

A culture of theatics

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have quickly shifted focus to the three-match T20I series against the West Indies, starting from July 2 in Dominica, after an embarrassing 2-0 defeat in the Test series.

Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan and batting coach Jamie Siddons already expressed their optimism about Bangladesh's chances to win the T20I series. And we all know that one win may help them sweep all ongoing debates under the carpet.

Amid all this, there is a big chance that one may forget that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has decided to form a working group in order to find ways to improve the structure of domestic first-class cricket.

The same way a fuss over the need to improve the poor state of affairs in longer-version cricket ensues every Test debacle, a higgledy-piggledy mess surrounding Shakib's availability for any series has become standard practice for the BCB.

The all-rounder made a sarcastic remark after the end of Bangladesh's Test against Sri Lanka last month, saying he was available for all three formats in the West Indies since he was named in all three squads for the tour.



Wednesday, BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon informed that Shakib had asked for a leave from the ODI series ahead of the tour to the Caribbean.

According to sources, the team management had drafted up plans to combat his absence well before the team left for the Caribbean. The management was considering spinner Nasum Ahmed as a potential replacement for the ODIs because they have faith in the former's late-order batting. Somehow, Shakib was still named in the ODI side.

There has been a lot of talk about the lack of a cricketing culture and system but, in recent times, the Shakib saga may have volumes to speak about such issues.



England captain Ben Stokes arrives for a net session at Edgbaston in Birmingham on Thursday ahead of the fifth and final Test against India which starts today. Following a 3-0 whitewash of New Zealand, the new England skipper will want to extend the winning run by beating India in the final Test, with the visitors leading the series 2-1 from last year.

PHOTO: REUTERS

'Only players can make Test cricket beautiful'

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Roquibul Hassan, the first captain of the national cricket team, believes that cricketers have to illustrate the beauty of Test cricket in order to attract fans.

While raising questions about a lack of Test culture following a humiliating defeat 2-0 series defeat to the West Indies, Test captain Shakib Al Hasan pointed out that there was a lack of interest among fans in longer-version cricket in Bangladesh.

Roquibul admitted that Bangladesh were yet to make strides in terms of organising competitive first-class competitions. But he admitted that, despite all the shortcomings, players like Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal could not defend the Test team's poor recent performances.

"People worship beauty and that applies to cricket as well. Unfortunately, our demonstration of cricket is very ugly. Why would I go to the field to watch an ugly display of cricket? When you play well, win games regularly, fight in tough situations, only then will there be spectators."

"I know we have lot of limitations in terms of first-class infrastructure, it's especially frustrating that we are yet to form regional cricket associations. But you have to keep in mind that players are the main stakeholders of the game and they have to take the responsibility to make Test cricket beautiful. Only players can make Tests or longer version cricket beautiful."

Roquibul said.

He added that after 22 years of Test cricket, we cannot only blame infrastructure because there are numerous instances in sporting history of players overcoming adversities and becoming world-class athletes.

"The way Tamim [Iqbal] and Shakib [Al Hasan] played some of the shots that got them out, sometimes I wonder how they have scored 5,000 runs," the former skipper questioned.

"Not many are interested in Test cricket in our country, but in other countries they have many fans. Why? Because if I go to watch our games, I know the result already. Bangladesh will lose anyway. So why should I go and watch that game?" he said.

He also questioned the logic of the recent discussions about the lack of Test culture in the country.

"I am unable to understand what those who talk about cricket culture actually mean. If they are trying to say that it's due to a lack of participation Tests and that's why they are unable to perform well, that's different. But the way people are talking about the absence of spectators in the longer version leading to this scenario, I disagree. Our players do not have the skills, temperament or patience to ensure the presence of the crowd," he explained.

"I think it was better not to drag this issue after 20 years," he added.

However, Roquibul agreed with what

Shakib said about creating a system. He believes there is no alternative to making a competitive first-class competition in order to get skillful Test players.

"Back in our days, when we started to play regularly after Independence, all of our games were longer versions. If you talk about the culture of longer version cricket, I will say that there is a huge gap here and it's not the way it once was, that's the first thing."

"Then you have to make it competitive. You can't play just for the sake of playing. We've been hearing for many years about 'regional cricket associations'. They sat for meetings, but the outcome is unknown. To make these tournaments competitive, you have to rely on them [regional bodies]. Unfortunately, reality is different. Teams are organised centrally from Dhaka and there is a practice of nepotism."

"We can make longer version cricket with top Premier Division Cricket League teams because top players play there. We must think 'outside the box'. We don't have time for cliched traditional words," he continued.

Roquibul also thought it was suicidal to complete a national league tournament inside a month.

"There have been huge technological advancements in cricket. You cannot hide and there is no scope for mercy now. So, you have to be smart enough to deal with modern cricket. You cannot stick to cliches of 'we have no culture,' he ended.

Bumrah to lead India in Edgbaston

REUTERS, BIRMINGHAM

India captain Rohit Sharma has been ruled out of the rescheduled fifth Test against England beginning on Friday and seamer Jasprit Bumrah will lead the side instead, the touring team said on Thursday.

Rohit was doubtful for the clash since he tested positive for COVID-19 during a warm-up match in Leicester last week.

He had a Rapid Antigen Test on Thursday and returned a positive result, which snuffed out his chances of playing in the match at Edgbaston.



India faced a leadership crisis with vice-captain KL Rahul also missing the match to have surgery for a sports hernia in Germany. Bumrah will lead the side with wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant as his deputy, the team said in a statement.

Mayank Agarwal has joined the squad as cover but India have yet to decide who will be Shubman Gill's opening partner in Rohit's absence.

Coach Rahul Dravid has said they have two more options in stumper-batsman KS Bharat and top order batsman Cheteshwar Pujara.

India are 2-1 up in the series which could not be completed last year because of COVID-19 cases in the India camp ahead of the final match at Old Trafford.

Green, Khawaja put Aus on top

AFP, GALLE

Cameron Green and Usman Khawaja hit half-centuries to put Australia ahead by 101 runs against Sri Lanka after abysmal weather set back the second day of the opening Test on Thursday.

The tourists reached 313 for eight when bad light stopped play in Galle after storms and ferocious winds that collapsed a spectator stand and delayed the start of play until the afternoon.

Skipper Pat Cummins, on 26, and Nathan Lyon, on eight, were batting at close of play after the tourists dominated the two sessions.

The left-handed Khawaja made 71 before Green, who top-scored with 77, was involved in an attacking stand of 84 with wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey.

Ramesh Mendis soon removed Carey at 45 to break the stand and claimed his fourth wicket of the innings when he trapped Green lbw.

Mitchell Starc fell next to debutant leg spinner Jeffrey Vandersay, who took two wickets, but Cummins smashed the bowlers around in his 16-ball blitz that included one four and three sixes.



KYRGIOS BEHAVES TO REACH LAST 32

Nick Kyrgios buried the rage he showed in his Wimbledon opener to ease into the third round on Thursday and warned: "I just wanted to remind everyone that I'm pretty good." The volatile Australian pulled off an impressive 6-2, 6-3, 6-1 win over Serbian 26th seed Filip Krajinovic to make the last 32 for the sixth time. Kyrgios fired 24 aces and a total of 50 winners past Krajinovic, who made the final at Queen's in the run-up to Wimbledon.

PHOTO: REUTERS

"Me and Harmony have talked and figured out all misunderstandings. She made me clear about her injury now and we already apologised to each other. I will delete my previous post regarding this situation. And I will ask (you) not to write bad comments to her, don't want that she get insults! Hope for your understanding!"

Tamara Korpatsch
about her doubles partner Harmony Tan

