

'Now I know the nature of Test cricket'

SPORTS REPORTER

Liton Das has been the name of a revolution for Bangladesh over the past one year or so as the elegant right-hander keeps taking his game to greater heights with commendable consistency.

With a magnificent 141-run knock against Sri Lanka in the second Test, Liton combined with another centurion Mushfiqur Rahim to rescue the Tigers from a disastrous position of 24 for 5 to eventually post a total of 365 runs in the first innings.

It was Liton's third hundred in the last seven months in the longest format and undoubtedly, his sheer elegance despite being under tremendous pressure remained the highlight of his innings as he went on to dominate the Lankan bowlers.

It seems something has definitely transformed in



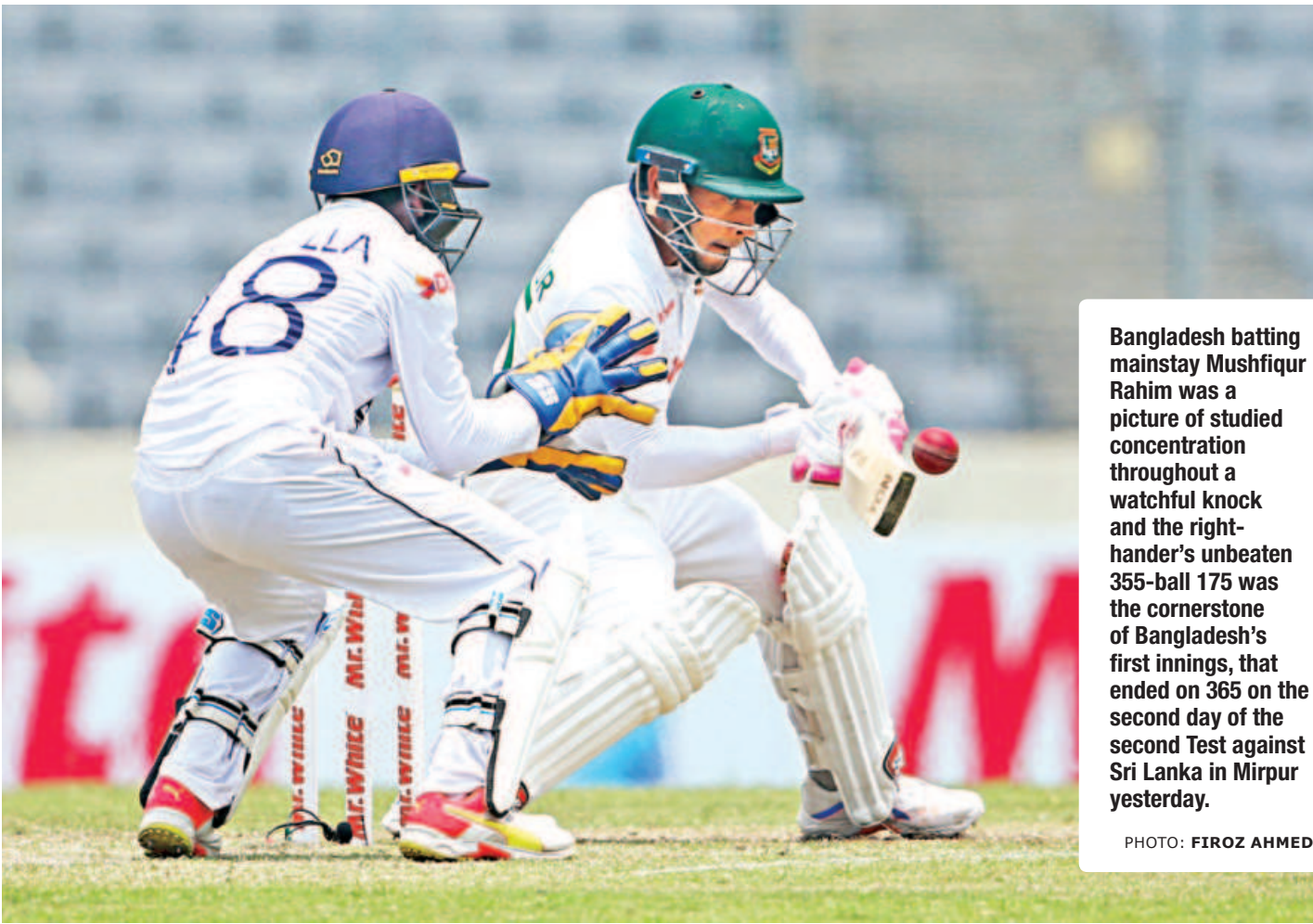
Liton's batting approach since the 27-year-old has been a prolific run scorer for the Tigers and averages fifty-plus in both Tests and ODIs for the last year.

