

Umesh capitalises on tricky Mirpur surface

STAR SPORTS DESK

Bangladesh faced another first innings debacle against India in the second Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur on Thursday, getting bundled out for 227 after opting to bat first on a greenish wicket.

Having seen the green tinge on the pitch, India went for three pacers who managed to pick up six wickets between them, with veteran Umesh Yadav scalping four and Jaydev Unadkat, playing his first Test in 12 years, taking two.

Despite Unadkat's swing and control with the new ball, it was Yadav who lived up to his subcontinent credentials as he used his experience to bowl wicket-to-wicket, used his high release point to extract extra bounce off the Mirpur surface, and late in the day, got the ball to reverse.

The 35-year-old found swing early with the new ball but couldn't nick a wicket. But he used his experience, didn't look to try different things and kept it significantly tight from one end.

His perseverance paid off straight after Lunch when Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan tried to launch the pacer over mid-off but the ball gathered a bit of extra bounce as it hit high on Shakib's bat. The timing got messed up as the batter could only offer the easiest of chances to short mid-off.

For his second, Umesh nicked off Mehedi Hasan Miraz and reversed the ball into Nurul Hasan Sohan's pads to leave him dumbfounded before enticing Taskin Ahmed to a drive which resulted in him getting caught at point.



On a pitch that had a bit for the bowlers, Umesh perhaps identified the nature of the pitch the best but had enough game sense to not get carried away as he stuck to pretty much what he knows best - bowling tight lines to trap batters lbw and using the reverse later on to trouble batters.

The pacer, however, felt that it was a 50/50 kind of wicket that had something for both the pacers as well as the spinners but said he adjusted by sticking to his basics.

"I reckon it is a 50/50 kind of wicket. It's not favouring fully the fast bowlers or the spinners. Some deliveries are doing something and others are not," Umesh said.

"You have to keep patience and bowl in the right areas. Some deliveries kicked off the surface and some did not go anywhere," he added.

Asked whether he was happy to restrict Bangladesh under 300, Umesh admitted that it was a good effort from their side considering the nature of the wicket.

"I think it's a good performance to get them out for under 300 especially considering how the wicket is behaving now," Umesh said.

Ramiz Raja sacked

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket chief Ramiz Raja has been sacked just days after the national team suffered a humiliating Test series defeat at the hands of England, according to a government notice seen by AFP Thursday.

Appointments to run the sport in the cricket-mad country are highly politicised, and responsibility lies with the prime minister and cabinet.

England wrapped up the third Test on Tuesday to hand Pakistan their first-ever 3-0 home series whitewash.

But a change had been on the cards since April, when Imran Khan - a former national captain - was ousted as prime minister and replaced by Shehbaz Sharif.

Raja, a member of Khan's 1992 World Cup-winning side, was appointed chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) in September last year.

A government notice seen by AFP said Sharif's cabinet had dismissed Raja, and the PCB would now be run by a 14-member committee headed by Najam Sethi, who has twice served as chairman.



Mominul Haque, back in the side after missing two Tests due to a lengthy lean patch with the bat, grabbed this opportunity with both hands, scoring an innings-high 84 on the first day of the Dhaka Test against India yesterday. However, Bangladesh were bowled out for 227 as most of the others, including Shakib Al Hasan (bottom), threw their wickets away. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Freed up' Mominul's lone battle

SPORTS REPORTER

Mominul Haque's lack of runs confounded everyone this year. The batter, who played a crucial hand in the historic win over World Test Championship winners New Zealand at this year's start, failed to get past the fifty mark in his next 12 innings. However, with wickets tumbling around him, Mominul found the right frame of mind to get back into runs yesterday following his return to the Test side.

There was a growing belief that he was over-thinking and one did not find too much wrong with his technique either. What had worked for him was the positive approach which needed to be brought up with some mental tinkering.

Mominul was fluent, playing some of his favourite shots during a 157-ball 84. He used his feet to spinners, not letting them settle against him or get a mental edge. A few ramp shots, soft hands to guide past the slip cordon, and cutting loose with cuts were the trademark of Mominul's freed up mojo. A six over mid-on off Ashwin saw him keep his head very still, a sign of something has changed.

While most batters struggled with the movement of the Dukes ball and the hard surface at play in Mirpur during the series, Mominul was happy to get a feel for such challenges that are not part and parcel of the longer-version format in the domestic front. Even as he struggled for runs, he said it would greatly help the players during overseas tours when they struggle in away conditions.

Before this knock, Mominul failed to reach double digits in his last nine innings. The abysmal form led to him being dropped. Concerns over his form had seen his Test captaincy relinquished before the tour of West Indies, and during the series he was dropped for the second Test.

His domestic form had been poor as well, managing just a fifty in the two National Cricket League matches. He managed another fifty against Tamil Nadu during



Bangladesh A's tour of India but did not manage big scores at home during two unofficial Tests against India A in Cox's Bazar and Sylhet.

Thus, his selection hinged on the quite natural problem in Bangladesh ranks: of missing a batter who fits in perfectly at number three when Mominul is not there.

"We gave him a rest. We had to work on a few things in Chattogram. We gave him a bit of time to get back into the swing of things, and forget about those failures," batting coach Jamie Siddons said in a press conference yesterday when asked why Mominul did not play the first Chattogram Test.

