

“The two boards have great relations. We help each other a lot. Just like I would want my team to win at all cost, they would have the same feeling. I am sure that both teams will never let it go off the field.”

Shakib Al Hasan
after Bangladesh’s dramatic win over Sri Lanka in a must-win game of the Nidahas Twenty20 Tri-Series in Colombo in 2018.





It takes two to tango

It began with one ‘nagin dance’ but did not end there. It only kept escalating and soon it became an Asian rivalry feisty enough to keep even the most detached Bangladesh cricket fan’s eyes glued to the TV. The rivalry between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka had been pretty exciting and challenged the levels of determination from both sides but it never quite transpired to the red-ball format, much of it down to Bangladesh’s failings in the game’s hardest format that is Test cricket.

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The exultation of triumphing in close encounters and the celebrations thereafter all became symbolic of the rivalry, which peaked in 2018. Sri Lanka had won a tri-nation series ODI series, clinched a two-match Test series 1-0 and the T20I series 2-0 at the start of the year in the Tigers’ den. Nazmul Islam Apu had been known for his ‘nagin dance’ celebrations in the domestic circuit but during one game in Sylhet, Sri Lanka’s Danushka Gunathilaka had mimicked that celebration.

Many may not have remembered but that impersonation triggered something in the Tigers’ dressing room, particularly in Mushfiqur Rahim. He retaliated back with venom in the Nidahas Trophy in March that year in a tri-nation T20I series in Sri Lanka that also involved India. Bangladesh toppled Sri Lanka’s massive 214 with Mushfiqur playing a big hand in the win and he celebrated with a ‘nagin dance’ that did not please the Lankan Lions.

The Lions would do their own celebrations in the next game, a virtual semi-final where the winner would take on India. The game went to the wire with plenty happening in the field and the sidelines as Bangladesh successfully chased down Sri Lanka’s total with a penultimate delivery six from Mahmudullah Riyad. While Riyad

had kept his calm on the field, a no-ball controversy in that eventful last over had seen skipper Shakib Al Hasan almost successfully call his players off the field in protest.

Eventually the game got underway and as Mahmudullah held his nerve, the joy outpoured as the whole Bangladesh outfit

was felt in the final when the Sri Lankan crowd supported India in the final against Bangladesh.

“It’s not bad to have that kind of rivalry. Sometimes it makes the game more exciting,”

Bangladesh’s current ODI captain Tamim Iqbal would say later about the rivalry. However, the rivalry did not quite get reflected since that series and in the Test format, the results have been pretty one-sided. Till date, Bangladesh have been able to win just one Test against Sri Lanka, the one they won in their 100th Test in Colombo in 2017.

As Sri Lanka come for another tour of Bangladesh, with the first Test slated for May 15, the onus on Bangladesh will be to make something meaningful of the rivalry in the longest format. The shorter formats might have been juiced by the adrenaline rush but in Tests, more calm heads will be required. The two

teams are pretty similar in strengths but the Tigers have found some belief in their Test abilities with a win over New Zealand in their home soil.

Playing Sri Lanka at home has always been a tough proposition but the confidence from the resurgent pace battery and a few young batters may just instigate a fire in the Bangladesh dressing room to light up the series.



celebrated with nagin dance out in the middle. Nurul Hasan, not even in the playing eleven that night, was raging at a few Lankan stars as things got out of hand. Later, images appeared of Bangladesh’s dressing room glass being smashed to bits in an electric game. Much was said later with Shakib putting in a conciliatory tone but the effect of the rivalry

‘We should not do anything that backfires’

Mohammad Ashraful’s connection to Sri Lanka is probably stronger than anyone else’s in Bangladesh cricket. Not only did the cricketer burst onto the scene by becoming the youngest Test centurion in history on debut against the Islanders, he also scored 190 in his last series to help Bangladesh draw a Test match in the island nation for the first time. The former Bangladesh captain shared his experience with The Daily Star’s Mazhar Uddin ahead of the upcoming home series against the Lankans. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): What has been the difference between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka over the years?

Mohammad Ashraful (MA): I would say it’s experience. We were not experienced after getting Test status in 2000 but I can say we have come a long way in the past 22 years. However, the fact is that Sri Lanka have been playing Test cricket since long before us and they were even world champions (in 1996). We have players like Mushfiqur [Rahim], Shakib [Al Hasan], Tamim [Iqbal] and Mominul [Haque], all players that have played over fifty Tests. I can compare the Sri Lanka side from when we started to the current Bangladesh team as they also had the presence of senior veterans like [Sanath] Jayasuriya, [Mahela] Jayawardene, [Kumar] Sangakkara, and [Muttiah] Muralitharan in the team.

DS: How do you view the growing rivalry between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in limited-overs formats?

MA: I think it’s very normal and it started back in 2012-13, when we started to dominate them. Mushfiqur struck a maiden double hundred, Nasir scored a hundred and I also scored 190. Drawing the Test and ODI series helped us gain belief. Initially, for the first 12 years, we used to surrender against them but that started to change in 2012 and we started to become competitive.

DS: Despite Bangladesh being competitive in limited-overs formats, Sri Lanka still dominates the Tigers in Tests. What is the reason for that?

