

# Could change in seniors’ batting approach influence Test culture?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh’s lack of Test culture has created a buzz in the media recently. Head coach Russell Domingo has spoken numerous times about creating such a culture since taking the reins, but the issue keeps coming to the fore, especially after disastrous losses.

However, looking at the team’s two senior batters in Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan during the West Indies Tests, the question remains whether such batting approaches can influence the desired changes.

Test culture was brought up again after a 10-wicket defeat to the West Indies in the second Test, with skipper Shakib Al Hasan fielding questions on the topic afterwards. Shakib pointed to a lack of interest in Tests in the country, although he conceded that may be due to a lack of good performances in the format.

“I think you can’t fault the players totally for it (being less interested in Tests) because our system is like that. Do you see that 25,000 or 30,000 fans watch a Test from the ground? In England, that happens every match. There was no Test culture in our country before and it’s not there today either,” Shakib said.

Shakib opined that culture was inter-linked with overall performances in Tests and thus the two must improve together.

Shakib hit 51 in the first innings of the Antigua Test but his approach made some sense with batters providing no resistance from the other side. In the second innings, he and Nurul Hasan Sohan put up the only century stand in that Test during a seventh-wicket stand.

Both batters looked good as they played against the older ball, but Shakib threw away his wicket with a rash shot off Kemar Roach just after the new ball arrived. The aerial shot, trying to go over cover, ruined his good work.

Head coach Domingo said that Shakib needed to find balance between attack and defence. However, Shakib later said that he had found success a certain way and would not change his approach.

In the second innings of second Test, Shakib’s approach did not change. In fact, he kept going at deliveries that promised bad consequences before eventually falling to Alzarri Joseph during a period when the Tigers needed to preserve wickets and see off the new ball’s shine.

Tamim Iqbal – who said he understood that he should have carried on for something bigger after his first innings score of 46 in the second Test – chased a delivery seaming away from him as he went for a drive and managed to find the wicket-keeper’s gloves in the second innings in Saint Lucia.

Such a shot, so far away from his body, could not have produced any other result.

When two of the senior-most batters come out with such an approach, especially when one of them is Test captain, what message does it send about Test culture to the rest of the team?

Shakib and Tamim have similar shot-playing tendencies, part and parcel of their natural game. Shakib’s five Test centuries have come at an average strike rate of over 70 while Tamim’s Test tons have a similar average strike rate.

The batting consultant, coaches and many others have talked about patience, but if the Test culture is to be improved, shouldn’t it begin with way the two senior members approach Tests?

BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon said yesterday he did not altogether disagree with what Shakib had to say about the Test culture. “Test cricket is a game of patience. But that patience applies not only to players, but everyone else,” Nazmul remarked, suggesting fans and the media need to exercise patience as India and other teams took a long time to find their feet in Test cricket.

However, should that patience not start from the cricketers in national team for whom the fans usually go to the ground?



Although the FIFA World Cup in Qatar is still more than four months away, the craze for the quadrennial event is already building up in Bangladesh. The shops in capital’s Gulistan have already decked up with jerseys and flags of the participating nations, dominated by those of Argentina and Brazil, and according to the shop owners, sales are already picking up.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has asked the board verbally to be excused from the upcoming three-match ODI series against the West Indies. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon told the media yesterday that: “I heard that he [Shakib Al Hasan] had earlier told Jalal Yunus that he



might not play the ODIs [against West Indies].” After the completion of the three-match T20I series, set to begin from July 2, Bangladesh are scheduled to play a three-match ODI series, starting from July 10. Meanwhile, with Shakib unwilling to play the Windies ODIs, left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, who is usually not considered for the white-ball cricket, has now been asked by the team management to stay back in the Caribbean for the entirety of the tour.

## Eleven years apart, Lyon dominates Galle battle

REUTERS, COLOMBO

Australia bundled out Sri Lanka for 212 but endured a top order wobble of their own before reaching 98-3 in reply after a frenetic, spin-dominated day one of the opening Test in Galle on Wednesday.

Usman Khawaja rode his luck to an unbeaten 47, while Travis Head was on six at the close with Australia still 114 behind in what promises to be a low-scoring contest.

The tourists could have been in a better position but for two avoidable dismissals in the final session.

On a pitch where spinners dictated terms from the opening session, David Warner realised the futility of trying to hang around and scored at a run-a-ball rate. He made 25 before falling lbw to Ramesh Mendis.

Marnus Labuschagne fell for 13 after a rash reverse-sweep shot found the only fielder on the vast off-side and Steve Smith was run out for six after a mix-up with Khawaja.

