

Shanto shows captaincy mettle

SABBIR HOSSAIN *from Sylhet*

In his first stint as on-field captain in a Test match, Najmul Hossain Shanto was able to leave his mark on yesterday's proceedings, with especially how he rotated the bowlers and changed the field to match his team's plays against New Zealand batters.

Bangladesh would be satisfied with the proceedings at the end of second day, despite letting slip many of the opportunities that were created, having picked up eight wickets to leave the visitors trailing by 44 runs.

It appeared Shanto got decisions right from the onset. With just one pacer in Shoriful Islam, he asked Mehedi Miraz to partner Shoriful with the new ball.

Operating against two left-handed openers, Miraz began with a slip and a short-leg, an indication that Bangladesh expected things to happen with the new ball. Miraz went on to bowl nine overs on the trot.

Shoriful, meanwhile, after an expensive first over, gradually settled in a line in the corridor of uncertainty and troubled Devon Conway with an attacking field in place.

Shanto's first-change option in Taijul Islam would reap the reward of early pressure in his first over, getting Tom Latham's wicket.

The offensive field settings, unusual for Bangladesh in Tests for long periods, were a feature of the day. Youngster Shahadat Hossain Dipu took a fantastic catch leaping to his right at short-leg to remove Conway.

That attacking field-setting did not change altogether even when set batters were at the crease. Shoriful was



Riding on two dropped catches, on 63 and 70 and both off the bowling of off-spinner Nayeem Hasan, New Zealand's key batter Kane Williamson got to his 29th Test ton. His 104-run knock off 205 deliveries saw him stretch his purple patch in the format as he became the first New Zealand player to score a century in four consecutive Tests.

“

It was a tough day. I thought the batters really tried to apply themselves, putting together some good partnerships. We have couple of wickets left. It will be nice to get a few more, and then we will have our chance to bowl. The surface is showing signs of deteriorating quite a lot.

New Zealand batter KANE WILLIAMSON

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Cabrera likely to get extension

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is likely to extend the contract of Javier Cabrera, the head coach of men's national team, for another year with an increase of his wages following demand from the 39-year-old.

Cabrera was initially appointed for a one-year term in 2022 before his contract was extended for another year, running out on December 31, 2023, even though he was only able to lead the side to one win and two draws in eight matches.

However, the Spaniard pulled off some good results in his second year, seeing the team to the semifinals of the SAFF Championship after 14 years. In the second year, Cabrera guided the side to four wins, five draws and four defeats in 13 international matches.

It has been learnt that the Spaniard had demanded almost twice his current wage – US\$8,000 – apart from other facilities.

“We are negotiating with his demands and hoping to reach an understanding within a week,” BFF vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed said yesterday.



eventually rewarded in his second spell as he sent back Henry Nicholls to break a sturdy 54-run stand.

A heavy leg-side field was also seen when Nayeem Hasan was operating against right-handers. Shanto kept gaps open on the off-side to induce drives and open the gap between bat and pad.

Even the usually composed Kane Williamson was forced into an error in the 49th over. With Tea approaching, the right-hander played a sweep-pull to Nayeem with Taijul positioned at mid-wicket. Taijul would, however, let it slip.

Shanto devised another field change, asking Shoriful to come forward a bit further from backward square-leg in the 59th over – an instruction he did not quite follow. Consequently, in the 71st over, Shoriful was just inches short of taking what would have been an easy catch and Williamson survived Nayeem yet again.

Even Mominul Haque rolled his arm to remove Glenn Phillips and break the 78-run stand with Williamson. Taijul later made amends by casting Williamson but not before the batting maestro got his 29th Test ton.

“He [Shanto] managed well to change up those bowlers. I think he created those angles [making batters play to the field and provide chances],” outgoing spin-bowling coach Rangana Herath said.

Shanto's confident demeanour in the pre-match presser extended to his first day as on-field captain, setting the tone for a collective success in their first assignment of the third ICC World Test Championship cycle.

Another day of ruing missed chances

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh ended Day 2 of the first Test against New Zealand with their tail up at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday but were perhaps left to rue a few missed opportunities which could have put them in total control of the match.

Najmul Hossain Shanto and Co reduced the visitors to eight down for 266, 44 runs away from Bangladesh's 310-run first innings total.

The Tigers would consider taking eight Kiwi wickets as a win but things could have been better for the hosts who let a few chances slip away, two of which gave centurion Kane Williamson reprieves.

Unsurprisingly, the premier Kiwi batter did what good players do. Not only did Williamson keep a collapse at bay but also made the hosts pay as he capitalised on those missed opportunities to get to his 29th Test ton, displaying in the process why the 33-year-old is amongst the best in the business.

Bangladesh's left-arm spinner Taijul Islam was the pick of the bowlers on the day as he returned four wickets for 89 runs from his 30 overs. However, the 31-year-old was at fault for letting Williamson off the hook when he dropped

the right-handed batter on 63 at midwicket in the 49th over of the innings. A major inroad could have been made as Tom Blundell, who was batting at naught having faced just five deliveries at the other end, would then have to rebuild the innings from a precarious position which would have seen the Kiwis lose five for 165.

Ten overs later, pacer Shoriful Islam misjudged the trajectory

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH VS NEW ZEALAND

FIRST TEST, DAY 2

Bangladesh 1st innings: 310 all out
New Zealand 1st innings: 266 for eight (Williamson 104, Phillips 42, Mitchell 41; Taijul 4-89, Shoriful 1-44, Miraz 1-57)

of the ball to make Williamson breathe a sigh of relief once again. This time he was on 70 and New Zealand had just lost Blundell with 186 on the board.