MA: We play a lot more ODI and limited-overs cricket than Test or longer-version cricket. Although we have played over 120 Tests, there were stretches of time when we didn’t play Test cricket for eight months, nine months and even 16 months. We even played only one Test a year and that is one of the biggest reasons we have been found to be lacking in the Test format. Sri Lanka are ahead of us because they play a lot of Test cricket and because of their domestic structure, especially the emphasis they give to school cricket.

DS: What could be the biggest challenge for Bangladesh in the upcoming series? Do you think Bangladesh can win the series?

MA: The weather can play foul as rain has been forecast during both Tests. We should not do anything that backfires. We prepared a spinning track for the last series in Mirpur and went on to lose the series against Pakistan. Since rain is forecast, there is less chance of the full five days of cricket. It will be important how the team management approach things and whether they will look to win or draw. It would be wise to prepare a batting pitch since our batters are not in a very good rhythm, as they showed during the performances in South Africa. I think it would be better not to prepare a tricky wicket.

DS: Many say that Bangladeshi players lack patience when it comes to Test cricket. What is your take on that?

MA: I really liked the way our batters played during the victory against New Zealand at Mount Maunganui earlier this year. Even former Kiwi players said that the Bangladeshi batters were strong in terms of their defence, which was a big reason for success. But later we saw our batters switch from defence to attack. Things may not go your way every day, but I believe they will improve gradually. We lost against Pakistan at home after going on the attack, similar to the second Test in New Zealand and also in South Africa. If our batters remain strong in terms of defence, it will give us better results in Test cricket.



Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Test Records

Remarkable Muralitharan

Muttiah Muralitharan’s record against Bangladesh was remarkable. In 11 Tests, he took 11 five-wicket hauls, picking up ten wickets in a match on four separate occasions.

Ashraful’s success

Mohammad Ashraful is the most successful batter for Bangladesh against Sri Lanka in Tests, scoring 1090 runs at an average of 45.41 with five centuries and one fifty. He created history by becoming the youngest ever player, aged 17 years and 61 days, to score a century in the format at Colombo in 2001.

Mushy’s double

Mushfiqur Rahim became the first Bangladeshi to score a double century in Tests when the batter scored a 321-ball 200 against Sri Lanka at Galle in 2013 to help Bangladesh earn their first draw in the format against the Lankans.

Dominant Sangakkara

Kumar Sangakkara’s dominance against Bangladesh in Tests was extraordinary. In 21 innings, he scored 1816 runs. Mahela Jayawardene’s 1146 is the next highest by any batter from either side.

One way traffic

Since Sri Lanka and Bangladesh first met in the longest format in 2001, it has been a one-way traffic with Sri Lanka winning 17 and losing just one of their 22 meetings.

Double delight

A total of eight batters have scored double centuries in Tests between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, with Kumar Sangakkara scoring the highest individual innings, hitting 319 runs, at Chattogram in 2014.

TOP FIVE BATTERS (BANGLADESH)					
Player	Matches	Runs	Average	100	Highest
Mohammad Ashraful	13	1090	45.41	5	190
Mushfiqur Rahim	15	1043	45.34	1	200
Mominul Haque	9	884	58.93	4	176
Tamim Iqbal	11	784	37.33	0	92
Shakib Al Hasan	7	527	40.53	1	116

TOP FIVE BOWLERS (BANGLADESH)					
Player	Matches	Wickets	Average	BBI	BBM
Shakib Al Hasan	7	29	41.17	5/70	6/154
Shahadat Hossain	10	24	46.20	5/86	5/129
Tajjul Islam	5	22	35.18	5/72	8/159
Mehidy Hasan Miraz	6	19	50.57	4/113	6/190
Mustafizur Rahman	4	14	28.50	3/49	5/66

TOP FIVE BATTERS (SRI LANKA):					
Player	Matches	Runs	Average	100	Highest
Kumar Sangakkara	15	1816	95.57	7	319
Mahela Jayawardene	13	1146	76.40	5	203*
Tillakaratne Dilshan	11	1008	72.00	4	168
Dimuth Karunaratne	10	834	49.05	3	244
Dinesh Chandimal	8	700	77.77	4	138

TOP FIVE BOWLERS (SRI LANKA)					
Player	Matches	Wickets	Average	BBI	BBM
Muttiah Muralitharan	11	89	13.37	6/18	12/82
Rangana Herath	10	50	24.76	7/89	12/157
Dilhara Fernando	8	28	19.28	5/60	7/95
Lasith Malinga	7	27	24.81	4/25	5/111
Dilruwan Perera	6	23	37.21	5/109	5/119

TOP FIVE HIGHEST INDIVIDUAL SCORES FOR BANGLADESH			
Player	Score	Venue	Match Date
Mushfiqur Rahim	200	Galle	8 March 2013
Mohammad Ashraful	190	Galle	8 March 2013
Mominul Haque	176	Chattogram	31 January 2018
Najmul Hossain Shanto	163	Pallekele	21 April 2021
Mohammad Ashraful	136	Chattogram	28 February 2006



Win! Sweet Win!

Bangladesh celebrated their 100th Test match with a four-wicket victory against Sri Lanka, chasing down 191 on the fifth and final day in Colombo in 2017. The Mushfiqur Rahim-led side took a 129-run lead after ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan scored a century. After stopping the hosts at 319 in their second innings, player-of-the-match Tamim Iqbal hit 82 runs to guide the Tigers over the line. It was Bangladesh’s ninth Test win overall and only their fourth overseas.

