

Of a backfiring short-term fix

SPORTS REPORTER

When it comes to approaching Test cricket, which revolves around endurance and longevity of ideas, Bangladesh cricket often adopts short-term fixes.

Case in point, after the rain-hit second Test between Bangladesh and New Zealand in Mirpur reached its conclusion after 178.1 overs, stand-in skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto had said that the wicket was what they had asked for.

A four-wicket loss, however, suggested that the Tigers fell into the trap they had set the visitors up for at their favourite hunting ground.

Shanto also mentioned that at home, such wickets will be prepared again and Bangladesh needed to be better prepared to take advantage.

It turns out that the wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium for the Mirpur Test was adjudged "unsatisfactory" by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday.

The Mirpur pitch was consequently handed one demerit point after match referee David Boon said in his report that the wicket was "under-prepared" with inconsistent bounce and balls bursting from the surface.

Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a cricket analyst and mentor of many national team stalwarts, has also served as a curator and he was asked to comment on whether batters can be prepared for such wickets.

"First of all, the ICC does not allow such wickets. The skipper must know where the limit is if they want to play on such wickets," Fahim said about the wicket.

Fahim said that such clipped grass, mentioned in the match referee's report, only acted as a means to "camouflage whatever the surface actually was".



Teams such as England and Australia have lost Tests here on turning tracks, but Fahim believes that the gap between Bangladesh and teams outside of the subcontinent are decreasing in terms of how they fare on such wickets.

"There was a time when we would play average on such wickets but the away side would play poorly. This time New Zealand had world-class spinners and went against us toe to toe," he opined.

Bangladesh batters tried to show resilience but no batter from either side could find results as well as Glenn Phillips.

"When the ball is within a batter's reach, it's difficult to defend since you need to react faster. But you also need the capacity for hitting, and Phillips had that," he said.

More acutely, Fahim believes that short-term gain was prioritized by the thinktank.

"Maybe winning the second Test would have allowed the captain to say that the team won on his captaincy debut. The coach [Chandika Hathurusingha] should be asked about it too, since I feel it's his idea too [to prepare such a wicket]. Maybe it was done to bring immediate results right now, but without much forethought.

"It shows that current leadership doesn't have ideas like Eddie Barlow or Gordon Greenidge, who not only thought about the present but also kept Bangladesh's future in mind," Fahim further said.

Batters can hardly say that they gained any confidence from batting in Mirpur. It is trivial given how the ODI World Cup went where bowlers from all countries were put under the cosh and batters made the difference with their shot-playing ability.

"If we play on such surfaces [in future], we will be knowingly losing the game since opponents are coming better prepared for such tracks as time progresses," Fahim concluded.



Opener Ashiqur Rahman Shibli powered Bangladesh to a comfortable six-wicket win over Sri Lanka yesterday, taking his side into the semifinals as Group B winners of the ongoing ACC U-19 Asia Cup in the UAE. The young Tiger's unbeaten 130-ball 116, laced with 11 fours and two sixes, enabled Bangladesh to chase down 200-run target with 55 balls to spare. Having scored 71 and an unbeaten 55 in respective wins against the hosts and Japan, Shibli raised his run-tally to 242 runs, the highest in this edition so far. Bangladesh will take on Group A runners-up India in the second semifinal on Friday after Pakistan face off against the UAE.

PHOTO: BCB

Rohit breaks silence after WC final loss

ICC



India captain Rohit Sharma has spoken out for the first time since his side suffered defeat in the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 Final against Australia last month.

India secured victories in all 10 matches leading up to the final on November 19.

Rohit has taken a well-deserved break, opting out of the white-ball series against Australia and South Africa and simultaneously stepping away from the public eye. Now, more than three weeks after the final, he took to social media to open up about his emotions after missing out on cricket's biggest prize.

"I had no idea how to come back from this the first few days," Rohit said in a video posted on social media. "I don't know what to do. You know, my family, my friends kept me going, kept things pretty light around me, which was quite helpful."

