

It's a shame we didn't have a camera in the dressing room at halftime because I always hammer it into them. I warn them about going out for the second half against a team losing 1-0 at home.

AS Roma coach JOSE MOURINHO



Taijul Islam jumps in the air following one of his four wickets which helped Bangladesh to the brink of victory on the fourth day of the first Test against New Zealand at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. (Inset) Earlier, Mehedi Hasan Miraz's rearguard effort with the bat in the second innings meant the hosts had a challenging total to defend.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Patel praises Tigers' spinners

SPORTS REPORTER

New Zealand left-arm pacer Ajaz Patel credited Bangladesh spinners, particularly Taijul Islam, pointing out that it wasn't just the turning wicket in Sylhet but the Tigers' spin attack that has put the hosts in a favourable position to clinch the first Test.

Taijul added four more wickets to his name to help slump New Zealand to 113 for seven on Day 4 of the first Test at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium on Friday after the Tigers set the visitors a 332-run target.

"No, it's not a bad wicket," Patel replied when asked if the wicket had everything to do with New Zealand's collapse. "I suppose their bowlers have bowled very disciplined and put the ball in good areas and asked us good questions for long periods of time."

"He's [Taijul] bowled really well.

Obviously, he's played a lot of cricket and he's definitely a very, very skilled bowler and fair credit to him, he put the ball in good areas for long periods of time and he bowled really well," the Kiwi spinner said.

Spinners have accounted for 29 out of the 37 wickets (including two runouts) that have fallen in the match so far.

Bangladesh's spin attack has taken 15 wickets of the 17 Kiwi scalps so far and eight of those have gone to Taijul, who has been the stand-out figure on a turning wicket, striking with the old ball and the new, in the battle of the spinners.

Patel pointed out that the wicket, despite accommodating decent turn, has been consistent.

"I think it's shown consistency. The morning period probably doesn't have as much in it. And then as the day goes further, it starts to kind of dry up that top layer and it starts to spin a little bit more. But I suppose also the other thing to factor in is that the new ball probably bites a little bit more and the older ball is a little bit softer and doesn't spit as much," he said.



Taijul has been ready to lead spin attack for a while

SABBIR HOSSAIN, ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI

When Kane Williamson, centurion in the first innings, came to bat in the second innings yesterday, the stump mic picked up Bangladesh fielders riling Taijul Islam up with 'this is your wicket.'

Taijul has been one of Bangladesh's most crucial figures in Tests for a long time, especially at home. He usually bowls the lion's share of overs during Bangladesh's bowling innings and this time he needed to play a huge role in terms of making his presence felt in absence of the other left-arm spinner, Shakib Al Hasan. His teammates' confidence on him to do just that was what the stump mic picked up.

Taijul is almost always the second fiddle in terms of attacking with spin when Shakib is in the side but without the ace all-rounder, Taijul's role was more pronounced. He had a simple plan -- to support his spin group of Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nayeem Islam.

"To be honest, I cannot do what someone else is doing and someone else cannot do what I am doing. I always stay within my plan. Whether Shakib bhai is around or not there are other spinners with me and game by game the plan remains in a way that someone will take wickets and someone will contain the runs.

"If I was looking to contain runs, Nayeem or Miraj might have taken wickets. Whoever playing or not, the important thing is that we are playing well," Taijul said after his 4-40 in the second innings put the hosts on the verge of victory.

But Taijul has appeared in more Tests since 2021 than Shakib. Since 2021, Shakib has played in seven Tests to Taijul's 14 appearances. In the seven Tests Taijul appeared alongside Shakib, his average went up to 36.32 (from 31.58) along with his strike-rate (88 compared to career strike-rate of 63.6) while his economy rate went down to 2.47 from a career economy rate of 2.47 -- a clear indication that he was doing a containing job.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH VS NEW ZEALAND

Bangladesh 1st innings: 310

2nd innings: 338 all out

(Shanto 105, Mushfiqur 67, Miraz 50 not out, Mominul 40; Patel 4-148, Sodhi 2-74)

New Zealand 1st innings: 317

2nd innings: 113 for 7

Mitchell 44 not out, Conway 22; Taijul 4-40, Shoriful 1-13)

Without Shakib, Taijul is a more attacking prospect. In the seven games he played alongside Shakib since 2021, he picked up 28 wickets. In the other seven Tests, he has bagged 43 wickets.

Thus, he was handed the key to attack and lead. He would bag the in-form Kane Williamson for the second time in the Sylhet Test, yet again with an arm delivery that slipped past the right-hander's defences and rapped his pads. Williamson reviewed but started walking as soon as he saw the replay.

"I have been playing for nine years and probably they had the faith that I will be able to set him (Williamson) up and get his wicket," he said.

Even when Shakib is playing, Taijul's role is crucial. With Shakib now at the latter stages of his career, there are suggestions he would opt out of Tests sooner rather than later. Taijul would then have to lead and he feels ready.

"If the coach and the captain give me priority certainly I will try to help," Taijul said.

Bashar justifies Soumya's inclusion

SPORTS REPORTER

Soumya Sarkar was recently recalled to the Bangladesh one-day international and Twenty20 squad for the forthcoming tour of New Zealand, an inclusion that has raised many eyebrows.

Selector Habibul Bashar, however, justified the inclusion of the all-rounder, saying his experience will aid the team in New Zealand.

"The thought process behind picking him [Soumya] is his experience of playing in such conditions along with his all-round abilities," Bashar told the media in Sylhet on Friday.

Soumya didn't light up the recently concluded National Cricket League (NCL) but his returns of 436 runs, which included four fifties, and 17 wickets in six matches wasn't anything to scoff at.

