried to bring in some variation with cross-seam and seam-up deliveries," an elated Taskin said during a post-innings interview yesterday.

The tall quickie was brought back for his third spell by skipper Tamim in search of a few more wickets and he delivered, removing Dwaine Pretorius.

Although South Africa were in dire straits after being reduced to 107 for six, David Miller looked key to posting a fighting total in the series-decider.

But Taskin had other ideas, delivering a double-blow and going for the kill. He first removed Miller, who initially shuffled towards the off-side but Taskin followed him and bowled a length delivery at his hips that the left-hander could only edge to Mushfiqur Rahim behind the stumps.

Two balls later, the moment that Taskin had been waiting for finally came as he registered a second five-wicket haul to follow up his filer on debut against India in 2014.

A gem of a delivery to Kagiso Rabada tempted the batter as a fuller delivery landed outside the off stump. And it proved too good for the tail-ender, who could only get an outside edge.

Taskin's joy knew no bounds after reaching the milestone, taking off with his trademark celebration and thanking the Almighty after finally getting what he deserved.

Cabrera era starts against Maldives today

SPORTS REPORTER

New coach Javier Cabrera will want his charges to carry out his game plan perfectly when Bangladesh lock horns against Maldives in a FIFA international friendly at the National Stadium in Male today.

Since the separation with English coach Jamie Day, Bangladesh played two international tournaments under two interim coaches last year, but success remained elusive. Today's match is going to be a test for Cabrera, who got only four days to prepare the team for the match against Maldives.

Cabrera will certainly hope for a positive start to his era but all will depend on how the players carry out the plan.

"Each coach has their own style and impact. Our new coach has different ideas compared to previous coaches and we have to implement the ideas. I think we can do it because the players know each other for last six to seven years. We



have to adjust even though we did not have a long time to practise together," captain Jamal Bhuiyan was quoted as saying during the official press conference in Male yesterday.

While staying together for a long time can be a great advantage for Bangladesh, they will certainly miss the services of some key players, especially in defence.

Tapu Barman, Yeasin Khan and Riyadul Hasan Rafi managed the centre-back positions recently, but none of them are with the squad. The only regular centre-back in the squad is Tutul Hossain Badsha.

Cabrera is likely to keep the midfield compact in a bid to lessen the pressure on the defence. However, the Spaniard has a big problem in upfront as the forwards were not in form in the Bangladesh Premier League. Nabib Newaj Jibon and Suman Reza were inconsistent for their respective clubs.

Cabrera had almost three-hour training sessions on each of the three days the team trained at the Bashundhara Kings Arena before their departing for Male.

"It has been four days for our preparation and I think it is time to adjust and we are getting ready for tomorrow," Cabrera said. "I am extremely happy with the way the boys fought and that is commitment every player showed in each position. I am absolutely convinced with the forwards and the defenders who will play against Maldives tomorrow."

Bangladesh beat Maldives five times, drew four times and suffered four defeats in 13 meetings between the two sides. The last time these two sides met ended in a 2-1 win for Bangladesh, a win that ended an 18-year winless streak for the men in red and green against the island nation.

Master of many, Barty, says goodbye

AGENCIES

Multi-talented Ashleigh Barty excels at so many sports that she has played professional cricket and even won a golf tournament, but it was in tennis where she rose to become the best in the world.

In January she took her place among the giants of Australian sport by winning her home Grand Slam.

It was fitting that Chris O'Neil, the last home-grown player to win the Australian Open, in 1978, was in the stadium to witness Barty ending a 44-year hoodoo and thrilling a nation glued to their televisions.

Less than two months later, Barty on Wednesday announced her shock retirement from tennis aged just 25.

She leaves the sport having been world number one for more than two years and with three Grand Slam singles titles, having also won the French Open in 2019 and Wimbledon last year.

It is unclear what she will do next, but it would be no surprise if Barty ended up becoming a champion in another sport, because few athletes can boast



such a varied sporting CV as the down-to-earth Barty.

"I know how much work it takes to bring the best out of yourself ... I don't have that in me anymore," she said in video posted on her Instagram account on Wednesday.

"I don't have the physical drive, the emotional want and everything it takes to challenge yourself at the very top level any more. I am spent."

It marks Barty's second retirement from the sport, having walked away from the game as a teenager in late-2014 after becoming disaffected by the Tour.

Barty's surprise retirement from tennis was met with shock and an outpouring of well wishes from current and former greats Wednesday.

Karolina Pliskova, who Barty defeated to win Wimbledon last year, congratulated the Australian for an "incredible career".

"It was a privilege to share a court with you," tweeted the Czech former world number one. "You will be missed."

Britain's three-time Grand Slam champion and former number one Andy Murray said on Twitter: "Happy for @ashbarty. Gutted for tennis. What a player".

Crunch time for Portugal and Italy



Cristiano Ronaldo looks a picture of concentration as the Portugal team train in Oeiras recently ahead of tonight's crucial World Cup qualifying playoff semifinal against Turkey.

PHOTO: AFP

AFP, PARIS

The World Cup hopes of the last two European champions are on a knife edge with Portugal and Italy on a collision course in decisive qualifying play-offs over the next week.

A potential clash in Porto between the Euro 2016 winners, captained by Cristiano Ronaldo, and an Italy team who succeeded them as continental champions last year is a mouth-watering prospect. However, both must first come through semi-finals on Thursday that are far from foregone conclusions, with Portugal hosting Turkey and Italy facing North Macedonia.

Failure to reach this year's World Cup would be a catastrophe for the Azzurri, who had gone to every finals since 1958 until missing out in 2018 when they lost a play-off to Sweden. It would be all the more remarkable given that they bounced back from that under Roberto Mancini to win Euro 2020.