

# Will Bangladesh identify their home advantage?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

What is home advantage for Bangladesh? The question has been one of the more acute ones in Bangladesh's Test cricket in the last few years as the team has failed to yield such advantage at home – an outcome pointing to a lack of long-term vision.

More often than not, Bangladesh have suffered at home against big sides in the format despite preparing wickets they thought were more suited to their strengths. Yesterday's four-wicket loss to New Zealand was yet another example.

Following a World Cup debacle, the cricket board was keen to sweep disastrous performances in India under the rug and a Test series win felt like the perfect remedy for the incumbent board. While a 150-run win in Sylhet in the first Test showed that the team is ready for conditions that has a bit for everyone, the wicket served up in Mirpur went back to the particular blueprint of 2016 and 2017 from head coach Chandika Hathurusingha's first stint. The only problem with that is that more often than not, the blueprint of success that had led to wins against England and Australia on such tracks, is one that usually backfires on the Tigers.

This time, too, Bangladesh banked on their spinners to bowl better than their counterparts, which they possibly did. However, the Bangladesh batters had a harder time than their Kiwi counterparts which resulted in another Test loss and an opportunity to seal a historic series let go.

Even the crowd in Mirpur yesterday was talking about



the pitch. The first ball from Shoriful Islam just shaped away and once it landed, it rolled to the wicket-keeper. The BCB president Nazmul Hassan, speaking after the match, suggested that they expected the team to play better on such a wicket.

Captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said the home advantage factor did not backfire on them.

"I don't think so. When we play Tests, we are not here to improve. This is not a place for practice. We are trying to win the Test. It is important that we prepare to win the Test. But we should definitely take this type of advantage. We can prepare in first-class cricket by trying out good wickets or wickets like these," he said at the press conference yesterday, even though the way second Test played out suggested that the home advantage has been misinterpreted.

While India or Sri Lanka also produce turning tracks, usually the pitches have true bounce. At Mirpur, balls often bounced so low that most batters worried about when one was sneaking through under the bat or other times they took off from a length. Success for batters, appeared to be decided by chance or fate.

Would the batters carry confidence when they move to New Zealand for the ODI and T20I series? They would again need to acclimatise to true bounce, always lagging behind the rest of the world.

"There was both turn and bounce. It was difficult for the batters. We have to enjoy these challenges as batters. We wanted this wicket. As a batting group, it was important how we could have taken the team forward on the strength of big partnerships. I hope batters will enjoy these conditions in future," Shanto said when asked whether the uneven bounce was more difficult than the turn spinners enjoyed.

Thus, having suffered a World Cup debacle where the batters failed to capitalise on sporting wickets, this time the Bangladesh think-tank outwitted the Test team as well.



Glenn Phillips once again showed his mettle on a demanding Mirpur pitch after first innings heroics as New Zealand aced a thrilling fourth-innings chase on the fourth day of the second Test, thanks to an unbroken 70-run seventh-wicket partnership between Phillips and Mitchell Santner.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Mirpur gives Southee 'worst wicket' experience

SPORTS REPORTER

A gulf in the cricketing culture separating Bangladesh and a top Test side like New Zealand was once again showcased by how the two captains remarked about the Mirpur pitch, which staged the just-concluded second and final Test between the two sides.

Despite winning by four wickets yesterday, Kiwi skipper Tim Southee was scathing in his remarks about the poor playing surface on display at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium but his counterpart backed it.

It is highly unusual that a captain would suggest that a wicket was bad even after winning a Test

**“There are a number of ways I could describe that wicket [in Mirpur]. I think for the match to be all over in [around] 170 overs is a fair reflection on the wicket.”**

**Tim Southee**  
New Zealand skipper

that allowed them to end the series on level terms. But Mirpur has a reputation, and this time it served something special for Southee to make such remarks.

Only 178.1 overs -- the seventh-lowest for a Test where at least

36 wickets fell -- were needed to produce an outcome as the match saw a result on Day Four, even after the second day was completely washed out by rain.

"Probably the worst wicket I've come across in my career," Southee, with experience of playing 96 Tests since 2008, said in the post-match



press conference yesterday.

"Just like I said, the balance between bat and ball was heavily favoured into the bowler's hands. So, I think for the match to be over in 170 overs sort of reflects that.

"So, for our guys to scrap away and then come away with the win was a big pleasure," the 34-year-old added while talking about whether it was the most difficult wicket he has seen from a batting perspective.

Southee and Kyle Jamieson, the two pacers bowled just 15.2 overs in the entire Test match, producing two wickets. Shoriful Islam, the lone pacer in the Bangladesh ranks bowled nine overs, bagging three wickets in the match.