Khawaja used a review to overturn an lbw decision against him and also survived a missed stumping opportunity as he built up his score.

Earlier, a belligerent 58 by Niroshan Dickwella rescued Sri Lanka who had been on 97-5 in the second session. Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne (28) combined with Pathum Nissanka (23) to give the hosts a decent start after electing to bat.

Off-spinner Lyon was introduced within the first 30 minutes and his first delivery turned sharply, offering a glimpse of what the batsmen can expect in the next four days.



Australia captain Pat Cummins dismissed Nissanka and Alex Carey took the second of his four catches behind the stumps when Kusal Mendis nicked Mitchell Starc. Warner took a diving catch at gully to send back Karunaratne before Swepton twisted the knife combining drift and turn.

The leg-spinner fired identical loopy leg-breaks to remove Dhananjaya de Silva and Dinesh Chandimal off successive deliveries but was denied a hat-trick by Dickwella.

Angelo Mathews made 39 before walking into Lyon’s leg-slip trap but Dickwella decided offence was the best defence.

The stumper-batsman raced to a 42-ball fifty with the sweep shot, both traditional and reverse, proving particularly productive for the left-hander.

Even more audacious was his ‘Dilscoop’ – a shot named after compatriot Tillakaratne Dilshan – when he bent forward to scoop a Cummins delivery over his own and the wicketkeeper’s heads for a boundary. Lyon wrapped things up quickly after the tea break, dismissing Ramesh Mendis and Dickwella in successive overs.

Eleven years after his maiden Test five-for on debut in Galle, the off-spinner bagged his 20th at the same venue when Khawaja plucked a stunning catch at wide mid-on.

“I was really proud the way we came back after tea and stuck to our plans and we were able to get the late rewards and knock them over,” Lyon said on bowling out the hosts after they took tea at 191-6.

“Saying that, I see this game as even, there’s still a lot of work to do.”

## ‘Stokes has exceeded my expectations already’

REUTERS

England coach Brendon McCullum said his side’s aggressive performances in their 3-0 series win over New Zealand set the alarm bells ringing around world cricket and that there would be no change of approach against India in their rearranged Test.

England, who had been mired in a run of one win in 17 Tests, brought in McCullum as coach and named Ben Stokes as their new captain in May and the duo have made an immediate impact with a more swashbuckling style of play.

After brushing aside reigning world Test champions New Zealand, England take on India at Edgbaston from Friday in a rearranged Test from last year’s series. “The world Test champions were a formidable opponent and the alarm bells have probably gone off somewhat around world cricket as to how this team is going to play,” McCullum told British media.

“Let’s enjoy the moment and see what unfolds in the next little while.”

Former New Zealand captain McCullum said Stokes had been “fabulous” since succeeding Joe Root as skipper. “It’s early days, but he has exceeded my expectations already. I’m aggressive but he’s got me covered, which is saying something,” McCullum said.

“He’s been fabulous so far.”



## Serena brushes off retirement talk

AFP, LONDON

Serena Williams brushed off any talk of retirement on Tuesday by insisting she is “motivated” to play at the US Open later this year despite a shattering Wimbledon defeat.

“The US Open was the place where I won my first Slam, it’s super-special. There’s definitely a lot of motivation to get better and play at home,” the 40-year-old American said.

Williams was speaking after losing in her first singles match for a year when she went down 7-5, 1-6, 7/6 (10/7) to unseeded Harmony Tan, the world number 115, in the opening round of Wimbledon.

The 23-time major winner, who debuted at the All England Club in 1998, refused to speculate on whether or not she will be back at Wimbledon in 2023.

