

Shanto, Taijul GRAB THE BRASS RING

ASHEFAQ-UL-ALAM

When Shakib Al Hasan got ruled out of Bangladesh's home Test series against New Zealand due to injury, the hosts suffered a double blow as they lost their leader and their best all-rounder at the same time.

The void created by the skipper's unavailability only got accentuated by the absences of other experienced players like Tamim Iqbal, Liton Das and Taskin Ahmed, leaving the team vulnerable against a full-strength New Zealand side.

But the absence of familiar faces, Shakib in particular, made space for other players to step up – an opportunity Najmul Hossain Shanto and Taijul Islam grabbed with both hands in the Sylhet Test, which concluded yesterday, playing key roles in a monumental 150-run victory.

Shanto, the stand-in captain for the Test series, was Bangladesh's best performer with the bat in the match as it was his century in the second innings that helped the team set a daunting target for the Kiwis.

But the 25-year-old's impact in the match can't solely be measured through his returns with the bat.

Shanto, who made his captaincy debut in Tests in the match, exuded confidence right from the pre-match press conference, where he didn't give vague statements of hoping to do well, but declared that he is eyeing a series win.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Bangladesh: 1st innings 310 and 2nd innings 338

New Zealand: 1st innings 317 and 2nd innings 181 all out (Mitchell 58, Southee 34, Sodhi 22, Conway 22; Taijul 6-75, Nayeem 2-40, Shoriful 1-13, Miraz 1-44)

Result: Bangladesh won by 150 runs
Player of the match: Taijul Islam

The first day didn't go too well for the left-hander, as he got caught off a full-toss from part-timer Glenn Phillips, after he had chosen to bat first.

The soft dismissal, however, didn't rattle him mentally as he made up for his earlier gaffe with a match defining century in the second innings.

On the field, Shanto marshalled his troops like an



experienced skipper and even took inspired captaincy calls.

His decision to use part-timer Mominul Haque in the first innings paid dividends twice as the left-arm spinner broke a 78-run partnership between Phillips and Kane Williamson and then a stubborn ninth-wicket stand between Tim Southee and Kyle Jamieson, stopping New Zealand from getting a sizable lead.

Even after achieving the monumental victory, Shanto didn't lose sight of his main goal, winning the series.

"There is still one match to go. The job's half done. It's not like we will just show up and win the match. We will again have to work hard for five days," the stand-in skipper told reporters after the match.

Taijul, on the

other hand, has been the leader of the Bangladesh spin attack in home Tests for some time now, without anyone really noticing.

Despite featuring in 14 Tests to Shakib's seven since 2021, Taijul has been mostly overshadowed by the ace all-rounder.

In the Sylhet Test, the wicket was neither a rank turner nor a low and slow track like the ones the Tigers are accustomed to having in home Tests.

The 31-year-old had to use all his experience and bag of tricks to first keep a tight leash on the Kiwi batters while also picking up wickets in regular intervals, finishing with match figures of 10-184 to be rightfully named the player-of-the-match.

Incidentally, Bangladesh's only other Test win over New Zealand also came in a match where Shakib and Tamim were missing.

In that game in Mount Maunganui in 2022, captain Mominul and Ebadot Hossain played pivotal roles in the victory, similar to what Shanto and Taijul have done in Sylhet.

Both wins indicate the same thing – Bangladesh do not need to depend on the same few faces to win matches all the time.



Taijul Islam holds aloft the cherry as skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and the other players approvingly stare at him as they make it to the dressing room following Bangladesh's 150-run victory over New Zealand in the first Test at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Unconventional fixtures set for BPL

SPORTS REPORTER

The Professional League Management Committee (PLMC) yesterday decided to create the fixture of the forthcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) on a random basis, abandoning the conventional format in order to minimise "influence" in matches between lower-table teams.

Traditionally, the defending champions played the lowest team on the table before playing the second bottom side, gradually progressing to complete the league, while the runners-up and other teams proceeded in similar manner.

"As the top sides play the bottom sides initially, they try to influence each other [in the latter stages, in terms of outcomes]," Imrul Hasan, newly appointed PLMC chairman and BFF vice-president, told reporters after a meeting at the BFF House yesterday.

"So, we have decided to formulate the fixture on a random basis, with the aid of online apps."

Commencing on December 22, BPL will draw its curtains by June, allowing teams – particularly those participating in the AFC Cup – to take advantage of both the international and domestic transfer windows.

Hasan informed further, "Like the previous edition, the league matches will take place on Friday and Saturday while the matches of the Federation Cup will be held on Tuesday."

Following Gopalganj FC's withdrawal from top-flight football, it was also decided that top two teams from the upcoming Bangladesh Championship League (BCL) – expected to begin in early February following the transfer window from December 26 to January 25 – will earn BPL promotion, while the bottom two BPL teams will be relegated to BCL.

