

Tests: A format that refuses to die

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When did Test cricket first start dying?

Just a few weeks ago, former Australia captain Steve Waugh was predicting the imminent death of Test cricket after South Africa announced a second-string squad for their New Zealand tour, reserving their top players for their Twenty20 league: SA20.

Waugh viewed the mushrooming of T20 leagues as the final nail in the coffin of Tests. There are many others who share this dire assessment, which included former International Cricket Council (ICC) president Shashank Manohar.

"We are trying to see whether Test championship can generate interest, because Test cricket is actually dying to be honest," Manohar said in Dhaka in 2019 about the reasoning behind the ICC World Test Championship.

According to this line of thinking, the trouble for Tests began when the Indian Premier League (IPL) got launched in 2007, as this was the league that got the ball rolling for franchise tournaments.

But talks of Tests being in a virtual ICU have existed long before the England and Wales Cricket Board first started flirting with the idea of staging 20-over-a-side matches. The fears about Tests arose when the limited-overs format first originated and got amplified with the Kerry Packer World Series, a rebel tournament that attracted the top players across the world and, in hindsight, had revolutionised cricket. But cricket administrations were worried about the health of Tests before Kerry Packer was even born.

In 1909, three representatives of the ICC -- then called the Imperial Cricket Conference -- sat in a meeting in London and one of the main agendas of that was the formation of a triangular series in England in 1912, an attempt to generate more interest, which they felt was



Khulna Tigers skipper Anamul Haque Bijoy led from the front with a 48-ball 58 as his side chased down Durdanto Dhaka's 131-run target in 14.4 overs with 10 wickets in hand in a Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. The win meant Khulna remains the only team with a 100 percent win record so far this season, having won four matches on the trot.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



Shakib-Tamim rift not in probe's purview

SPORTS REPORTER

The three-member committee of Bangladesh Cricket Board met with Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal in Sylhet yesterday to investigate what led to Bangladesh's disastrous performance at the ODI World Cup in India last year.

"It's being dealt confidentially. We have talked to them [Shakib and Tamim] separately," the probe committee's convenor, Enayet Hossain Siraj, told the media.

Siraj informed "the discussion was dynamic", further adding that their investigation is not focused on the soured relationship between Shakib, who was present at the Rangpur Riders practice session yesterday, and Fortune Barishal Tamim, who opted out of the World Cup.

"We are not considering the problems between them. It's not something permanent."

Local batters not standing out this BPL

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

The ongoing edition of the Bangladesh Premier League was to be used for gearing up the local stars for the forthcoming T20 World Cup in June. However, in terms of performance, that has not happened so far.

Mushfiqur Rahim tops the run-scoring charts in this BPL, with 180 runs under his belt, but local batters have not been able to match the veteran's haul.

Yesterday's fixtures saw Sylhet Strikers' Zakir Hasan accumulate runs under his belt, Chattogram Challengers' Tanzid Hasan Tamim made some headway with a fifty off 40 balls in the after match before Durdanto Dhaka's Naim Sheikh and Khulna Tigers' Anamul Haque Bijoy made their presence felt.

Yet, in a tournament where the lion's share of responsibility falls on local talents, their impact has left a lot to be desired.

Last year, the top three run-getters in the tournament were Najmul Hossain Shanto, Rony Talukdar and Tawhid Hridoy. Before yesterday's evening fixture, 13 games have gone and the three are yet to find their feet in this tournament, which does not bode well for the national team.

The momentum has just not come despite Zakir, Shahadat Hossain or Anamul Haque Bijoy providing some sparks. Given that

wickets in USA and West Indies are expected to be subcontinental-esque, it does not paint a pretty picture of the national team's prospects in the coming mega event.

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World Cup. More importantly, local players need the tournament to be a challenge that can take them to the next level.

Chattogram Challengers opener Tanzid, who was a regular feature for the Tigers in the ODI World Cup India last year, was asked yesterday about whether the bowling seemed up to the standard of international cricket.

"I don't think about which bowler is bowling, but play according to merit. Any bowler may be bowling but if we think of just who is bowling, then it's difficult. Obviously, there are quality bowlers here and every team have quality

players," Tanzid replied.

Yet, an associate nation pacer from Chattogram and Tanzid's teammate Bilal Khan, caused much trouble for Sylhet Strikers yesterday. Sylhet could only muster a meagre 137 despite having six wickets in the bank after skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza chose to bat first. With eight wickets Bilal is the highest wicket-taker in the tournament while national team spinner Mahedi Hasan and pacer Shoriful Islam are the ones that have carried the flag for local stars.

There are no quality leg-spinners yet to turn out in the tournament. If a BPL is going to be used to make national team batters come up to the standards of the T20 circuit, they should be tested with more.

Avishka Fernando, who has notched this edition's biggest score of 91, has been out of the Sri Lanka side since January 2023. Similar instances involve Fortune Barishal's Ahmed Shehzad, who had retired from the Pakistan Super League (PSL), having cited deliberate effort from all the franchises to not pick him.

