



Sri Lanka pacer Kasun Rajitha (C) celebrates with teammates after removing Bangladesh batter Mushfiqur Rahim (not in picture) as Liton Das reacts during the fifth day of the second Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (Bottom) Coach Russell Domingo walks off with his head down after he hosts were beaten by 10 wickets as the visitors won the two-match series 1-0.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Sri Lankans dedicate win to compatriots back home

SPORTS REPORTER

What the two-match Test series win over Bangladesh means to the Sri Lanka cricket team players, since their country is going through its most difficult period both financially and politically, reflects when the Lankan captain Dimuth Karunaratne dedicated the win to the people of the island nation during the post-match presentation ceremony yesterday.

"I would also like to dedicate this win to the Sri Lankans back home, who are having a tough time. I hope this brings them some joy in a difficult period," said Karunaratne after the 10-wicket victory over the Tigers in the second Test in Mirpur yesterday.

Despite the huge mental trauma when the cricketers left the country in a turmoil, the Lankan cricketers remained unaffected when it came to their fighting approach on the field in the two Tests.

The relatively inexperienced Sri Lanka pace bowling attack remained the highlight for the visitors in both the Tests, having wreaked havoc by removing the Bangladesh top-order as Bangladesh were reeling on 24 for 5 and 23 for 4 in the two innings, in that order.



Player of the Match pacer Asitha Fernando, who played just three Tests before coming to Bangladesh, becomes only the second Lankan fast-bowler to pick 10 wickets in a Test match after Chaminda Vaas.

Another fast bowler Rajitha Fernando, who was included as the concussion substitute in the first Test, also showed his hunger. The seamer also registered his maiden five-wicket haul playing his eleventh Test.

"They are the best bowlers in Sri Lanka, that's why they are on tour. All the fast bowlers have done their homework, and done their job whenever they were called up. He got an opportunity and I think he nailed it," said Lankan wicket-keeper Niroshan Dickwella yesterday.

The visitors were well ahead over the hosts in terms of rectifying the weak links of the opponents. According to Dickwella, the visitors have done their homework over the Tigers lack of confidence in the top order and opted to put the hosts under pressure on the final day.

"We had our plans cut out in the second innings. We knew the top-order was struggling in the first innings. We wanted to bowl line and length first. With Asitha's pace and tactics with the short ball, we knew it would be hard for them. We wanted to spread the field, not to give easy runs."

WE'RE GETTING CLOSE says Domingo

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh once more flattered to deceive as Sri Lanka put the pressure on the 'Tigers' at the opportune moments of the game to pick up yet another series win.

The Lankan outfit, especially the bowling unit, lacked experience and yet they got more out of the Mirpur pitch, which was good to bat on. The recent set of results both home and away, leads one to think whether there are pitches Bangladesh can cope without disastrous results. Over five days, Bangladesh did show fight, but the aggression of Test cricket was perhaps not where it should have been.

Despite Liton Das and Mushfiqur Rahim's incredible effort in the first innings, the batting collapses in both innings took centre-stage again. The Tigers missed out on vital moments to attack when they could have gotten a grip on the game. The argument of why Bangladesh could not doctor pitches for spin conduciveness the same way they did against the likes of England and Australia five or six years ago, returned after yet another familiar debacle.

"With all due respect to past Tests, those may have hurt us going forward. When we get on good pitches, and I'm a



"I think we're starting to get better in Test match cricket, we're starting to compete. But now we need to take a step further. I do [believe the gap in Test culture can close]."

Bangladesh coach Russell Domingo

big advocate of playing on good pitches, we come second. If we feel that we have to doctor pitches, then we have no chance away from home," head coach Russell Domingo dictated regarding the rosy home results of the past in the post-match press conference yesterday.

This argument on doctored pitches was as far as it could have gotten away from the idea of what Test cricket is about. Despite winning with pace in New Zealand only recently, the results at home appeared rosy because of the dominance shown by spinners at home against the big sides.

However, home results have been equally poor recently and while most teams try to take advantage of home conditions, doctored pitches and the experience of spin department bowling on such surfaces, often Bangladesh get the upper hand against opponents at home. But usually when another team from the subcontinent comes here, the pitches rarely help. The results against Afghanistan, Pakistan and now Sri Lanka come to mind.

This time the wicket had something for pacers, especially in the first hour over five days. It was in line with team management's vision but while Sri Lanka pace duo of Kasun Rajitha and Asitha Fernando reaped rewards,

Bangladesh pace attack failed to keep that line of attack fit for Test. The field settings were often defensive, in line with keeping runs down to bad deliveries. But a skipper cannot attack and set a field for bad deliveries at the same time.

"If you look at the stats, the number of balls that got scored between square leg or mid-wicket and fine leg, I've never seen so many runs scored there in my career as a coach," said the Bangladesh head coach.

Domingo was at a loss to explain what went wrong with the batters. He argued in favour of changes, either in batting order or the line-up. But change must start from culture.

"If we knew the answer [to batting debacles], it probably wouldn't happen (sighs and smiles)," he said before adding that a batting order change or changes in the line-up will happen. Domingo and his side are left reflecting on bad phases in sessions that take the game away from them.

"We're getting close. First Test against Sri Lanka, they were six down and ended up drawing," he cited before listing a few close match scenarios. But Domingo knows full well that a cultural shift would be required for better results and that takes time to build.

Pioneer league back after 4 years

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After a four-year hiatus, the Pioneer (U-15) Football League is all set to start today with less number of clubs compared to last edition in 2018.

Some 46 clubs, split into five zones with two groups in each zone, will play in round-robin format at five venues in Dhaka and Narayanganj. Top two teams from each of the 10 groups will advance into the 20-team final round.

"Many clubs have lost interest in football as 53 teams enlisted for the league. Six clubs have lost their eligibility due to having over-aged players in medical tests," said Pioneer football league committee deputy chairman Mohidur Rahman Miraz. "Some 1500 to 1600 footballers went through medical tests with 980 players getting clearance."

He also added that the last edition had featured 62 teams.

Kyrgios turns down Tomic's million-dollar challenge

REUTERS, Sydney

Nick Kyrgios has turned down a million dollar challenge from Bernard Tomic to sort out their differences on court as the Australian tennis players continue their spat on Friday.

Kyrgios described Tomic as the most hated athlete in Australia when the pair exchanged barbs over who was the better player on Instagram on Wednesday night.

Tomic, who won their only professional meeting at Kooyong in 2019, returned serve by offering to put

up a million dollars for a one-on-one contest.

"At the end of the day, talk is cheap," Tomic told the Sydney Morning Herald. "I'm ready to make it 2-0 whenever you want. Put your money where your mouth is."

"Let the public decide who is better. I'll beat you anywhere, any place. If not, shut your mouth and go back to playing doubles."

"I'll dominate you one-on-one," he added. "To not make excuses, I'll even play you on grass, whenever you want."

"You know what? Let's sort this out

in the boxing ring. Put your gloves on, I'll dominate you there also. Let's see who's better once and for all."

Kyrgios did not rule out a boxing bout one day but said the world number 418 would have to work his way back up the rankings to get on court with him.

"I'm still playing on the tour, my brother. I've got bigger fish to fry," the world number 76 said in an Instagram video. "If you want to play me and you want to set this straight, just get back to the top of the sport. I'm right here, I'm not going anywhere."



Serbia's Novak Djokovic makes a return against Slovenia's Aljaz Bedene during their third-round match of the French Open at Court Philippe-Chatrier in Paris on Friday. The World No. 1 cruised through to the fourth round with a 6-3, 6-3, 6-2 victory.

PHOTO: AFP