

Soft underbelly of Tigers' Test batting re-exposed

SPORTS REPORTER

It happened all over again, a familiar batting collapse that is now part and parcel of Bangladesh's Test cricket, as the Bangladesh first innings crumbled from 96 for one to 178 all out on the third day of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Chattogram yesterday.

It was the fifth consecutive innings where Bangladesh's score failed to reach 200. While the preceding ones happened across a variety of conditions, the latest collapse was arguably the most surprising, given the flat nature of the deck at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

Test cricket is about resilience and despite Zakir Hasan's and Mominul Haque's resistance, the batting side failed as a unit.

There is no scoreboard pressure in Tests because every scenario in Test cricket is of a testing nature. However, captain Najmul Hossain Shanto felt that pressure when he played a Prabath Jayasuriya delivery uppishly to mid-wicket after a few dots.

Another struggling batter in Liton Das hung his bat to one that was wide enough to be left alone. Asitha Fernando came from wide of the crease and angled one into Shahadat Hossain Dipu, providing an opportunity for the batter to consider playing at it, resulting in him getting out caught at slips.

These were regulation dismissals which also show that the required mental clarity was missing. For in Tests, wicket has to be earned despite it being a bowler's game. It is the batters that have to grind it out and survive.

Result is the end product but, in the process, the Tigers



show their soft underbelly more often than not. In 276 Test innings, Bangladesh has now been bundled out for less than 200 in 102 innings.

It is a team management failure when, despite a Test win against New Zealand in Sylhet last year, a Mirpur track unfit for Tests was thrown in for the second Kiwi Test as batters from both sides struggled. That kind of thinking also shows the lack of faith in batters' ability to grind it out across successive Tests.

So, a spinning track lacking in true bounce meant batters had to go aggressively to get anything on the board in Mirpur. New Zealand had succeeded better under those circumstances. In the long run though, Test mettle takes a hit. If coaches come to a press event and ask for "Liton [Das] to be left alone" amid criticism, that kind of environment will not build mentality either.

Nazmul Abedin Fahim, who oversaw growth of stars such as Shakib Al Hasan and is mentor of many national team players, feels Test cricket mentality has deteriorated because the environment does not build accountability.

Asked about the difference in cultures between what was seen in country's cricket to what is seen now, he said: "While the likes of Shakib or Mushfiqur Rahim were growing up, they had that mentality that 'we can't lose'. Right now of course current players don't want to lose but the environment is not the same.

"You look at club cricket or other domestic games, the environment is different. Batting in Tests, it's about your dignity and self-respect. You have to create ownership in players and allow them to take responsibility. The domestic structure isn't creating that; one look at how teams are built would show you that. Our cricket culture was far better before because they learned that grind. Players are not owning their trades now, they are being treated as mere employees."

Sinner relishing 'special moment'

REUTERS

Jannik Sinner said he is enjoying every moment of his sensational start to the 2024 season after winning the Miami Open on Sunday for his third title of the year.

The Italian thoroughly outplayed Daniil Medvedev in the semis and Grigor Dimitrov in the final to improve to 22-1 on the year and rise to a career-best world number two.

"This is a special moment," Sinner said after beating Dimitrov 6-3 6-1 in the final for his second Masters 1000 title.

"You never know if this is the last time or not. So you have to enjoy this for one day, and now a new chapter is coming, clay-court season is coming, so completely different."

"Let's see how I will play from now on. But for sure, the hard-court season until now has been very good."

Behind an improved serve and textbook shot-making, Sinner has been on a roll this season, winning the Australian Open in January for what is expected to be the first of many Grand Slam titles. His only loss of the year came to Carlos Alcaraz in the semis at Indian Wells but after his triumph in South Florida, the Spaniard will now be looking up to his rival in the rankings.



