

SHAKIB'S TEST REIGNS

Shakib Al Hasan first led Bangladesh in Tests in 2009 during the Tigers' tour to West Indies after the then skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza suffered an injury.

He continued as the captain till 2011, leading Bangladesh in nine Tests. During his first stint as the Tigers' Test skipper, Shakib scored a total of 650 runs at an average of 38.23, including one century and four fifties. In bowling, he scalped a total of 39 wickets and bagged three fifers during that time.

He was then reappointed as the skipper in 2017, replacing Mushfiquur Rahim and continued in the position until 2019 before the ICC imposed a ban on him.

In his second stint as the Test skipper, Shakib led Bangladesh in five Tests. He scored a total of 268 runs at 29.77 average, smashing only two fifties during that period. He also scalped 22 wickets and registered one fifer in those games.

Shakib as a regular player has played 47 Tests and scored at an average of 40.44. His highest score of 217 also came when not leading the side. He also bagged 15 of his 19 fifers and also registered both his 10-wicket hauls while playing as a regular player.

Shakib on Thursday was appointed as Test skipper of Bangladesh for the third time. None of the time BCB clarified on the time period of the captaincy.



Can Shakib take Test culture forward?

SPORTS REPORTER

Shakib Al Hasan was named Test captain yesterday after a few days' pandemonium following Mominul Haque's urgent message that he did not want to carry on captaining the Test side. Liton Das was named Shakib's deputy.

It will be Shakib's third stint as Test captain and his first assignment will be the tour of West Indies. It was also on a tour of West Indies when a then 22-year-old Shakib was first handed the reins after injury to Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

Shakib was replaced by Mushfiquur Rahim before turning around and replacing Mushy in 2017, Bangladesh's most successful Test captain in terms of wins. Including his second stint, Shakib captained the side for 14 games, recording three wins and 11 losses.

However, he had to give up the captaincy after the ICC levied a ban on him in 2019 for failing to report corrupt approaches. Mominul Haque was named captain for the tour of India after Shakib's ban.

As the southpaw was named captain for a third time, there were concerns among BCB higher-ups, especially in regards to his availability.

During the second Test against Sri Lanka in Dhaka, Shakib told the media in a press conference that there were no replacements for Mominul as Test captain and that everyone should back Mominul.

When the BCB approached Shakib following that Test regarding taking over

the role, Shakib told them he was willing. However, BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon could not comment on the duration that Shakib would serve as captain, leaving speculation about the conditions provided by the player and the board.

Three names were put forward for the leadership roles during yesterday's meeting, the BCB president said without naming the third player, who was widely touted to be



Mehedi Hasan Miraz. The BCB president added that if Shakib had not taken up captaincy, the other two would have been named as captain and vice-captain.

There was also no indication whether Shakib was a long-term solution. "From what I have discussed, he wants to play [Tests]. After the West Indies series, there is the Zimbabwe series and he is still uncertain for that one. It's difficult to say how long he will stay captain," Nazmul said

yesterday.

Bangladesh's Test-playing abilities have frequently been questioned. There were many concerns over Mominul's leadership and it is believed that Shakib, a top performer, will find it easier to lead the side and also garner the respect of others.

However, under Mominul's leadership, the team had found a certain balance. He was also the captain that developed a pace-bowling culture, which saw a revitalised Test team in away conditions. The Mount Maunganui victory was supposed to be a precursor to a pronounced Test culture. But what changes will Shakib's appointment lead to?

Will Shakib take that team culture forward, or will it be a similar dependency towards spin at home which was seen during West Indies series at home? Those are questions that only time can answer.

The BCB president also said that the board was not bothered by the matter of integrity in appointing Shakib despite having been banned by the ICC once. "There was a clear difference between the punishment and the statement which was given to him by the ICC," he said.

Many questions remain. Shakib's ability to inspire others and his ability to perform under pressure will come in handy in his third stint but it remains to be seen whether Bangladesh can take any real steps in terms of improving the Test culture, especially with so many questions about their captain's whims and unpredictability.