Bashar believed that Soumya is in decent enough form to come good for the Tigers in New Zealand. "Soumya's form is not that bad, he batted well in the first-class competition. It's not like he batted exceptionally well, but an average of 48 is not that bad, even though we expect more from him," said the former Bangladesh skipper.

Bashar also said that the absence of regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad and Soumya's experience of playing 20 matches in New Zealand across three formats, played a part in his call back.

"We had to make some forced changes. Since Mahmudullah and Shakib are not available, we lacked experienced cricketers in the team. "When we form a team we take a few other aspects into consideration, not just the performance... On that note, those who are relatively experienced and performed decently get preference," he said.

Just this September, Soumya had made his return to the Tiger's ODI side after almost 30 months against the same opponents at home.

The left-hander played two ODIs of that three match series, he got out for a duck in the second ODI and didn't get to bat in the third one and was not considered for the World Cup squad.

Independence Cup last-8 confirmed

SPORTS REPORTER

The Independence Cup quarterfinals lineup was completed yesterday as holders Bashundhara Kings emerged group champions after a goalless draw against Chittagong Abahani in Group D final match in Gopalganj.

In the last-eight encounters, Kings face off Bangladesh Army while Chittagong Abahani and Mohammedan SC lock horns on December 5, two days after Police FC play Rahmatganj MFS and Abahani take on Sheikh Jamal DC.

At Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium, Kings arrived on the back of two memorable AFC Cup victories over Mohun Bagan and Maziya S&RC. However, the defending champions found it difficult against the port-city outfit without their key players -- likely avoiding any risk of playing their regular starters ahead of the AFC Cup group final match against Odisha FC on December 11.

Kings featured a few substitutes in the second half, including Brazilian forward Dorielton Gomes, speedy winger Rakib Hossain, and defender Boburbek Yuldashov, but they had little impact on the game. Instead, it was Chittagong Abahani who had the majority of possession but they failed to unsettle the backline of Kings, who appeared content with a draw.

Nadal to return in Brisbane

REUTERS

Former tennis world number one Rafa Nadal will return at the Brisbane International warm up event for the Australian Open in January, the Spaniard said on Friday.

The 22-time Grand Slam champion has not played a competitive match since bowing out in the second round of this year's Australian Open when hampered by a hip flexor problem.

Nadal was initially expected to miss just eight weeks but underwent surgery on a hip muscle in June.

"After a year away from competition, it's time to come back," Nadal, who won the Australian Open in 2009 and 2022, said in a video posted to social media.

"It will be in Brisbane, the first week of January. I'll see you there."

Last month, Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley confirmed that Nadal would be participating in the year's first Grand Slam.

Nadal has said he expects to retire after the 2024 season, with a series of injuries limiting his appearances on Tour.

He dropped out of the top 100 for the first time in 20 years earlier in the season and has slipped to number 633 in the world but is eligible for a protected ranking having been injured and not competing in any event for at least six months.

Nadal has previously expressed a desire to play one more French Open and represent Spain at the Paris Olympics next year before retiring at the end of his 23rd season on the tour.

The Brisbane tournament, which is returning after a three-year hiatus forced initially by the COVID pandemic, will run from Dec. 31 to Jan. 7.

Teamwork outshines Tahura brace as Bangladesh sink Singapore

SPORTS REPORTER

Forward Tahura Khatun had contemplated hanging up her boots following a lean patch but the lanky forward showcased her mettle by netting a brace in Bangladesh's convincing 3-0 win over Singapore in the first of two FIFA friendly fixtures in Kamalapur yesterday.

At Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium, defender Afeida Khandokar gave Bangladesh an early lead with a close-range header in the third minute. Tahura later provided a two-goal cushion with a placing shot in the 16th minute before putting the game to bed in the 60th minute, striking her second with an overhead shot.

"I had gone through a bad time because I was sick. I also wanted to quit football but [assistant coach Mahbubur Rahman] Litu sir gave me confidence to persevere. He also asked me to keep faith in myself. This time the coaching staff including [coach Saiful Bari] Titu sir supported a lot," said Tahura, who climbed up the hierarchy to feature in the starting eleven following injury to Krishna Rani Sarkar and the retirement of forward Sirat Jahan Swapna.



The forward proved herself in the match and she has "no regret of missing an hatrick opportunity".

"I'm rather satisfied with the build up game the team showed today [yesterday]," said Tahura.

It was also the first win in six matches for the women in red and green since their SAFF Women's Championship triumph

in September last year. The result also served as a revenge for Bangladesh, who lost to Singapore by an identical margin in 2017.

The charges of Saiful Bari Titu dominated visiting Singapore, who initially attempted to press the home side but went on the backfoot once Bangladesh grabbed control of the match

through a patient build-up from the back.

Maria Manda, Monica Chakma, and Sabina Khatun were crucial in the midfield, facilitating attacks. They accelerated the tempo in the second half, producing a good number of chances but could only convert one.

"All credit goes to the players because the girls are used to playing this way, and I just worked on one aspect on how to build the game from behind rather than playing long balls. I think they showed the style of play today," said Titu, who guided the women's team in three matches against Japan, Vietnam, and Nepal during the Asian Games in China in September and October.

The former national footballer further said that Bangladesh have no room for complacency despite a big win.

"Of course, the convincing win gives the girls confidence to carry on in the next match, but we don't want to be satisfied with this winning margin, which could have been larger. We need to figure out why this happened, and we'll analyse our performance before taking on Singapore in the next match [on December 4] to keep the momentum going."