

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH: First innings-382 and Second innings-425-4d

AFGHANISTAN: First innings-146 and Second innings-115 all out in 33 overs (Rahmat 30, Janat 18; Shoriful 3-28, Taskin 4-37, Miraz 1-5, Ebadot 1-22)

Result: Bangladesh won by 546 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Najmul Hossain Shanto.

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“Their [Bangladesh’s] pace, I think it’s pretty good. They will be able to compete at home and away with the types of seamers that they’ve got. Also with the accurate spin bowlers [Bangladesh have], they know how to play in their own conditions really well. So, credit to them.

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Afghanistn coach
Jonathon Trott



The pace trio of Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain and Shoriful Islam were all smiles on Saturday, and they had good reason for it. The Bangladesh quicks accounted for a total of 14 wickets in the one-off Test against Afghanistan, which the Tigers won by a record margin of 546 runs on Day 4 in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

‘Maturity shown won’t be forgotten’

SPORTS REPORTER

When Bangladesh took on New Zealand at Mount Maunganui last year, there was fear and trepidation at the thought of facing the then World Test Champions on their own turf without key stars Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal. Bangladesh won that Test, a historic win and a first win of any kind on New Zealand soil. The team, galvanised in the absence of key stars, placed faith in younger stars and has carried on from there.

Bangladesh have now attained their biggest-margin win in Tests with a 546-run victory in the one-off Test against Afghanistan at Mirpur yesterday. They did it with Shakib and Tamim again out injured.

“There is no change. The win against New Zealand was the same. Neither Tamim bhai nor Shakib bhai played in that game. We were a young team and we won playing abroad. When we won outside, we had the belief that when you work hard, the chance of success increases. Now we are desperate for when Tests will come around again,” Liton divulged about the mindset of the squad while talking to reporters on Saturday after the win over Afghanistan.

Liton reiterated that the squad had believed that the transitional period could be handled better given the talent in the team. Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Zakir Hasan formed a new opening pair that stood tall against the Afghan challenge. Najmul Hossain Shanto has been in a rich vein of form while pacers are keeping opposition batters on their toes on a regular basis.

“Ultimately, after two-three years you won’t get three-four seniors. If we cannot handle it now, it will be difficult if it hits us all of a sudden. If they [Shakib and Tamim] had played, it would have been good. But it is not like we can’t come back from situations without them. In the pipeline and in the batting order, we are improving and the new guys are capable,” he said.

“Today the team that played was the best (Test) team of Bangladesh and everyone fulfilled their responsibility,” Liton added.

Bangladesh have 12 Tests in the next ICC World Test Championship cycle and Liton said the players’ maturity was a big asset.

“It’s a good feeling to win by this margin and each and every player showed maturity. That maturity doesn’t come in one day but by playing continuously. The maturity shown won’t be forgotten,” he said.



Home versatility improving Tigers’ Test mentality

SPORTS REPORTER

Liton Das really enjoyed his captaincy stint. After all, it is not commonplace in Test matches in Bangladesh that one might find five fielders at the slip cordon. Just throw the ball to a pacer, wait for them to create pressure with a nagging length and then expose a batter’s technique. Liton felt he had that freedom and also enjoyed wicketkeeping on a track with carry for pacers.

“I enjoyed captaincy. The way the bowlers supported especially. From behind the wicket, I saw how the bowlers got the ball to carry with balls going to slip. It was fun to keep. As a captain, it’s a good feeling that there is a chance of getting wickets at any time,” Liton said at the press conference yesterday.

A big conversation in this just-concluded one-off Test was whether Bangladesh would be willing to give their pacers a suitable hunting ground against Afghanistan given that the Tigers always went with spin to secure home advantage.

The wicket had enough for pacers and spinners in the end, making it a sporting wicket. For so long, the conversation had been about banking on spinners at home. But under Chandika Hathurusingha this time, the Tigers are showing a revitalised mindset in terms of focusing on their tactics by analysing where the opponents’ weaknesses lie.

For a long time, pace had been a weakness. The pacers’ resurgence now gives the team management more options at home. So, for the first time, a green wicket allowed pacers to discover optimism in home surfaces. 14 wickets were taken by the Bangladesh pace trio in the one-off Test, the highest number of wickets taken by Bangladesh in a Test in Mirpur.

Since Afghanistan’s strengths lay with their spin unit and their weakness was batting against quality pace, the decision was an easy one. Liton was asked whether these kinds of wickets with help for pacers would be a top option now.

“It depends on who we are playing. It’s not like we will only play on spinning turfs or only seaming wickets. It depends on who we are playing and their strengths and weaknesses. What people say about home advantage, that’s what we will be thinking about,” he said.

“Obviously when we will go to New Zealand, they won’t play three spinners because their weapon is pace bowling. The same way, when a team comes to Asia, for instance in India, they build spinning wickets. When you enter a championship where you need to win, you can take benefits of different kinds,” he added.

Hathurusingha has been able to pinpoint the need for pacers to also be able to get help in home conditions so as to strengthen them for away tours. Choosing what qualities to prioritise in the side by analysing the opponents is a mark of Test teams that get success continuously.

