

Tigers gauge best of both worlds with team combination

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There were a few things floating around the horizon of the one-off Test between Bangladesh and Ireland and once the toss took place, the team's set-up had a clearer definition, approaching Test cricket with more adventure despite an injury to Taskin Ahmed. There was the curious case of skipper Shakib Al Hasan's body language in the face of IPL exodus. The end of the day shed light on a few matters.

In the past, the absence of in-form pacer Taskin would propagate a change in plans, but not this time around.

Although the greenish pitch two days before the Test did not have as much grass in the end, the Tigers have historically never prioritised pace. The inclusion of Shoriful Islam in a three-pronged pace attack was perhaps one of the most aggressive selection calls in a home Tests in a while. Over the years, the pace attack has only been really been depended on away from home.

The last time that Bangladesh played three pacers in a home Test was back in 2014 against Sri Lanka. Ebadot Hossain and Shoriful made early inroads and it was apparent that the first hour had help for the trio.

Ireland had seven Test debutants in the side and the team management took the opportunity towards a brave new world, putting in six batters with Mehedi Miraz at number seven capable with the bat.

Bangladesh had made a habit of putting in more batters and depending on their spin trio. This time, they managed



to play three spinners – Shakib, Mehedi and Taijul – but did not include Mahmudul Hasan or Shadman Islam to lengthen the batting order. It was the best of both worlds with spin and pace.

"We have a good ODI side but if we are to do well in Tests, I feel playing against a team like this on this kind of surface is perfect. Then we will be able to improve in the future. Maybe when a bigger team comes, it's natural to take advantages [in terms of conditions] that we get here," Taijul Islam, who bagged a fiver, said on the team combination at the press conference.

If the idea was to be more aggressive in Tests following a change in approach in ODIs and T20Is, the combination of the team justified the tenability of the idea. It was a refreshing change from always preferring a packed batting order and playing on low-spinning turfs.

Meanwhile, Shakib seemed in another zone completely. The build-up to the game had seen news surface that he was opting out of playing the IPL as the BCB had him earmarked for international assignments.

Despite Taijul bagging a fiver and threatening throughout the day, Shakib only came to the attack in the 66th over of the innings with Ireland seven down. He proceeded to bowl three overs, appearing to do the bare minimum, mostly observing from the slip cordon. At one point, Tamim Iqbal was seen giving instructions on the field.

Asked regarding Shakib not bringing himself on, Taijul said: "He didn't give any reason. Maybe his idea was to keep bowling us and if we were in trouble maybe he would have bowled."

Whether Shakib's demeanour was natural or whether there is a pebble in his shoes cannot be ascertained easily, but going forward, there is something the BCB and the team has to figure out to keep the skipper activated.



Bangladesh left-arm spinner Taijul Islam celebrates his 11th five-wicket haul in Tests after dismissing Mark Adair during the opening day of the one-off Test against Ireland at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Pace variations help Taijul find a way through

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Although it seemed that the pitch was designed to assist the three seamers in Bangladesh's line-up, it was left-arm spinner Taijul Islam who had the most telling impact for the hosts, bagging a five-wicket haul as Ireland were bundled out for 214 in their first innings on the first day of the one-off Test.

Taijul picked up his 11th five-wicket haul in the longest format and one that did not come easy. The 31-year-old had to adapt and adjust to the surface, which offered hardly any spin on the opening day.

He seemed to realised the importance of pace variations immediately and maintained a tight line and length which saw him trap three batsmen leg before.

While Bangladeshi spinners tend to struggle on sporting tracks away from home, Taijul hoped having similar pitches at home would help them do better abroad.

"If we continue playing on such pitches at home, where it's important to bowl a good line and length, it will urge you to adjust. If we can adjust to such pitches at home, it will help us to do well when we go abroad too," Taijul told the media after the day's play.

"Obviously pace variation was important since there wasn't much turn on offer and bounce was also good. So you need to gauge the batters' strengths and weaknesses

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Taijul Islam

and exploit accordingly."

With a knack of consistently picking up wickets, Taijul, who is Bangladesh's second-highest wicket-taker in Tests, was asked where he wanted to see himself at the end of his career and the soft-spoken cricketer did not shy away from expressing his desire to have more than 500 scalps to his name.

Meanwhile, Ireland were playing just their fourth Test match overall and their first after nearly four years, with seven of their playing XI making their debut. But despite

the lack of experience, the visitors showed a fighting approach after losing a few wickets early after electing to bat.

Harry Tector smashed his maiden Test half-century on debut alongside Curtis Campher's 34 as the pair added 74 runs for the fourth wicket and showed a glimpse of their ability in adjusting to such difficult conditions.

Even after the partnership was broken, at one point Ireland were tottering on 124 for six. But the visitors hung in and eventually went past the 200-run mark courtesy of gritty thirties from Lorcan Tucker and Mark Adair lower down the order.

