

## Ebadot hands Afghanistan mission impossible

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite the fact that Bangladesh lost their last five wickets for just 20 runs upon resuming the second day on 362 for five, by the end of the days' play, it was the Bangladesh bowlers who kept the hosts in the hunt to clinch the lone Test at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

It was a breath of fresh air to see the pacers utilised on a seam-friendly Mirpur surface to great effect, especially Ebadot Hossain, who picked up four wickets as the visitors were bundled out for 146 runs in their first innings just after the tea break. Another pacer, Shoriful Islam, also bagged two wickets and made a mark.

Ebadot also had no regrets about missing out on his second five-wicket haul as the seamer was happy to execute the game plan in such conditions.

"I think this is the first time we got such a pitch and I think we were fortunate enough to be able to play with three seamers in such conditions. We tried our best to bundle out the opponent cheaply and it feels good to be able to successfully execute our game plan," Ebadot said.

The recent rise in Bangladesh's pace-bowling unit has been significant in breeding a positive mindset for the team management in the longest format.

When asked if they were sending the message that the pace unit had the ability to make an impact in conducive conditions, the Sylhet native replied: "Our pace unit has improved a lot in the past three years or so. I won't say we have become good, but we have been trying to improve the graph for the past three years. We are trying to grab the fast-bowling dominated mindset which world cricket is witnessing at the moment," he said.

The hosts did not enforce the follow-on despite their 236-run lead and, with half-centurions Najmul Hossain Shanto and Zakir Hossain at the crease and the lead growing to 370 runs, Afghanistan will have a daunting task to save the Test match.

Visiting head coach Jonathan Trott admitted that it would be a tough task for the visitors but believed that they should play with pride when asked if it was possible to save the Test.

"It's going to be tough. Obviously, the way the pitch is playing, it's going to be tough. So, yeah, you just have to fight and put up as strong a performance as possible with a bit of pride and show a bit of character."

"We're going to have to bowl really well tomorrow morning and then have a mammoth effort with the bat. But anything's possible. We've seen some funny things happen in cricket before, but we are going to have to play out of our socks," said Trott.



Three slips and a gully -- a very common scene in cricket's longest version but not so much when the ground is the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Sidestepping the typical approach to overwhelm visitors with spinners on spinning tracks, Bangladesh prepared a green surface and employed three quicks in their one-off Test against Afghanistan. The ploy seems to have worked, especially with the hosts leading by 370 runs in their second innings at stumps on Day 2. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Mirpur turns face to bring Test cricket's beauty

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI

Was that extra bounce? The ball kicked off from a length delivery from Ebadot Hossain and got Afghan opener Abdul Malik high on the bat with nowhere to go and Zakir Hasan gobbled it up diving forward from third slip.

If that action was surprising, the other delivery from Nijatullah Masood in the morning session, the one that caused Mushfiqur Rahim all sorts of trouble, was



was like day and night.

The beauty of Test cricket comes from the intense battle between bat and ball, a battle that forms the core of cricket's muse. Without it, Test cricket can have a dreary tone. When it comes to Mirpur wickets, Test matches have always been a drab affair. The carry for pacers is missing. The conditions usually do not allow swing and the grass on the surface lends to a slower surface rather than a seaming one where deliveries zip around.

Mirpur has always been dominated by spin thusly. Spinners go through their regular toil and while some with special tricks up their sleeves can get better purchase off the pitch, that beauty is often missing. Mirpur Tests become a drab affair with lots of overs and never the flurry of wickets and excitement that pace can produce.

After the first day's play, where bat dominated ball, the cue had been set that it was indeed another of those traditional Mirpur tracks.

But it was something else completely as Day Two began on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the new ball did not move around consistently and the Afghan pacers' inexperience in the longest format also showed in their indiscipline. By Thursday, Afghanistan

had to wait for one over to take the new ball and then everything changed.

In six overs, Bangladesh's innings was wrapped up, with Mushfiqur possibly getting the most unplayable delivery of the game. It was not just the bounce. The ball moved around all morning. All five remaining Bangladesh first innings wickets fell to pace as Nijatullah bagged three to complete a fiver on debut while Yamin Admadzai bagged two to wrap Bangladesh's innings up in a jiffy.

Ebadot and Co. seemed to have the winds in their sails after having to skip a nap or two, perhaps initially having felt that Mushfiqur or Miraz would go on and make the tail wag a bit longer.

The windy conditions helped with swing and the grass seemed to have finally decided that it was time for seam movement. Afghanistan's batters found it just as difficult as Bangladesh's on the second day.

Shoriful Islam bowled with five slips in one session. In 10.4 overs of the Afghanistan innings in the morning session, deliveries zipped past the bat and caused all sorts of trouble with Ebadot and Shoriful getting the ball to talk particularly effectively.

Three more wickets fell before lunch. Then five more in the second session as Afghanistan wilted to pressure. Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Tajjul too got on the act with two wickets each as Afghanistan were bowled out in just 39 overs. However, what will be remembered is the pacy, bouncy day, possibly a first in a Mirpur Test.

Asked at the end of the press conference, whether the pace unit would now seek such wickets at home, Ebadot was hopeful. "If you do well, you get the confidence of winning matches. As we are doing well, we can hope."

