



Mushfiqur Rahim swept one off Simon Harmer to bring up a richly-deserved half-century as Bangladesh showed some fight on the third morning, facing a massive first-innings total set by South Africa. But two balls later, the veteran batsman attempted a reverse-sweep off a full delivery from Harmer, losing his castle in the process as his bat went nowhere near the ball. A collapse followed and Bangladesh were facing a heavy defeat. Taijul islam (bottom) took three wickets in South Africa's second essay for a match-total of nine wickets.

PHOTO: AFP

A purposeless mentality

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh batting mainstay Mushfiqur Rahim had kept his promise by resorting to one of his go-to shots but it all came at the cost of putting his side in complete disarray during the third day of the second Test against South Africa at the St George's Park in Gqeberha yesterday.

Right after reaching his 50 of 134 balls, the experienced batter went for an outrageous reverse-sweep shot at a crucial juncture of the game, at the stroke of lunch, when his side desperately needed his presence at the crease to avoid the follow-on.

The third day morning had promised to show the proverbial day with some brave and resilient display from the two overnight batters Yasir Ali Rabbi and Mushfiqur. However, the manner of dismissals of the duo, coupled with opener Tamim Iqbal's hurried attempt to pile up runs under his belt in the previous day, gave enough evidence that there was a lack of clarity in the 'Tigers' modus operandi on the batting front. It was in stark contrast to how the inexperienced troops of Mominul Haque performed in New Zealand earlier this year.

Before Mushfiqur's blunder, Yasir Ali was guilty of playing across the line to Keshav Maharaj, who was turning the ball sharply from the onset of his spell. Mushfiqur had the glorious opportunity to consolidate with Mehedi Hasan Miraz but he chose the risky road.

It is worth remembering that the wicketkeeper-batter had made his intentions clear in May last year, where Mushfiqur mentioned that he was ready to embrace the consequences, even at the possibility of letting his team down.

"If the situation arises, I'll play not one but four to five reverse sweeps next time," Mushfiqur said after his cool-headed and match-winning 125 against Sri Lanka, in a game where he curbed his natural tendency to play the infamous reverse-sweep shot.

Unfortunately for Bangladesh, the situation might have been conducive for Mushfiqur to opt for the



SCORES IN BRIEF (DAY-3)

South Africa: First innings- 453 all out and second innings- 176 for 6 dec (Erwee 41, Elgar 26, Petersen 14, Bavuma 30, Verreynne 39 not out; Taijul 3-69, Miraz 2-34, Khaled 1-38)
Bangladesh: First innings-217 all out (Tamim 47, Mushfiqur 51, Yasir 46; ; Olivier 2-39, Harmer 3-39, Maharaj 2-57, Mulder 3-25) and second innings -- 27 for 3 (Tamim 13, Joy 0, Shanto 7; Maharaj 2-17, Harmer 1-8)

shot that was uncalled for but someone like Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, mentor to many leading cricketers in the country, would differ with him.

"There are a lot of factors to consider over here. One of which can be, that being the only established batter on the pitch and as he was playing for a while, having scored a fifty, his confidence should have been high before lunch," observed Fahim.

"It's obvious for any batter to think that he should play defensively ahead of lunch. I understand it's a rush

of blood, but why would a batter play such an extreme shot at this stage?

"We do expect that they will act responsibly. Mushfiq should've taken the game to lunch, as he could've stitched a partnership with Miraz and could've avoided the follow-on," said a disappointed Fahim.

"He can do that well in practice, but as far as I've seen, his conversion rate of reverse sweep isn't that good. Without mastery, playing this shot is very risky. And also, you can see turns on the wicket, so it's very difficult to play such shots. It wasn't the right thing to do, taking such a risk at this stage," added the respected mentor to many including Mushfiqur.

Fahim found the Bangladesh batters mentally disorganised in the ongoing Test.

"The way Tamim played, it looked like he didn't mind getting out but he wanted to play the shot. Being an experienced player like him in Tests, also being in a good form, he didn't look like he wanted to extend his innings.

"Sometimes, when the batter doesn't trust himself, he goes on to play aggressive shots, which can be a factor. I mean, they looked very vulnerable to me. It looked like, as if, they had given up already.

"If you look at the game against New Zealand in the first Test, our effort was to play as long as we can and try to draw the match if possible. And patient approach became the main reason for us to eventually win the match," he explained.

Fahim was mostly frustrated not because of the result but due to seemingly non-existent approach.

"There should be one or two who should stand out and not give up, didn't see that from anyone. The dressing room isn't the state it was supposed to be. The attitude to play more balls to score runs is missing," observed the veteran coach.