Shoriful could consider himself unfortunate in another case prior to this when the players behind the stumps failed to ascertain whether Daryl Mitchell, batting on four, had

nicked it while trying to slash a wide one. They were not convinced enough to go for a review but were left to rue when replays of Snicko showed a spike.

Had those chances been cashed in on, Bangladesh could have had New Zealand reeling six down, fighting to evade the scare of being skittled out for under 200 or 250 – something that would have changed the entire scenario of the game with the Tigers getting a considerable lead.

Fourteen of the 18 wickets that have fallen in the match so far have gone to spinners.

But Williamson's vigilant stay at the crease that saw him churn out a testing ton proves that a batter too can get rewarded for his steel and resolve.

However, the wicket is expected to dry up further, meaning batting would only get more challenging in the third and fourth innings, with both teams to impose a trial by spin.

In such situations, it is only safe to presume that the final two innings of the game could see small totals and Bangladesh, who already failed to capitalise on good starts in their first innings, might go on to rue yesterday's missed chances as well in a game that seems to be headed towards a close finish.

Can BCB's probe reach the root of rot?

SPORTS REPORTER

It took over two weeks for the country's cricket board to finally set in motion a special probe committee to unearth the reasons behind Bangladesh's shambolic ICC ODI World Cup campaign in India.

With Enayet Hossain Siraj as the convenor alongside Mahbubul Anam and former captain Akram Khan as its members, the three-person committee will “scrutinise the factors contributing to the team's underperformance in the tournament”, stated a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) press release yesterday.

Bangladesh finished eighth among 10 teams in the tournament, winning only two of their nine matches, falling far off from what the team management aspired prior to the mega event: a maiden semi-finals berth.

Akram informed that they will first sit with everyone related to the World Cup squad before



filing the report; which, however, has no deadline in place. “As we have a series going on against New Zealand, everyone is not available. So, I think it will take some time for us to speak with everyone,” Akram told The Daily Star yesterday.

This is not the first time that the Nazmul Hassan-led BCB had attempted to probe into a major event debacle, having previously formed a two-member committee following the T20 World Cup in 2021.

The board, however, never revealed any of the findings presented by the duo of Enayet and BCB director Jalal Yunus, now the chairman of cricket operations.

“There were past instances where, despite forming fact-finding committees, there were no significant results witnessed. But this time our board president has strictly instructed us to dig deep and find out the exact reasons behind the World Cup debacle,” Akram informed further.

“We had huge expectations for this World Cup but we failed miserably. Having witnessed some negative incidents before and during the World Cup, we will take everything into consideration, both on and off-field issues, before filing the final report.” It sparks curiosity that all three members of the investigative committee are BCB directors, involved in various capacities with the board: Enayet is the chairman of the BCB's Working Committee, Mahbubul leads the BCB's Grounds Committee, and former captain Akram is the chairman of the BCB's Facilities Committee.

This is unlike what happened following the 2003 World Cup in South Africa, where Bangladesh lost all their games, including one against Canada. The then cricket administration formed a two-member inquiry committee with two individuals not associated with the board: Commodore (ret'd) Mujibur Rahman and Syed Shamim Ahsan.

That report, submitted after talking to all relevant stakeholders, is still considered an exemplary fact-finding report that eventually helped Bangladesh cricket rise from the ashes.

Will the three-member committee be able to operate independently, without any external influence from BCB, this time around? Or will the reason(s) for another World Cup disaster be conveniently shrugged under the rug?



Kylian Mbappe celebrates wildly as he converts from the spot to earn PSG a 1-1 draw against a valiant Newcastle United and keep their Champions League destiny in their own hands following a controversial penalty decision from referee Szymon Marciniak on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

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Sabina & Co confident of beating Singapore

SPORTS REPORTER

Six years ago, a young Bangladesh women's football team suffered a 3-0 defeat against their Singaporean counterparts in a Tri-nation Cup in Singapore. However, those girls are much more matured now, so much so that they are confident of beating the Singaporeans as the two teams square off in two FIFA friendly matches in Dhaka.

The Singapore team, who were scheduled to arrive in Dhaka in the early hours of Thursday, will play the two matches against their hosts at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium on December 1 and 4.

In February 2017, as part of preparation for Bangladesh under-16 women's team for the finals of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship in Thailand, Bangladesh women's team played against Singapore with only three senior players. The team conceded the 3-0 defeat conceding goals in the ninth, 39th and 48th minutes respectively.

Six years after that match, the likes of Maria Manda, Monika Chakma, Sanjida Khatun, Shamsunnahar Sr, Krishna Rani Sarker and others have grown stronger and have already won the SAFF Women's Championship by beating India and Nepal. They are also much more experienced now, having rubbed

shoulders with former world champions Japan and Asian powerhouse Vietnam in this year's Asian Games.

So with those experience behind them, the women in red and green are confident about beating Singapore, who are ranked 130th in the world – 12 places ahead of Bangladesh.

“We are a much more balanced side now than we were in 2017 because we have improved a lot technically, tactically and physically,” captain Sabina said at a press briefing yesterday.

“We hope the spectators will turn up to watch two challenging matches where we want to entertain our them and keep the trend of women's football we have established. Obviously, our target is to win both matches.”

Echoing the sentiment of Sabina, vice-captain Maria Manda said, “We are getting the opportunity to play friendly matches again and we will be trying to give our level best to win both matches.” Head coach Saiful Bari Titu, however, wants to focus on the first of the two matches against Singapore.

“The team was in a good shape after the Asian Games and we are trying to maintain the same shape. Now we are looking forward to going match by match because Singapore are an unknown opposition for us,” Titu said.