"It wasn't easy to digest, but yeah, life moves on. But honestly, it was tough. It was not so easy to just move on. I've always grown up watching 50-over World Cup and to me, that was, you know, the ultimate prize, the 50-over World Cup.

"At times I thought we did everything we could from our side if someone asked me what went wrong because we won 10 games and in those 10 games, yes, we made mistakes. But those mistakes happen in every game," Rohit continued. "You cannot have a perfect game. You can have a near-perfect game but never a perfect game."

Australia eye fitting end to a stellar year

AGENCIES

Australia will look to cap a brilliant year with a golden home summer by beating Pakistan in a three-Test series starting in Perth on Thursday as David Warner looks to bow out of the longest format on a triumphant note.

Having won the World Test Championship, retained the Ashes and earned a record-extending sixth World Cup title, Pat Cummins's side have the chance to celebrate with home fans against a team they have whitewashed in their last five home series.

Home skipper named a full-strength side on Wednesday with the return of off-spinner Nathan Lyon the only change from the side which retained the Ashes in the fifth Test against England in August.

Cummins also announced that middle order batter Travis Head, one of the heroes of Australia's World Cup triumph, would be one of the team's vice captains alongside Steve Smith.

"I just think the personality that he brings to the team is something that we all love," Cummins told reporters.

"He takes the game on and he enjoys it. He's always got a smile on his face. He never takes anything too seriously.

"Sometimes you can mistake

● Australia have lost only one of their last 10 Tests against Pakistan (W6 D3) and have lost only one of their last 25 Tests at home against Pakistan (W19 D5).

Pakistan have won six of their last seven Tests away from home (L1) but the last time they won a Test in Australia was in 1995. Since then, they've lost 14 Tests in a row in the country.

● Australia have won all their three Tests at the Perth Stadium, batting first in each of those three matches; only at Old Wanderers Ground in Johannesburg (W2 D3) have they played more games at a single venue in the history of the format without losing.

● Nathan Lyon (496) is four away from becoming the third player to take 500 wickets in Tests for Australia (Shane Warne, Glenn McGrath) and the eighth overall; however, Lyon's Test bowling average against Pakistan (46.6) is his highest against any team.



that for someone who's not a deep thinker about the game but I think tactically he's excellent. So, he's got all the makings of a really strong leader."

Pakistan's new captain Shan Masood said his team will be out to buck considerable odds, and 28 years of history, with a victory over a full-strength Australia.

Masood, who replaced top batsman Babar Azam as skipper after the 50-overs World Cup, conceded Pakistan were short of test match practice but said there was no question of playing for anything less than a win at Perth Stadium.

"You have to be positive," Masood, a fan of England's 'Bazball' style of play, told reporters on Wednesday.

"It's picking your battles, it's being sensible. It's about seeing the requirement of the games and seeing what are the ways we can save time in the game and create a situation where taking 20 wickets would be easy."

Pakistan have taken 20 wickets only once in their last eight Tests in Australia going back to 2009, part of a sequence of 14 straight losses going back to their last win in November 1995.

East Zone eye win over Central on final day

SPORTS REPORTER

East Zone are 41 runs away from sealing a victory over Central Zone in their second round game of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) after the end of the third day at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

Chasing a small target of 149, East Zone ended the day on 108 for 3 with Amite Hasan and Shamim Hossain not out on 40 and 37 respectively.

Earlier in the day, Central zone took a first innings lead of 23 runs after bundling out East Zone for 257.

But courtesy of Nayeem Ahmed's four-wicket haul and pacer Khaled Ahmed's three wickets, East Zone bounced back brilliantly, bundling out Central Zone for just 125 runs in 38.2 overs.

At the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, North Zone posted 277 for 3 in their second innings and are leading by 253 runs against South Zone after the third day.

Abdullah Al Mamun is 13 runs shy of his second first-class ton as the right-hander will resume the final day on 87 off 217 deliveries while Akbar Ali was not out on 62 off 84 balls.

Earlier, South Zone took a first innings lead of 24 runs by posting 243 in reply to North Zone's 219.

Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus is the latest recipient of the World Football Summit Award. The award was presented on Monday during a gala ceremony in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, dedicated to recognising outstanding individuals. The prize acknowledged Yunus for his "extraordinary contribution to impact in the sports industry and his lifetime achievements." Professor Yunus said: "As we celebrate sport, let us recognize its potential for positive change through sports, but let us also recognize our own potential, as human beings, be it individually or collectively, to make a meaningful difference in people's life."



FED CUP Mohammedan, Abahani in same group

SPORTS REPORTER

Reigning champions Mohammedan SC and runners-up Abahani Limited were slotted in Group B of the Federation Cup draw held at BFF House yesterday.

Chittagong Abahani and Brothers Union are the other members of Group B of the 10-team competition.

The 34th edition of the tournament will get underway on December 26 at three separate venues in Munshiganj, Gopalganj and Bashundhara Kings arena. The final is billed for May 21 next year.

This is the third time Abahani and Mohammedan have been drawn in the same group of the Federation Cup. Earlier, they were grouped together in 2013 and 2020 and in both editions neither of them could reach the final.

Group A: Police FC, Sheikh Jamal DC and Rahmatganj MFS
Group B: Abahani, Mohammedan SC, Ctg Abahani and Brothers Union
Group C: Bashundhara Kings, Sheikh Russel KC and Fortis FC

In the last edition, 11-time champions Mohammedan and 12-time champions Abahani faced off in the final for the first time in 14 years and the former team won in a penalty shoot out.

The 10 participating teams were divided into three groups with the top two sides from each group and the two best third-place finishers set to advance to the quarterfinals.

Man Utd hit new low

REUTERS, London

Far from being the Theatre of Dreams, Old Trafford provided a horribly bleak dose of reality for Manchester United fans as they went out of Europe with a whimper on Tuesday.

A season in which United have already lost half of their 24 matches in all competitions plumbed new depths as they slumped to a 1-0 loss at home to a Bayern Munich side in third gear.

It condemned Erik ten Hag's side to bottom place in their group with just four points -- their lowest total in the Champions League group stage -- while the 15 goals they conceded in six games was the most ever by an English side.

For the third time in seven seasons, United have exited at the group stage and this time they do not even have the consolation of the Europa League.

With a daunting trip to Premier League leaders Liverpool at the weekend -- a fixture they lost 7-0 last season -- the question is are things about to get even worse and how much time does Ten Hag have left to try and turn it around.

"The fans have shown a level of patience, but there's huge disappointment," United's former title-winning defender Steve Bruce

told the BBC's Football Daily podcast.

"As we have said many times with United they always look like they're two games away from a crisis. Erik ten Hag now has to try and lift the spirits of everyone and the only way you can do that is getting a result (at Liverpool).



"It's a desperate situation they find themselves in."

Ten Hag's first campaign was relatively positive as the former Ajax Amsterdam manager delivered the League Cup, their first trophy for six years, and put the club back in the Champions League via a third-placed finish in the Premier League.

It earned Ten Hag plenty of credit

in the bank but he is using it up fast, even if the fans are largely still behind him.

The truth is, despite 400 million pounds (\$500.88 million) being spent on new signings since Ten Hag took charge, United look like a team lacking a clear vision or direction.

Jaap Stam, a Champions League winner with United in the treble-winning 1999 side, said he fears for fellow Dutchman Ten Hag and says United's recent banning of some media outlets over stories of dressing room rifts just adds to the malaise.

"You need to have peace and quiet," he said.

"You don't want to pay too much attention to other things like players and the press. It has to do with your players as well, but he invested a lot of money in players that he brought.

"But are they the right players? My opinion is that they're not."

While imminent investment into the club by Jim Ratcliffe offers some cheer, the immediate concern is a trip to Anfield without suspended captain Bruno Fernandes and defenders Harry Maguire and Luke Shaw after they were injured against Bayern.

"I am trying not to think about that," former United goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel told CBS Sports.