Yet, here in the BPL, Shahzad notched a 17-ball 39 against Chattogram, while none of the locals are matching that strike-rate. T20, after all, is predominantly a batters' game, and bar some sporadic instances like Aliss Al Islam's mystery spin, a lot more is desired.

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Sports writer Wright THOMPSON

dwindling. The fact is, people have been worried about Test cricket for over a century and also have been guilty of underestimating its resilience.

ODIs, the format that was first feared to take the sheen off of Tests, is now itself fighting for relevance.

And as for T20s, at a time when three T20 franchise leagues are running simultaneously -- BPL, ILT20 and SA20 -- the cricket world has been abuzz with a couple of Test matches that took place in two different timelines.

American sports writer Wright Thompson viewed the constant fear about Test cricket to be rooted in the very nature of the game.

"The roots of cricket, as this game created to preserve this longing for an already dead world, sounds so simple but also overly reductive," he said in the Red Inker podcast in 2020. "This is so hardwired into the DNA of the sport that it influences how people look at it. It is a sport born of longing for a vanished world. Therefore, everyone who loves it lives in fear of a vanished world," he added.

Coming back to Waugh, who recently envisioned doom for cricket's purest format, now saw West Indian pacer Shamar Joseph, who tore apart the mighty Australia and won his side their first Test Down Under in 27 years in Brisbane, as the "saviour" of Test cricket.

"This man [Shamar] may be the saviour in the purest form of the game... a young man who has single handedly reignited the passion of cricket followers in the Caribbean and all over the world," he wrote on Instagram yesterday.

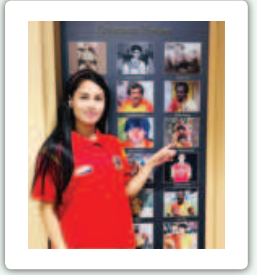
His optimism about a single hero descending from the heavens and saving the format from perishing sounds great, but it isn't practical.

The fact remains that Test cricket is under pressure and it requires steps from the world cricket administration and national boards to survive. But if the history of Tests has shown anything, it's that this format has always found a way to survive.

SHORT CORNER

Sanjida wants to emulate country's greats at East Bengal
Bangladesh women's team forward Sanjida Akhter, who is at Kolkata now for the Indian Women's League, is set for her East Bengal debut today.

The pivotal member of the reigning SAFF champions wants to contribute to the club's success, like her predecessors who enthralled for the men's team.



Elgar makes shocking revelation relating Kohli

The recently retired former South Africa captain Dean Elgar made shocking revelations about his first on-field tussle with Virat Kohli, saying that the Indian cricketer "spat" at him during a Test match in India in 2015, while speaking on "Banter, with The Boys" podcast in Betway South Africa's YouTube channel.

Pope Francis hails Sinner
Pope Francis yesterday joined the chorus of congratulations for Jannik Sinner, the first Italian to win a tennis Grand Slam trophy in 48 years. "We have to congratulate the Italians because they won in Australia yesterday," said the 87-year-old pope, whose best-known sporting passion is football.

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DR Congo's defender Gedeon Kalulu (L) and midfielder Samuel Moutoussamy (2R) celebrate next to Egypt players after winning their Africa Cup of Nations 2024 round of 16 tie at the Stade Laurent Pokou in San Pedro on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP

U-19 women determined to retain SAFF title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh coach and captain aim to retain the title of the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship, which begins in Dhaka on February 2.

Bangladesh won the title of the tournament in the inaugural edition in Dhaka three years ago, and although most of those players have since graduated to the senior team, the new team under a new coach and with a new captain are determined to retain the title.

Bangladesh had begun the previous edition against Nepal at the Birshreshtho Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium, and the two teams will meet again at the same venue in the opening day on Friday after India and Bhutan meet in the opening match of the tournament.

Saiful Bari Titu, who is in charge of women's teams since the departure of Golam Rabbani Choton in May last year, informed that the 23-member squad features 14 players from the under-17 level, five from the senior team, three from BKSP and one from open trial.

"We will have to have the ambition and need hard work to translate our determination of retaining the title," Titu told media at a press briefing at the BFF House yesterday.

The veteran coach, who is on an extended contract, feels that the home environment and the round-the-year-training of the players keep his side ahead of higher-ranked India and Nepal.

"These players may not have the experience and maturity of their predecessors, but they are physically fitter," Titu said. "This will be a



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learning experience for the players."

Captain Afeida Khandaker, one of five players of the squad with experience of playing for the senior national team, said they want to satisfy the crowd with success. "Our target is to play in the final, and the first match will be very important in that regard. We have good players in every position. Hopefully we can make the fans happy."

The four-team tournament will end on February 8, with the top two teams from the round-robin stage playing in the final.