

Brilliant tour ended in the best way, says KL Rahul

SPORTS REPORTER

It was so close yet so far for Bangladesh but the hosts made sure they put up a fight till the end against a strong India side, who are eyeing for the second spot to qualify for the final of the World Test Championship.

Having been seven down for 74 at one stage while chasing 145, there was fear and nervousness in the Indian dressing room, courtesy of off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz's five-wicket haul. The Tigers were dreaming of a historic Test victory at home until Ravichandran Ashwin and Shreyas Iyer spoiled their party and eventually ensured a close three-wicket win for the visitors.

Ashwin and Iyer remained unbeaten on 42 and 29, respectively, as the pair added a match-winning and unbeaten 71 runs for the eighth-wicket stand to clean-sweep the two-match series.

"Tough game. Happy that we got the job done. We were in a bit of trouble and there was a bit of pressure and nervousness in the dressing room," India skipper KL Rahul told the media during the post-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

"Really happy that Ashwin and Shreyas got that partnership that got us the victory. Conditions were tough and that is what makes Test cricket fun. When the conditions are tough, your character is really tested. We like playing cricket like that. Tough game but something that is memorable and the victory will be sweet," he added.

It was a fruitful home series for Bangladesh after winning the three-match ODI series 2-1, and despite the Tigers losing the Test series 2-0, there was a sense of competitiveness given how the second Test unfolded in Mirpur.

The India skipper did not forget to give credit to the Bangladesh team for the challenges they posed to the visitors. He termed it as a brilliant tour ahead of their upcoming crucial home assignment against Australia.

"Really good series. A lot of good experiences, a lot of learnings, losing the ODI series was not the greatest [of feelings]. But sometimes a series loss does teach you a lot about where you stand as a team and as individuals. That is really important for us going into a 50-over World Cup. Even the Test series was hard-fought. Bangladesh really played some very, very good cricket.

"They challenged us a lot, even today. It was the best way to end the series. They made it really hard and they were in the game for the first 30-32 overs and then Ashwin and Shreyas put their hands up and did the job for us.

"It's been a brilliant tour. The next time when we come back here, whoever has played here will take the learnings and come better prepared," Rahul said.



Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan shares a light moment with Liton Das after their three-wicket defeat in the second Test of the two-match series against India at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Shakib found positives in his side's performance after how Liton and Mehedi Hasan Miraz made their presence felt this year.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Shakib harbours hope in growing leadership

SPORTS REPORTER

Tigers could neither quite catch the high of that win in Mount Maunganui, nor the ODI series win away to South Africa, or the recently-concluded ODI series victory against India, as they failed to clinch the second Test against India in Mirpur yesterday.

However, the performances of two of the cricketers' in Liton Das and Mehedi Miraz, who are not quite inside the sphere of 'seniors' but left their mark this year, have seen Bangladesh cricket turn a corner.

Skipper Shakib Al Hasan was hopeful of Bangladesh's near future in Tests and their World Cup aspirations. Those goals will find more security with the performances of Liton and Miraz.

Liton is the second-highest run-getter across all three formats combined this year, having piled up 1921 runs. He starred at Mount Maunganui with the bat alongside Mominul Haque in a pivotal partnership during a historic Test win against the World Test champions.

He then struck a ton at Christchurch when others failed to inspire. While Liton struggled a little in South Africa, he scored bags of runs at home in the Sri Lanka Tests. His 73 was pivotal to Bangladesh taking a lead in the second Test in Mirpur on Saturday, after which the Tigers came very close to winning another historic Test at year's end.

While Liton's leadership was crucial behind the stumps in Mount Maunganui, and in absence of veteran opener and ODI captain Tamim Iqbal in the India series, Liton led the ODI side to a 2-1 series win.

Shakib suggested that good stories are

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH

1st Innings - 227 all out and 2nd Innings 231 all out (Zakir 51, Liton 73, Taskin 31 not out; Patel 3-68, Aswin 2-66)

INDIA

1st Innings - 314 all out and 2nd Innings - 145 for 7 (Ashwin 42 not out, Patel 34, Iyer 29 not out; Miraz 5-63, Shakib 2-50)

Result: India won by 3 wickets

Player-of-the-match:

Ravichandran Ashwin

Player-of-the-series: Cheteshwar Pujara

not always well written. "You talk about the stories of disappointments really well, the good ones not so much. That is the problem," he said in the press conference yesterday, and went on to highlight the growing leadership within the team.

"Overall, if I have to summarise 2022, I have to say that we have played really good cricket. Especially the mentality, where we may have had a huge lacking, we have improved a lot here.

"I think the thought process we have and what is being discussed in the dressing room, and the growing leadership, makes me think we will see a difference in 2023," the Bangladesh skipper said about players growing into leadership roles that brings hope for the future.

Liton had earlier said on Saturday that he wanted to maintain his performances as a prolific scorer this year. Once criticised for subpar performances that did little

to justify his talents, Liton has grown into a stable cross-format star. He now understands criticism and understands his role in helping the team win.

"When there's a tag behind your name, criticism and praise are part and parcel of the game. I am not worried about it. I want to maintain my place [as a run-scorer], but it is difficult. You can't reach the same level every year. I want to be successful with my ability," Liton had said.

"I always rate Miraz as a key player," he said regarding Miraz, who had bagged three in the third day's last session to leave India on the back-foot.

Miraz went onto bag two more, completing a filer and was unlucky of not scalping the crucial wicket of Ravichandran Ashwin, who was dropped on one.