The 546-run win, the third biggest Test win ever in world cricket, is a statement win in terms of going forward with Test plans for the future.

“We want to play on good wickets so that both sides are there and to ensure that not only spin will only dominate or vice versa. Look at this wicket, there was help for the spinners here. In future it will be decided,” Liton said.

BIGGEST WINS BY RUNS IN TESTS			
Margin	Winner	Opponent	Year
675	England	Australia	1928
562	Australia	England	1934
546	Bangladesh	Afghanistan	2023

Afghan ODIs present one last opportunity

SPORTS REPORTER

The upcoming three-match ODI series against Afghanistan has emerged as the last opportunity for selectors as they look to finalise the squad ahead of the Asia Cup and ODI World Cup, slated for later this year.

The return of batters Afif Hossain and Naim Sheikh for the Afghanistan series were both strategic moves as selectors announced a 15-member squad yesterday.

Rony Talukder, who made his ODI debut in England, and Yasir Ali, who did not play a game against Ireland, were dropped while young pacer Mrittunjoy Chowdhury, who made his debut against Ireland, made way for Taskin Ahmed.

Naim, who played just two ODIs and has not been in consideration since 2021, earned his place after a prolific performance during Abahani’s charge to the Dhaka Premier League title. The left-hander finished as the tournament’s leading run-getter, scoring 932 runs in 16 games at an average of 71.96 and a strike rate of 91.64.

He recorded 10 fifties and a hundred.

Afif, who replaced Yasir, also proved instrumental in the DPL for Abahani, scoring 550 runs at a strike rate of 110.66 in the middle order.

“This is the last series before the Asia Cup and we wanted to see some players. That is why we picked Afif and them played in the domestic circuit and earned their spots back,” chief selector Minhajul Abedin said yesterday.

“Mrittunjoy could not retain his place since Taskin returned. We are thinking of Rony in the T20 format. As far as Yasir is concerned, we are not considering him for ODIs for the time being.”

Meanwhile, Shakib Al Hasan also made a comeback after missing the last Test against Afghanistan with a finger injury.



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Unbeaten on 84 off 176 deliveries and approaching his 15th Test ton, opener Usman Khawaja led Australia to 188 for four, still trailing England’s first-innings score by 205 runs, at Tea on Day 2 of the first Ashes Test at Edgbaston yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Will Modric and Co. extend Spain’s trophy drought?

AFP, Rotterdam

Luka Modric has been Croatia’s driving force on the way to Sunday’s Nations League final, where they could earn their first ever major trophy against a Spain team he knows inside out.

Questions surround the veteran midfielder, 37, over his future both in international football and at club level with Real Madrid, with his contract set to end this month.

Before resolving them, Croatia captain Modric is aiming to lead his country to glory in Rotterdam at De Kuip.

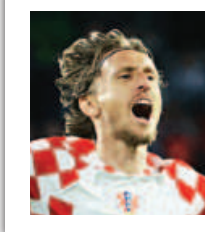
The Balkan nation has consistently over-performed on the world stage over the past 25 years, starting with their third place finish at the 1998 World Cup.

They followed that up by reaching the 2018 World Cup final, where they were beaten by France, and again finished third in Qatar last year, eliminating favourites Brazil along the way.

“We have once again become a powerhouse in football, showing that despite all our problems, we have quality and character,” said Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic.

“Now we need to stay calm and smart, not rush anywhere, towards that gold. That’s my great wish ... bronze, silver and gold.”

Modric converted a penalty to help fire Croatia into the Nations League final with a 4-2 extra-time



triumph against hosts Netherlands, one step closer towards that elusive “gold”.

There are some reports Modric may retire from international duty after the Nations League but the player said he would decide his future after the tournament.

“I always enjoy playing for the national team, it’s not because it could be my last competition or my last match,” said Modric.

“Every single match, every training session is a joy. As long as I feel I can help, there’s no reason for me not to be here.”

The Croatian midfield maestro pulled the strings for his country, getting the better of Barcelona’s Frenkie de Jong, but Manchester City’s Rodri will provide an even sterner test.

City’s Champions League final hero is the key piece in Luis de la Fuente’s La Roja, who are still finding their footing.

Joselu’s last winner to help them beat Italy in Enschede calmed the storm around Spain and they can end a trophy drought of over a decade, with their last triumph coming in Euro 2012.

“It will be very important to win again, after all this time, bringing Spain back to the highest point,” Rodri told a news conference Saturday.

“It’s not just important to win but to create a winning culture, we have to understand that we have a unique opportunity.”



Captains of 10 teams came together to experience Zimbabwe’s local wildlife at the Wild is Life sanctuary in Harare ahead the ICC Men’s Cricket World Cup Qualifier, which is set to begin today. The event will run from 18 June to 9 July and two teams will eventually qualify for this year’s World Cup in India. Hosts Zimbabwe take on Nepal while West Indies face United States in the two matches on the opening day.

PHOTO: ICC