What changed was to free up his mind by having a go at bowlers with expansive strokes at nets. It got him out of his hesitations.

"I think he had a more positive approach to the game rather than thinking he was going to get bad balls. He was thinking I am going to score today. In the recent past, he was thinking about when he will get a good ball rather than where to score the next run," the Bangladesh batting coach remarked.

Jamie reckoned that the mental switch from being worried about good deliveries to scoring runs worked out.

The wickets falling around him did not help his cause as he had to fight a lone battle against India bowlers on a track that surprised with some deliveries taking off.

FFF chief keen to keep Deschamps

AFP, Paris

The French Football Federation (FFF) president Noel Le Graet said in an interview published on Thursday he wants France coach Didier Deschamps, whose current contract expires at the end of the year, to remain in the post.

Deschamps, 54, led Les Bleus to the World Cup final on Sunday, where they lost in a penalty shoot-out to Argentina, after guiding them to the trophy four years ago.

Deschamps will meet with Le Graet in the north-west town of Guingamp next week to discuss extending the ex-Juventus midfielder's deal until Euro 2024.

"In my opinion we will settle it in Guingamp," Le Graet told newspaper Ouest-France. "If he doesn't want to stay, it will be short. If he wants to stay then there will be discussions that are a little longer."

Argentina go second in FIFA rankings

AGENCIES

Argentina's World Cup triumph has moved them up to second in FIFA's world rankings, but Lionel Messi's Golden Ball-winning exploits were not enough for top spot.

But despite it proving fifth time lucky for talisman Messi, it is Argentina's closest rivals Brazil who top the world rankings at the end of the year.

The Selecao were knocked out in the quarter-finals following a penalty shoot-out loss to Croatia, but Tite's side hold stay at the summit.

It ends a run of four consecutive years when Belgium have ended the calendar year as the world's top-ranked nation in men's football, with the Red Devils dropping to fourth.

Their descent allows France to move a place up the ladder, to sit third behind Argentina, while England round out the top five in an unchanged position.

Defeat to Morocco sees Spain slip down to 10th, with the African nation in 11th, while Croatia enjoy a bump to go seventh at Denmark's expense.

Spikers off to winning start

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh got their title bid off to a winning start in the Bangabandhu Asian Central Zone Under 23 Men's Volleyball Championship with a 3-0 sets win over Nepal at the Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium yesterday.

The men in red and green beat Nepal in 26-24, 25-22 and 25-21 sets in front of a full house.

Al Amin, Sajib, Rakesh, Shafin, and Sujan made a good start in the first set to take a commanding 8-2 lead but the Himalayan boys staged a bold comeback to make it 15-14.

However, Aroji's changes provided impact from the bench for Bangladesh as they clinched the first set in a hard-fought 26-24.

But Nepal dominated Bangladesh straight from the outset in the second set taking an 8-3 lead at one stage but in a game of comebacks, Al Amin-led Bangladesh dug deep and managed to level it at 10-10 before the hosts eventually won the set 25-22. In the third set, an improved performance saw Bangladesh lead halfway into the set as they managed to hold their own after that, winning the set 25-21.

Bangladesh will play their second match against Kyrgyzstan today while Nepal take on Sri Lanka.

Archers fall at India hurdle

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh archers crashed out of the semi-finals in all four events of the Asia Cup Archery Stage-3 after losing to India in three categories and falling to South Korea in the one event in Sharjah, UAE yesterday.

However, they will fight for bronze medals in all four categories - recurve men's team, recurve mixed team, compound men's team and compound women's team - against Kazakhstan.

Bangladesh recurve men's team beat hosts United Arab Emirates 5-1 in the pre-quarterfinal and handed a 5-3 defeat to Mongolia in the quarter-finals to move into the semi-finals where their momentum faltered against India, who beat them 5-3.

In the recurve mixed event, Bangladesh again suffered a 5-3 defeat to India after beating Vietnam and UAE 5-4 and 6-0 in the quarter-final and pre-quarterfinal respectively.

Bangladesh compound men's team also suffered a 228-223 defeat to India in the semifinal after beating Hong Kong 231-221 in the quarter-final, while the compound women's team suffered a narrow 224-222 defeat to South Korea in the semi-final after advancing to the last four with a big 225-214 win over Hong Kong.

BPL resumes today

SPORTS REPORTER

After an action-packed first round, the second round of the Bangladesh Premier League is all set to get underway on Friday following a two-week break.

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings will look to maintain their 100 per cent record as they take on newcomers Fortis FC in Rajshahi but will have to be wary of the unknown they might bring as Fortis managed to hold six-time champions Abahani to a 1-1 draw in the first round.

In Gopalganj, Sheikh Jamal will be aiming to get their first win against hosts Muktiyoddha Sangsad following a 2-2 draw against Rahmatganj in the previous round, while Sheikh Russel, who suffered a 2-1 defeat against Bangladesh Police, will take on Chittagong Abahani, who will kickstart their campaign with the aforementioned contest.



A day after Kylian Mbappe returned to work at Paris Saint-Germain, Brazilians Neymar and Marquinhos reported to the club's training centre on Thursday, according to PSG's social networks. They "are back at the Training Center!", the club tweeted, 13 days after Brazil's penalty shoot-out elimination against Croatia in the World Cup quarter-finals. PHOTO: TWITTER