Miraz's variations, his abilities -- of reading batters' shortcomings and finding out plays with genuinely good deliveries -- were all showcased in the Mirpur Test. He ended as the seventh-highest wicket-taker across formats with 59 dismissals to his name this year.

"It is a settled team. There's always room for fine-tuning. Except one or two places, it is a settled side," Shakib said of Bangladesh's Test side.

"We should win all three Test series in 2023. We should have a T20 team ready in the next six months, one that will do very well in the 2024 T20 World Cup. We have a settled ODI side. We have lost just one home series since 2015.

"If we can play as a team, get contributions from every aspect, we should do well in the World Cup," came Shakib's affirmation as Tigers look to new leadership from the group.

Conte may rest WC players at Brentford

AFP, LONDON

Tottenham Hotspur boss Antonio Conte suggested on Sunday that he might rest his World Cup players in the game at Brentford on Boxing Day that marks the Premier League's return.

"For the players who played at the World Cup it's a big effort because they have never stopped and only now after one week, 10 days," he said in a preview posted on the club website.

"I think that it is different for the players that played in the World Cup."

He said he would give a chance to those who had to stay behind and train. "For the players who worked in these four weeks, for sure it is a new start, a fresh start like pre-season."

Tottenham had players representing Wales, Uruguay and Denmark, who were knocked out at the group stage, as well as South Korea, England, Senegal and Brazil who went out at the quarter-finals or earlier in Qatar.

Argentine Cristian Romero and French goalkeeper Hugo Lloris played every minute of the final and Ivan Perisic appeared for Croatia the day before as they took third place.

"We are really excited (to be back) -- honestly, it's not easy after the World Cup and only eight days when you played the final and semi-final to play so quickly, but it's okay, it's a positive on one hand," Conte said.

"On another hand, you have the players who played the World Cup in a different physical condition, but it's okay, football during the Christmas period for sure is fantastic to play. At the same time, for many players we have to try to push them and to find a good physical condition."

Archer Hakim beaten in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladeshi archer Hakim Ahmed Rubel had to settle for a silver medal in Asia Cup World Ranking Tournament in Sharjah on Sunday as he lost against his Kazakh counterpart Ilfat Abdullin in men's individual recurve final.

Hakim lost the match in 6-4 sets after putting up a brave fight in the final against the eventual winner. The day did not belong to Bangladesh as they also in the bronze-medal matches of recurve men's team event and recurve mixed team event, both featuring Hakim with other members.

Bangladesh had, on the previous day, won three bronze medals from the competition.

Spikers storm into final

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh stormed into the final of Bangabandhu Asian Central Zone U-23 Men's International Volleyball Championship with a 3-0 sets win over Nepal in the semifinal at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium yesterday.

Bangladesh, who remained unbeaten in the group stages, beat Nepal 25-15, 25-22, 25-13 in the semifinal.

The hosts will play the final today against Kyrgyzstan, who blanked Sri Lanka in 3-0 sets in the other semifinal.

Bangladesh team's coach Alipour Aroji said his target is to win the final. "Our target is becoming champions. We have reached the final as the players gave their best. Now we only need to beat Kyrgyzstan."

Pak, NZ seek revival after England battering

AFP, KARACHI

Newly appointed New Zealand captain Tim Southee expects Pakistan to bounce back from a 3-0 home Test series whitewash at the hands of an aggressive England team, saying on Sunday that his men would find their own way to defeat the wounded hosts.

England handed Pakistan their first-ever 3-0 home Test whitewash earlier this week, enhancing the reputation of their newly adopted 'ultra-aggressive' style of Test cricket -- coined 'Bazball' after the nickname of head coach Brendon McCullum.

The Kiwis take on Pakistan in the first match of a two-match series in Karachi on Monday.

Southee described England's win as "impressive and incredible", but said his team would find their own strategy to take on Pakistan. "I think England played an incredible style of cricket and to come over here and win three Tests and the way they did was very impressive," Southee said on Sunday.

"It seems to be working for them (England), so we will be trying to look for ways that have worked for us and hopefully put on a performance that works for our side."

Southee, taking over the Test captaincy

from Kane Williamson, said conditions in Pakistan would be likely to suit spin. "But there is a place for the pace as well," he added. New Zealand have only won one Test series in Pakistan, way back in 1969.

The last time they played a Test in Pakistan was in 2002, with Pakistan's "home" series in the interim being mostly played in the United Arab Emirates due to security concerns.

The Kiwis have dominated Pakistan in recent contests, winning their last three series against them -- twice in New Zealand (2016 and 2020) and once in the UAE in 2018.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam vowed his team would come back strongly. "Yes, we could not execute what we wanted in the last series but I have the belief in my team and my players that we can stage a strong comeback," said Azam.

Pakistan's captain said he was unperturbed by recent changes in the Pakistan Cricket Board, with Ramiz Raja sacked as chairman and replaced by a management committee on Thursday.

"Our job is to do effort on the ground, perform and apply what the best we have. These things are out of the ground and our full focus is on the ground as to how to win the matches and series."



STARS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

Sports stars worldwide have embraced Christmas, taking to social media to show off decked-out trees surrounded by loving families. World Cup winner Lionel Messi posed for the photo with family members while Egyptian star Mohammad Salah shared a similar moment, sitting comfortably at home. Indian cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar brought smiles to the faces of sick children at Happy Feet Home in Mumbai while Serbian tennis star Novak Djokovic shared a picture with his wife wishing Merry Christmas to the children of their foundation.

PHOTO: TWITTER