"I've changed the method of my training but I can't tell you the specifics of the changes, better I keep that inside me," said a rather introverted Liton to the media after the second day's play in Mirpur yesterday.

"The team want me to perform and expect me to play a long innings and it remains on the back of my mind. Now I know what the nature of Test cricket is and how long I need to bat to score big. The suggestion from [former batting coach Ashwell Prince] Prince worked well for me. I still follow his advice to bat long."

Not so long ago, Liton's lack of consistency for a highly talented cricketer had induced heavy criticisms.

"I do try my best all the time. At times I fail, which is part of a cricketer's life. People will praise me if I do well today and I need to accept that and move on," said the wicketkeeper-batter.



Bangladesh batting mainstay Mushfiqur Rahim was a picture of studied concentration throughout a watchful knock and the right-hander's unbeaten 355-ball 175 was the cornerstone of Bangladesh's first innings, that ended on 365 on the second day of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

CONFIDENT, COMPACT, COMPOSED

Mushy 'turning over a new leaf'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

"He has a deeper understanding of his game and that is making the difference," Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a long-term mentor to Mushfiqur Rahim, said about one of his favourite students while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

Mushfiqur's adherence to discipline is well known. Usually first to training sessions, Mushfiqur manages his routine industriously. However, 17 years since his debut, a determination that kept the hunger alive has never waned. It is almost surprising to hear that someone has learned how to better understand their own game over such a long career. But in Mushfiqur's case, signs are that he is turning over a new leaf.

There was a stillness to Mushfiqur, portrayed very well over the last two days, that had not been seen before. There was no anxiety in trying to do something extra or force the issue. His technique and mindset all perfectly fused to meet the match scenario.

"His skill level has increased. There are a lot more shots in his arsenal. If you look at his scoring chart, you will see that he has increased range whether you talk about drives or pull shots. He has a lot of confidence in his batting and it is showing. The increased ability has made his confidence level rise to new heights and he appears to be even more ready to score runs now," Fahim said of Mushfiqur's confidence following an

SCORES IN BRIEF (Day-2)

BANGLADESH V SRI LANKA

Bangladesh: First innings-365 all out in 116.2 overs (Mushfiqur 175 not out, Liton 141, Taijul 15; Rajitha 5-64, Fernando 4-93)

Sri Lanka: First innings-143 for 2 in 46 overs (Oshada Fernando 57, Karunaratne 70 not out, Mendis 11; Ebadot 1-31, Shakib 1-19)

unbeaten 175 yesterday.

A few drives caressed the green carpet of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium and the positions he was getting himself into, especially to play some eye-catching cover drives, left the image of a Mushfiqur more compact than ever. That compactness has seen the confidence in his defensive shots rise to a new level.

"Compactness is everything. If you look at his defence, it is all about being compact. When a batsman feels that confidence in his defence, it is easier to get behind the line of deliveries and easier to spend time at the crease," Fahim opined.

Mushy's two back-to-back tons were far apart in terms of approach too. "The Chattogram innings gave him confidence, but in Dhaka he was freer and more

confident and he scored a lot more boundaries," Fahim said.

Mushfiqur even brought out his reverse-sweep on the second day, having avoided it altogether in Chattogram and on the first day in Dhaka. The shot has caused Mushfiqur much suffering over a long career but he never shied away from saying that it was a shot he felt comfortable with.

However, when he played the shot yesterday, it did not feel out of place. "The field was setup in a way to cut out boundaries and he picked the right deliveries," Fahim opined on Mushfiqur's reverse-sweep.

Mushfiqur records all his practice sessions and goes through them, putting his phone on 'flight mode'. Asked if Mushfiqur is now turning over a new leaf in his Test career, Fahim said: "Of course I feel he's turning over a new leaf and I am hoping he will keep scoring."

"He is enjoying his game and that is getting him more success," Fahim concluded about Bangladesh's 'Mr. Dependable'.

Just as Liton Das was feeling more confident in his new approach, Mushfiqur is also finding out his game better. "When you have discipline, it enables you to play a long period in Tests," Liton Das said yesterday at the press conference when asked about whether discipline was his and Mushy's biggest strength. Confidence, enjoyment and composure, it's all coming together for Mushfiqur.

My heart beat starts to accelerate, says Ancelotti

REUTERS

Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti said his team's performances were far from perfect on their journey to Saturday's Champions League final against Liverpool, but they managed to get there mainly thanks to their grit in the decisive moments.