The visitors also gained momentum by the end of the opening days' play.

Pacer Adair removed Najmul Hossain Shanto for a duck off the very first over of Bangladesh's innings. The hosts then suffered a late blow when experienced Tamim Iqbal was dismissed off the last ball of the day before stumps were drawn.

According to Taijul, that put the hosts on the backfoot. "The timing of the two wickets that fell actually puts us on the backfoot. Well I won't say we are on the backfoot since that can happen. But it is also important for us to make a comeback. If we want to put up a big total on the board, we need a big partnership," he said.



Dorielton inspires Kings again

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Dorielton Gomes stole the show on the day football season resumed following a four-week break as the Brazilian forward powered Bashundhara Kings to a come-from-behind 3-1 win over spirited Muktiyoddha Sangsad in the first quarterfinal of the Federation Cup at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

The victory meant Kings moved into the semifinals after a season gap as the country's modern powerhouse had withdrawn from the Federation Cup in the 2021-22 season in protest of sub-standard pitch conditions at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium.

Interestingly, Dorielton, who was the main architect behind Abahani's triumph of the Federation Cup in the 2021-22 season, scored a double and contributed to other goals in the match, including the one which Muktiyoddha scored.

Kings, as expected, staged a strong fightback to eventually down Muktiyoddha, who had earlier given Kings a good run for their money during the group match that ended 4-3 in Kings' favour.

Muktiyoddha threatened initially and took the lead in 34th minute.

But on the back of 19 goals in 18 matches, Dorielton was unstoppable like he was in the last season and he combined with Robson da Silva to take the game away from their opponents.

Anamul on a roll

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Wicketkeeper-batter Anamul Haque Bijoy continued his prolific run of form in the ongoing Dhaka Premier League (DPL) as table-toppers Abahani Limited crushed Prime Bank Cricket Club by 141 runs at the BKSp-3 ground in Savar yesterday.

The 30-year-old, who made a comeback to the Tigers side after a record-breaking DPL performance last season, struck his second consecutive DPL ton and the third of the season.

Sent in to bat, Abahani amassed 336 for six in 50 overs, riding on a 183-run opening stand between Anamul (153 off 127) and Naim Sheikh (94 off 102) and a quick-fire fifty from Afif Hossain.

Prime Bank, in reply, could not tackle pacer Tanjim Hasan Sakib who bagged four wickets and only delayed the inevitable, courtesy of Yasir Ali's 45.

At BKSp-4 ground Parvez Hossain Emon's century went in vain as Rupganj Tigers rode on a hundred from Imtiaz Hossain Mukidul Islam's filer to seal a 25-run win over Legends of Rupganj, who were bundled out for 262 in 48.2 overs while chasing down 287.

At Khan Shaheb Osman Ali stadium in Fatullah, Parvez Rasool starred for Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi club with team-high 48 runs and four-fer as they beat Gazi Group Cricketers by 31 runs after posting 251 for eight.



AFP

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez warned his team that their Copa del Rey semi-final opponents Real Madrid would be coming to wage a "footballing war" at Camp Nou, while Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said his charges will try to keep cool heads as they bid to overturn a 1-0 deficit in the Copa del Rey Clasico semi-final second leg.

The Spanish champions lock horns with arch-rivals Barcelona at 1:00 am on Thursday (Bangladesh Standard Time) as they bid to avoid a fourth consecutive defeat in the derby.

"It doesn't mean anything that we have won the last three Clasicos, tomorrow is another footballing war," Xavi told reporters.

"They will be out for revenge ... they will come here wounded, I'm sure," added the Catalan coach.

Barcelona will be without four injured key players in Pedri, Ousmane Dembele, Frenkie de Jong and Andreas Christensen.

"They have a lot of experience, they are used to mounting comebacks. They are still favourites

for me," said Xavi.

Despite Eder Militao's own goal handing Barcelona a narrow victory after the Santiago Bernabeu, Ancelotti's side dominated the Catalans.

"The idea is not to go crazy to try and score a goal," said Madrid coach Ancelotti.

"We won't go mad, because you can score a goal in the fifth minute and then let in two."

Real Madrid have lost three consecutive Clasicos, defeated by Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup final in January, the cup first leg and most recently 2-1 in La Liga at Camp Nou.

The Italian coach thought his team played well in the latter two games and confirmed defender Antonio Rudiger is fit, meaning Madrid have their full squad available aside from Ferland Mendy.

Ancelotti admitted it was difficult to choose between his midfielders, with Toni Kroos, Luka Modric, Aurelien Tchouameni and Eduardo Camavinga all vying to start.

"It's very hard to choose a side, because obviously there are more than 11 who deserve to play, there are 14 or 15," said Ancelotti.