Swiatek storms into final

AFP, Paris

Iga Swiatek booked her place in a second French Open final on Thursday as the world number one outclassed Russian Daria Kasatkina to extend her unbeaten streak to 34 matches.

The 2020 Roland Garros champion cruised to a dominant 6-2, 6-1 semi-final victory after just 64 minutes on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Swiatek will equal Venus Williams' record for the longest women's winning run since 2000 if she beats either Coco Gauff or Martina Trevisan in Saturday's final.

"I'm so grateful. It's easier to play matches with this kind of support," Swiatek said in her on-court interview. "It's surprising this week how much they're supporting me."

"I try to treat every match in the same way because when I think about how it's the biggest match of the season so far, it stresses me out."

It will be the 21-year-old's second Grand Slam final, as she looks to win a sixth consecutive WTA title.

The Polish star has stormed up the rankings this season, moving from world number seven to the summit during her remarkable run.

Swiatek hammered 22 winners past her opponent and she has still lost only one set in the tournament, against Chinese teenager Zheng Qinwen in the fourth round.

England bundle out NZ for 132

AFP, London

England debutant Matthew Potts and recalled great James Anderson took four wickets apiece as New Zealand were dismissed for just 132 on the opening day of the first Test at Lord's on Thursday.

Potts took four for 13 in 9.2 overs and Anderson, who had earlier reduced the World Test champions to two for two, four for 66 in 16 in what was England's first match under their new leadership duo of captain Ben Stokes and red-ball coach Brendon McCullum, the former New Zealand skipper.

New Zealand were in dire straits at 45 for seven after captain Kane Williamson's decision to bat first. But all-rounder Colin de Grandhomme's unbeaten 42 was the cornerstone of a late-order rally featuring handy contributions from Tim Southee (26) and Trent Boult (14).

England left-arm spinner Jack Leach had to leave the field barely half an hour into the day's play after landing on his head and neck when stopping a boundary.



Neymar closes in on Pele record

AFP, Seoul

Neymar scored two calmly taken penalties as Brazil fired a World Cup warning with a 5-1 thrashing of South Korea in Seoul on Thursday.

The Paris Saint-Germain forward scored his 72nd and 73rd goals for his country to close on Pele's record of 77 for Brazil.

Neymar also upstaged South Korean captain Son Heung-min, the joint Premier League Golden Boot winner, who was kept quiet by a rampant Brazil at a packed Seoul World Cup Stadium.

Neymar's status for the match had been up in the air after he suffered a right foot injury during training on Wednesday, but he was the star of the show on a night when Richarlison, Philippe Coutinho and Gabriel Jesus all scored.

Brazil, ranked number one in the FIFA rankings, fielded a strong side and looked dangerous almost from the opening seconds with a header by Thiago Silva wiped out by an offside call.

Brazil took advantage of poor South Korean defending to take the lead on

seven minutes.

Alex Sandro was left open as he charged into the left side of the box and he set up Fred for a shot from close range. The Manchester United midfielder misfired, but the ball took a fortuitous bounce to Richarlison, whose scrappy effort deflected in off goalkeeper Kim Seung-gyu.

Bordeaux forward Hwang Ui-jo levelled the score for the hosts on the half-hour mark, turning and firing it in off the left post.

But that goal came again as Brazil went ahead again on 42 minutes.

South Korean defender Lee Yong was called for a foul on Sandro inside the box and after a video review Neymar stepped up, calmly putting his penalty to the left of goalkeeper Kim.

Neymar scored his second penalty on 57 minutes, once again rolling the ball to Kim's left, before Coutinho and Jesus added gloss to the scoreline with two well-taken strikes.

Brazil will next play Japan in Tokyo on Monday, while South Korea host Chile on the same day.



Another trophy for Messi's Argentina

Argentina players lift Lionel Messi into the air as they celebrate winning the Finalissima, beating European champions Italy 3-0 at the Wembley Stadium in London on Wednesday. Messi set up two goals in a scintillating performance from the South American champions, who took a 2-0 lead in the first half through Lautaro Martinez and Angel di Maria before substitute Paulo Dybala wrapped up the victory in the stoppage time of the second half.

PHOTO: AFP