"There are a number of ways I

could describe that wicket. I think for the match to be all over in [around] 170 overs is a fair reflection on the wicket. I think [it's] just a scrappy Test match.

"Obviously, a tough wicket. Runs were hard to come by. And just those little moments and partnerships throughout were crucial. Whereas in other matches, I guess when conditions are a little bit more even between bat and ball, they don't get noticed as much," Southee pointed out.

Glenn Phillips, playing just his third Test, already carrying the tag of a white-ball specialist, turned out to be the most effective batter in these conditions. He followed up his 87 from the first innings with an unbeaten 40, part of a crucial 70-run partnership with Mitchell Santner.

Phillips also contributed with the ball, picking up three wickets in Bangladesh's first innings. Southee opined that Phillips' ability to play on difficult wickets became the difference between the two sides.

"I think it's just the way that Glenn [Phillips] plays, and the way that he's able to come in and only in his second and third test match, and to come in and play the way he knows how. A lot of his great innings have been on difficult wickets. He has a way of doing special things on tricky wickets. So, I think it's just his positive mindset on a wicket like that was very crucial," the Kiwi skipper said further.

## Girona can win LaLiga 'against the odds'

REUTERS

Barcelona face high-flying Girona in LaLiga on Sunday, and Barca manager Xavi Hernandez believes this season's surprise package are perfectly capable of winning the title.

Girona, with just one defeat, are level on points with leaders Real Madrid, while last season's champions Barcelona are four points behind the top two in third place.

Speaking to reporters on Saturday, Xavi had no doubts when asked if the Catalan minnows could go on to win LaLiga.

"I have already said that against the odds and surprisingly, they can do it," he said. "I like them because they're brave, they're not afraid."

Girona's rise to the top of the table has taken many by surprise, but Xavi is not among them, and he was full of praise for Barca's next opponents.

"It's a great game. Girona, surprisingly for many people, are leaders, or co-leaders. But for us it's no surprise.

"They're a dynamic team, with a great coach, a system similar to ours, they want to have the ball, they want to be the protagonists - they put pressure on you.

"I congratulate the coach and the team."



PHOTO: REUTERS

Liverpool's Harvey Elliott celebrates with Mohamed Salah after scoring a last-gasp winner during a dramatic 2-1 victory against Crystal Palace that sent the Reds to the top of the Premier League on Saturday. Salah earlier scored his 200th goal for Liverpool.

## Bangladesh begin U-19 Asia Cup with win

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh kicked off their ACC U-19 Asia Cup campaign with a 61-run victory over the UAE in Dubai yesterday.

At the ICC Academy Ground, the young Tigers successfully defended a rather modest 228-run target, restricting the home side for 167 runs in 47.4 overs. Skipper Mahfuzur Rahman Rabby and Parvez Rahman Jibon took four wickets apiece.

Asked to bat earlier, Bangladesh could not capitalise on the foundation laid by openers Ashikur Rahman Shibli (71) and Jishan Alam (42) with a 74-run partnership as the middle and lower-middle order misfired. Off-spinner Dhruv Parashar remained the standout UAE bowler with a six-wicket haul.

An improved batting display will be the primary objective for Mahfuzur and his troops when they take on Japan in their second group game on Monday.

## SA name strong ODI squad for Bangladesh series

ICC

Three key players returned to South Africa's ODI mix for the upcoming three-match ICC Women's Championship series against Bangladesh.

Fast bowler Ayabonga Khaka, along with all-rounders Marizanne Kapp and Nadine de Klerk, who were absent during the T20I series against Bangladesh -- a series that concluded in a tie (1-1, with the second T20I resulting in no outcome) -- are set to make their return to the side for the upcoming ODI leg.

### FIXTURES

**1st ODI:** December 16, Buffalo Park, East London  
**2nd ODI:** December 20, JB Marks Oval, Potchefstroom  
**3rd ODI:** December 23, Willowmoore Park, Benoni

## Russians, Belarusians to participate at Paris Olympics

REUTERS, Berlin

Russians and Belarusians who qualify in their sport for the Paris 2024 Olympics can take part as neutrals without flags, emblems or anthems at the event next year, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said on Friday.

Russians and Belarusians had initially been banned from competing internationally following Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, for which Belarus has been used as a staging ground.

In March, however, the IOC issued a first set of recommendations for international sports federations to allow Russian and Belarusian competitors to return and they have since done so in most events. The neutral athletes will compete only in individual sports. Athletes who actively support the war in Ukraine are not eligible, nor are those contracted to the Russian or Belarusian military.