### SCORES IN BRIEF

#### BANGLADESH:

First innings-382 all out in 86 overs (Joy 76, Shanto 146, Mushfiqur 47, Miraz 48; Ahmadzai 2-39, Masood 5-79) and Second innings-134 for one in 23 overs (Joy 17, Zakir 54 not out, Shanto 54 not out; Hamza 1-27)

#### AFGHANISTAN:

First innings-146 all out in 39 overs (Jamal 35, Zazai 36, Janat 23; Shoriful 2-28, Ebadot 4-47, Tajjul 2-7, Miraz 2-15)

similarly as exciting as it was surprising for when it comes to Mirpur wickets, extra bounce and seaming conditions all become oxymoronic. The stark difference between the first and second day's play

## 'Happy with the win but need to improve'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh had a decent enough preparation for the upcoming SAFF Championship as the booters registered a 1-0 win over hosts Cambodia in a FIFA-friendly in Phnom Penh yesterday.

Winger Mojibur Rahman Jonny, who made his debut in March against Seychelles, netted his first international goal in the 25th minute to keep intact Bangladesh's unbeaten record against Cambodia, who suffered four defeats in five meetings against the booters.

With the focus on the SAFF Championship starting from June 21 in India, Spanish coach Javier Cabrera's main target was to figure out the right combination and fine-tune his playing eleven. The 38-year-old coach fielded almost the same eleven that beat Cambodian premier league outfit -- Tiffy Army FC -- during a warm-up game last Monday. Only two changes were made for yesterday's game, with Bishwanath Ghosh and



Jonny replacing Rahmat Mia and Mohammad Ibrahim.

"Obviously, we are happy with the win. But in terms of ball control and overall competency, we must improve," Cabrera said after the game.

Jonny's strike that came from a counterattack was against the run of play as the men in red and green looked unsteady throughout the first half. Bangladesh were reduced to 10 men in the final minutes when Tareq Kazi was sent off.

## 'Hybrid' Asia Cup to begin on Aug 31

AFP, COLOMBO

Pakistan will jointly host this year's 50-over Asia Cup tournament with Sri Lanka, organisers said Thursday, in a compromise aimed at forestalling a tit-for-tat boycott involving India.

Neighbours India and Pakistan have not met on either side's soil in a bilateral series since 2012, and only play each other in international tournaments on neutral grounds.

The Pakistan Cricket Board had threatened to boycott this year's ODI World Cup in India, which is due to start in October and its schedule awaited, if its Indian counterpart refused to play in Pakistan.

The six-nation Asia Cup will be played between August 31 and September 17, an Asian Cricket Council (ACC) statement said.

"The tournament will be hosted in a hybrid model with four matches being held in Pakistan, and the remaining nine matches being played in Sri Lanka," it added. The release did not mention the venues for the tournament or which team will play where but it is understood that India's matches will be held in the island nation.

Oman Cricket chief and ACC vice-president Pankaj Khimji intervened to broker the compromise between the two sides, according to media reports.

Meanwhile, the International Cricket Council (ICC) is expected to announce the ODI World Cup schedule this week.



Lionel Messi celebrates with teammates after scoring fastest goal of his international career during a 2-0 friendly win over Australia, netting after 79 seconds at a raucous Workers' Stadium on Thursday. German Pezzella headed in a cross to make it 2-0 in the 68th minute. A sea of blue-and-white had greeted the teams as they stepped out onto the pitch with an overwhelming majority of the 68,000-capacity crowd sporting Argentina jerseys. PHOTO: AFP

## Australia braced for England storm

REUTERS, LONDON

England's barnstorming version of Test cricket has shredded the textbook of the sport's longest format but so-called 'Bazball' faces its biggest examination yet as they seek to regain the Ashes against world champions Australia starting on Friday.

Conventional cricketing wisdom has been turned upside down by England coach Brendon 'Baz' McCullum and captain Ben Stokes in a scintillating run of 11 victories from 13 Tests.

Scoring at a head-spinning average of almost five runs an over under McCullum, England's risk-takers have re-imagined the approach to test cricket and transformed the country's fortunes after a run of only one win from 17 tests previously.

It has bamboozled India, New Zealand, South Africa, Pakistan. England made a first-day record 506 runs in 75 overs in the first Test against Pakistan in Rawalpindi.

And against New Zealand at home last year, they made daunting fourth innings victory targets of 277, 299 and 297 look as demanding as a walk in park.

The big question, however, as the opening Test looms at Edgbaston on Friday is whether England will play with the same almost reckless abandon against an Australia side possessing arguably the best pace attack in the world.



"What we have done over the last year is show how we want to play. We found a way that we are able to get the best out of the team and also the individuals. We get asked if we will continue to play this way against this opposition or that opposition. This is how England play. It's worked more than it's not. There's no doubt about how we are going to play against Australia."

England captain, BEN STOKES



"We've been amazing over the last 20 Test matches. And I think you've seen a pretty similar style in the way we've played, so we don't want to lose sight of that. We're big on playing what's in front of you. Somewhere our batters might take 200 balls to get a hundred and that's totally fine."

Australia captain, PAT CUMMINS