"We haven't displayed exceptional quality in our play, but no one has beaten us in terms of commitment and motivation," Ancelotti told a news conference in the Spanish capital.

Ancelotti said his team were "calm and motivated" ahead of Saturday's game and that Kylian Mbappe's decision to stay with Paris St Germain instead of moving to Real had not created a distraction in the locker-room.

He said that his players' experience, going into their fifth Champions League final in eight years, could also be an advantage.

"Some of the players could be teaching me how to play a final, they have played more decisive games than me," Ancelotti said with a smile ahead of his record-breaking fifth Champions League final.

Despite being the first coach to win European football's top trophy three times with different clubs and on the verge of leapfrogging Zinedine Zidane and Bob Paisley to become the first to win four, Ancelotti said this season it was harder for him to control his emotions in the final hours ahead of big games.

"I'm sweating a lot, my heart beat starts to accelerate. It's been a difficult process for me and I can't really explain why," Ancelotti laughed.



Rune strikes teen blow

AFP, Paris

World number two Daniil Medvedev eased into the French Open second round on Tuesday as Denmark's Holger Rune reminded Roland Garros that Carlos Alcaraz is not the only teenager dreaming of the title.

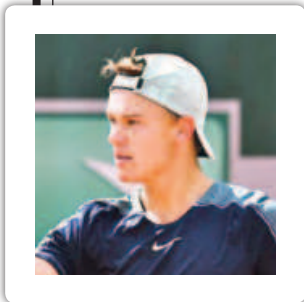
Medvedev, who came into Paris with just one match on clay this year following hernia surgery, routed Argentina's 103rd-ranked Facundo Bagnis 6-2, 6-2, 6-2 on the back of 35 winners and eight breaks of serve.

"I love Roland Garros, especially since last year," said Medvedev, who had lost in the opening round on his first four trips to Paris before reaching the quarter-finals in 2021. "I hope this year I can go further."

Rune, 19 and just a week older than the highly-rated Alcaraz, marked his main draw debut with a 6-3, 6-1, 7-6 (7/4) dismissal of 14th-seeded Canadian Denis Shapovalov.

Rune, the boys champion in 2019 and a former world junior number one, entered Paris at a career-high 40 having started 2021 outside of the top 400.

In the current clay season, he won his first title in Munich, beating world number three Alexander Zverev on the way.



Robson takes Kings to the top

SPORTS REPORTER

A stunning performance from Brazilian forward Robson Robinho helped Bashundhara Kings grab the top spot in Group D of the AFC Cup with a 2-1 win over Gokulam Kerela FC in their final group match at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata yesterday.

The Bangladesh Premier League champions took their tally to six points from three matches but their fate hanged on the outcome of last night's second match between ATK Mohun Bagan and Maziya S&RC. A draw or a defeat for Mohun Bagan will give Bashundhara Kings a first-ever knock-out round berth while a win for Mohun Bagan will force Kings to return home once again with a second-place finish in the group stages.

The star-studded Bashundhara Kings had no option but to beat I-League champions Gokulam Kerala FC to keep their hopes of advancing to the inter-zonal semifinals alive. The charges of Oscar Bruzon got off to a fine start with Biplo Ahmed, Nuha Marong and Mahbubur Rahman Sufil coming in place of Masuk Mia Jonny, Chinedu Mathew and Tariq Kazi following a 4-0 defeat against Mohun Bagan in their previous match.

Kings dominated the proceedings with their usual build-up game from the word

go before almost conceding the lead from a counter-attack in the fifth minute, but Gokulam's midfielder MS Jithin drove wide from inside the box, much to the relief of goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico.

Robinho then danced past three defenders to come close to breaking the deadlock in the 27th minute but his powerful shot from inside the box punched away by Gokulam goalkeeper Rakshit Dagar, who however could not stop a curling effort from Robinho in the 36th minute. The Brazilian found the ball on the left-side of the box and he curled in the way he often does in domestic competitions.

Four minutes after the break, Robson found space again but this time narrowly missed the target. However, the Brazilian turned provider on 54 minutes as he delivered a well-judged cross for Gambian forward Nuha, who nodded home from inside the six-yard box.

Gokulam Kerala played came out all guns blazing and Jourdain Fletcher reduced the margin in the 75th minute with a low drive from the top of the box before rattling the Kings crossbar in the 90th minute.

In the stoppage time, Iranian defender Khaled Shafiei made an important clearance with his legs stretched as Kings emerged with all three points.