Aussie curator passes first test

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

For the last few years, the chatter surrounding the pitch after a home Test for Bangladesh would usually be about its overtly spin-friendly nature or it having nothing on offer for bowlers.

But after the first Test of the two-match series between Bangladesh and New Zealand, the pitch at the Sylhet International Stadium has attracted a lot of positive attention, as cricketers, broadcasters and fans are singing praises of its sporting nature.

The person who oversaw the preparation of the lively pitch in Sylhet was Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) curator's recently appointed curator Tony Hemming.

Hemming, who was appointed by the BCB on a two-year contract in July, saw the match come to a conclusion on Saturday morning in the media centre and was visibly satisfied with his work.

"Groundsman tries to have an even balance between bat and ball. It was almost 29 runs a wicket. So it was very close," said Hemming as a satisfied smile appeared on his face.

Hemmings was delighted to have a hand in preparing a pitch that produced a good Test match.

"Well, there was a bit in for all facets of the game. So, everyone

got a chance to compete. That is what a good Test pitch is. Yeah, very pleasing to get the results, but more importantly, it is good to see good cricket."

Hemming has an impressive resume, having worked with Western Australia Cricket Association



(WACA) as a soil advisor and consultant and the head curator of the ICC Cricket Academy and the Dubai International Stadium.

He is now tasked with the development of the Sheikh Hasina International Cricket Stadium in

Purbachal, along with running training programmes for curators.

Suffice to say, the Australian has passed his first test with flying colours.

In the match, the Tigers defeated the Kiwis by 150 runs – their maiden home Test against the opponents – to take a 1-0 lead.

The margin of the win could indicate that the match was played on a typical Bangladeshi rank-turner, where matches usually end by the third day.

However, the fact that the match ended on the morning session of the fifth day indicates that wasn't the case.

The bounce in the pitch in Sylhet was nearly the same all five days with very few instances of the ball keeping low.

Although the spinners got some assistance, there were no demons in the wicket, which meant the bowlers had to put in more effort to claim their wickets.

In this regard, the Bangladeshi spinners had the edge with Taijul Islam claiming a match-winning 10-wicket haul.

Players from both Bangladesh and New Zealand said that the wicket played well, and was far from a minefield for the batters.



Southee praises 'ever-improving' Bangladesh

AGENCIES

New Zealand captain Tim Southee said they were outplayed by an "ever-improving" Bangladesh in the opening Test in Sylhet following their 150-run defeat to the home side in the first Test at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

"You look at the way the Bangladesh bowlers were able to apply pressure for a long period of time. I think we did that in periods but we did not do it for long enough," Southee said after New Zealand's first ever Test loss in Bangladesh.

New Zealand's batters also failed to create the partnerships they wanted to, he added.

"So many things you can look back on. As a side, we are just looking to improve and hopefully learn from this and move forward."

Kane Williamson's gutsy hundred helped New Zealand barely eclipse Bangladesh's first innings 310 but chasing 332 on a worn-out track, the touring side were bundled out for 181 by the spin-heavy attack of their hosts.

"We knew in this part of the world, as Test moves on, it gets harder to bat," Southee said.

"Every time you lose, it's not ideal but I think it's just a sign of an ever-improving Bangladesh team."

He defended his side's team selection, which saw Kyle Jamieson preferred ahead of Neil Wagner, with Ish Sodhi and Ajaz Patel forming the spin attack.

"You look at the conditions, and you look at the squad you've got, and you pick your best 11," he said.

"You look at the bowling group and KJ (Jamieson) has been a phenomenal performer for us, Ish Sodhi was the man of the series in the last series that he played, and AJ (Patel) has been a great bowler for us," he said.

Tigresses face SA in first T20I today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team will take on hosts South Africa in the first of the three-match T20I series, part of the ICC Women's Championship, at the Willowmoore Park in Benoni today.

Nigar Sultana and Co are coming from a 2-1 win over Pakistan at home recently and have made a couple of changes, with uncapped Lata Mondol and Shorifa Khatun getting an opportunity in the side.

The second and third T20Is are scheduled for December 6 and 8, respectively, in Kimberly.

The two teams then proceed to clash in a three-match ODI series, beginning in East London on December 16.

The second ODI is scheduled for December 20 in Potchefstroom before the teams travel to Benoni for the tour's third and final game on December 23.



Germany players celebrate one of their two goals during the FIFA U-17 World Cup final against France at the Manahan Stadium in Solo, Indonesia yesterday. The Germans, reigning European champions, went on to win the final in a thrilling penalty shootout after the regulation time ended in a 2-2 draw.

PHOTO: AFP