Hosts South Africa already sit with a fine cushion to whitewash the Tigers in the Test series after losing the ODI series and in the end, it would not be the result but the attitude that would hurt the Tigers the most.

Ronaldo phone incident being investigated

REUTERS

Merseyside police said on Sunday they were reviewing CCTV footage to establish if Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo committed an offence by knocking a mobile phone out of a supporter's hand after his team's 1-0 defeat at Everton.

Footage emerged on social media of Ronaldo appearing to swipe his hand towards the ground as he walked off the pitch and headed for the tunnel at Goodison Park after Saturday's match.

Eyewitnesses said the 37-year-old had knocked a fan's phone out of their hand and smashed it to the ground and Ronaldo later took to Instagram to apologise for the incident. Read full story

A spokesperson for Merseyside Police said the force was liaising with both clubs after reports of an alleged assault.

"As players were leaving the pitch at 2.30pm, it was reported that a boy was assaulted by one of the away team as they left the pitch," the spokesperson said.

"Inquiries are under way and officers are currently working with Everton Football Club to review CCTV footage and are carrying out extensive witness enquiries to establish if an offence has taken place."



'Tottenham feel the blood'

REUTERS

Tottenham Hotspur manager Antonio Conte said his team could "feel the blood" of their rivals and capitalised on their slips as the north London club tightened their grip on the fourth place in the Premier League with a 4-0 win at Aston Villa.

Son Heung-min's hat-trick on Saturday helped Tottenham open a three-point lead over rivals Arsenal, with Conte's team fourth in the league on 57 points after 31 matches.

"It was a great win for us, especially coming after your rivals have played and lost: Wolverhampton, Manchester United and Arsenal," Conte said.

"In this moment you start to feel the blood. It is important in this moment not to fail. We are working a lot on the mentality and the players are giving me satisfaction.

"At the same time, I know we have to work on this improvement. Because there are not only the tactical, technical and physical aspects but there is the mentality. There is a lot of space for improvement."

Tottenham next host 11th-placed Brighton & Hove Albion on April 16.

Nedo-boosted Abahani approach Valencia

SPORTS REPORTER

With the in-form Dorielton Gomes sidelined following a groin injury, Abahani would be banking on Nedo Turkovic in the AFC Cup play-off match against Maldives' Club Valencia on Tuesday in Sylhet.

However, Valencia, who arrived into the AFC Cup play-off stage after beating Bhutan's Paro FC 2-1 in Male, are not certain to come to Bangladesh due to financial constraints.

"I've heard unofficially that they [Club Valencia] are not coming due to the financial crisis but there is no official announcement, so we are taking our preparation to play the match," informed Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu yesterday.

If Club Valencia end up giving a walkover, then Abahani will advance in the competition to play the winners between Blue Star of Sri Lanka and ATK Mohun Bagan of India on April 19.

Otherwise, Abahani would be heading into the game without their star player Dorielton, who already tallied seven goals in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) after playing a key role in making the Sky Blues champions in the Federation Cup and the Independence Cup by scoring four goals in both the tournaments. Nevertheless, they managed to rope in Nedo from Swadhinata KS to fill the Brazilian's void for their crucial AFC Cup fixture.



Nedo, six feet and three inches tall, is perhaps the biggest striker in this BPL season and the Bosnian forward had netted four goals for his BPL side Swadhinata, currently dwelling at the bottom of the league table.

"Nedo is going to replace him [Dorielton]. He is big and a box player. We have to give him the ball and hope he can help us," Abahani coach Mario Lemos evaluated his new recruit, who began training with the Sky Blues yesterday.

"Nedo has not played with Abahani before but from what we have seen, he will be helpful for us if our players can support him during the play," Abahani manager told The Daily Star yesterday.

Rupu further added that Abahani would succeed if they can play their natural game against Valencia.

"Valencia is a very technical team. They like to play a passing game and love to control the game. Their Spanish players have the tendency to feed the forwards, so we can't give them any space," Lemos told The Daily Star about his upcoming opponents, who were scheduled to land in Dhaka last night and fly to Sylhet this morning.

Lemos is optimistic about overcoming the Maldivian hurdle.

"I'm confident of advancing to the next level because we are playing at home, and I think we have a good chance to go through but it won't be easy. We have to stay very disciplined and focused during the match," Lemos said.



Paris Saint-Germain's Neymar celebrates with Kylian Mbappe after scoring one against Clermont Foot 63 in their Ligue 1 fixture in Clermont-Ferrand on Saturday. Both the Brazilian and the Frenchman bagged a hattrick each as the capital giants moved 15 points clear of second-placed Rennes, with seven games remaining.

PHOTO: AFP