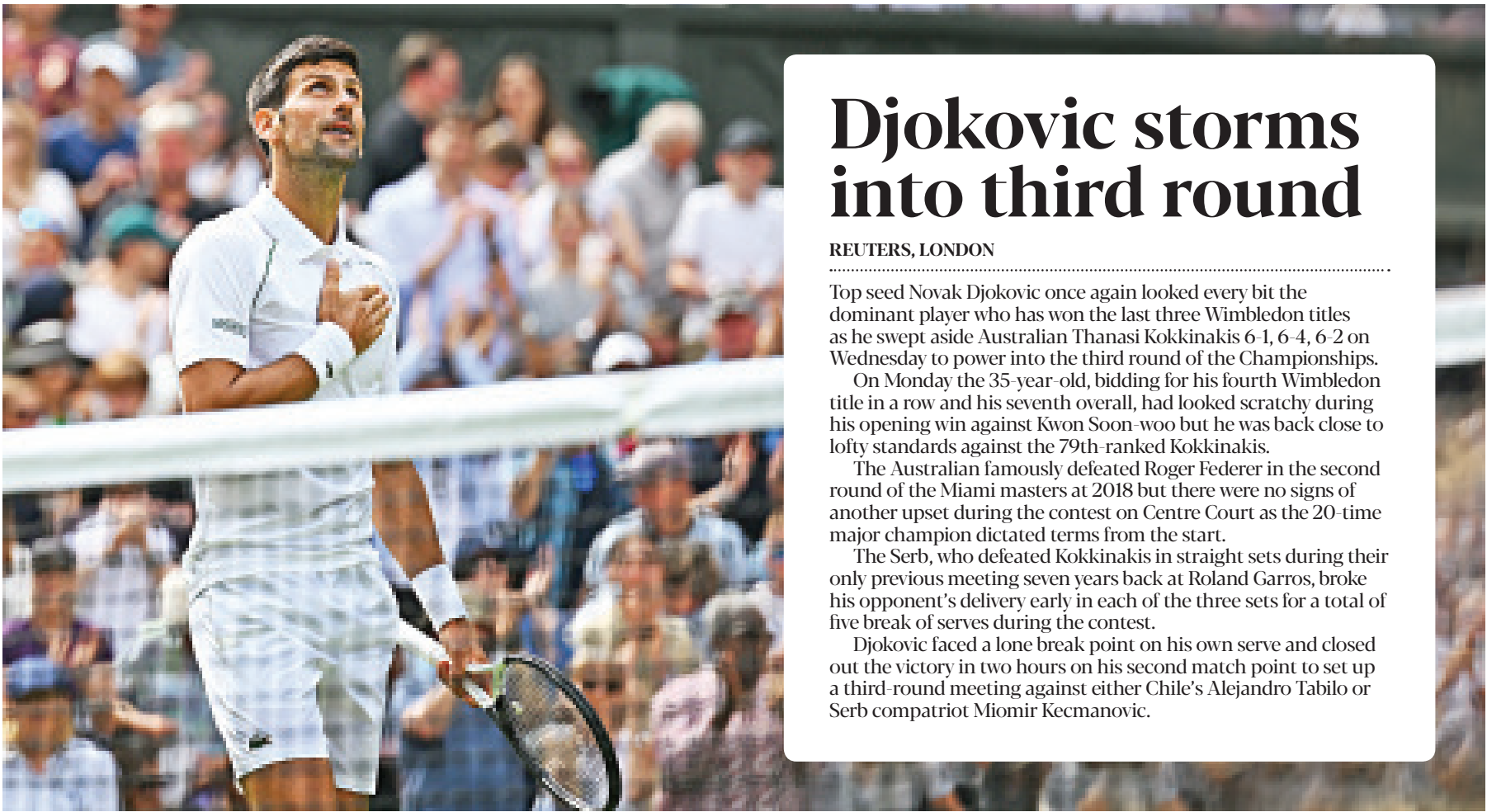
“I am just playing for right now. I see how I feel and go from there. Who knows where I will pop up?”

“I’m so emotional now,” said Tan. “She’s a superstar. When I was young, I was watching her so many times on the TV.”

“When I saw the draw, I was really scared. She’s such a legend. I thought if I can win one game, two games, that would be really good for me.”

Twelve months ago, Williams quit her Wimbledon first-round match in tears after suffering an injury and she had not played singles tennis since until Tuesday.

Doubts had been growing about whether the former world number one – who has slumped to 1,204th in the rankings after her period of inaction – would return to the sport.



## Djokovic storms into third round

REUTERS, LONDON

Top seed Novak Djokovic once again looked every bit the dominant player who has won the last three Wimbledon titles as he swept aside Australian Thanasi Kokkinakis 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 on Wednesday to power into the third round of the Championships.

On Monday the 35-year-old, bidding for his fourth Wimbledon title in a row and his seventh overall, had looked scratchy during his opening win against Kwon Soon-woo but he was back close to lofty standards against the 79th-ranked Kokkinakis.

The Australian famously defeated Roger Federer in the second round of the Miami masters at 2018 but there were no signs of another upset during the contest on Centre Court as the 20-time major champion dictated terms from the start.

The Serb, who defeated Kokkinakis in straight sets during their only previous meeting seven years back at Roland Garros, broke his opponent’s delivery early in each of the three sets for a total of five break of serves during the contest.

Djokovic faced a lone break point on his own serve and closed out the victory in two hours on his second match point to set up a third-round meeting against either Chile’s Alejandro Tabilo or Serb compatriot Miomir Kecmanovic.