Bangladesh suffered yet another batting meltdown on Monday as the Tigers now stare at a likely big-margin defeat in their second and final Test against Sri Lanka in Chattogram. Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto's one off 11 only exemplified the Tigers' sorry showing with the bat, from which the Tigers could not recover even after a fiery spell from debutant [inset] Hasan Mahmud in the final session. Hasan took four while Khaled Ahmed scalped two to reduce Sri Lanka to 102 for six in their second innings at stumps on Day 3, but the visitors' already 455-run lead means the Tigers would need to chase down a record target.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

- Barring Ireland and Afghanistan, who have played only eight and nine Tests respectively, Bangladesh boast the highest rate (36.96%) for getting bundled out for under 200 in Tests. Zimbabwe are next to the Tigers with a 31.56 rate in this regard.
- Out of the 276 innings Bangladesh played in Tests, they were bundled out for less than 200 in 102 innings so far.
- Hasan Mahmud has scalped six wickets (two in the first innings and four in the second) so far in the second Test against Sri Lanka, equalling Manjural Islam's record for the best-ever return by a Bangladeshi debutant in Tests. With Sri Lanka's second innings yet to be completed, Hasan, who made his debut in the Chattogram Test, could overtake Manjural today.
- Mominul Haque on Monday became the fourth Bangladeshi to surpass 4000-run mark in Tests after Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, and Mushfiqur Rahim.

Strategic Lankans make Tigers look out of depth

SPORTS REPORTER

Relentless pressure, meticulous planning and near perfect execution from the bowlers have put Sri Lanka in the driving seat against Bangladesh three days into the ongoing Chattogram Test, making the hosts look completely out of depth in comparison.

Bangladesh got skittled out for a mere 178 in their first innings in reply to Sri Lanka's mammoth 531 – their fifth straight total of less than 200 in Tests.

Resuming the day's play on 55-1, overnight batters Zakir Hasan and Tajjul Islam had done well to survive the first hour, however, the Sri Lankan bowlers did not get bogged down, remained vigilant and soon got their rewards.

Both overnight batters and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto departed in the second hour of the session and after lunch, the visitors claimed the remaining six wickets to secure a massive 353-run lead.

Sri Lanka pace trio led by Asitha Fernando, who took 4-34, claimed eight of the 10 wickets that fell on the day. Their pace bowling coach Dharshana Gamage was mighty pleased with the efforts of his pacers and said how tireless discipline was the key behind this performance.

SCORES IN BRIEF

2ND TEST, DAY 3
Sri Lanka 1st innings 531 & 2nd innings: 102 for 6 in 25 overs (Madushka 34, Mathews 39 not out; Mathews 4-51, Khaled 2-29)
Bangladesh 1st innings: 178 all out in 68.4 overs (Zakir 54, Mominul 33, Tajjul 22, Joy 21; Asitha 4-34, Vishwa 2-38, Lahiru 2-19, Prabath 2-65)

"In Test cricket we always plan around keeping our discipline. Before even planning for the batters, we focused on keeping discipline in the bowling, how to set a field and bowl according to that consistently," Gamage said at a press conference after the day's play.

Sri Lanka had specific game plan and field sets for each of Bangladesh's batters and at the press conference, Gamage revealed how they successfully planned the dismissal of Shakib Al Hasan, who was trapped lbw for 15 by Asitha.

"Asitha is someone that can bowl well with both the new and old balls. When it came to Shakib, the plan was to bowl a few short ones to push him back and then go

fuller and trap him, and he did just exactly that.

"Normally before the match we have the bowlers meeting, so we have different field sets for each batter. [Captain] Dhananjaya [de Silva] set those fields well in the middle overs."

Compared to the planned approach from Sri Lanka, who played with almost the same intensity throughout the match, the Bangladesh players were guilty of letting the match situation affect their intensity, something Zakir inadvertently admitted to while explaining why the entire slip cordon chased after a ball to the third-man boundary.

"When you get wickets, these efforts automatically come out. We are trying to hold onto that level of effort all the time. In that situation, everyone was putting extra efforts and tried to chase the ball," the left-handed batter said.

Sri Lanka are now leading by 455 with four wickets in hand and Gamage said they hope to bat one more session, leaving their bowlers five sessions to bowl Bangladesh out. "We have 450-odd-run lead, so 50 more and we can get a lead of 500. If we bat the first session, then we have five more sessions to bowl at them."

Man City still the best side in PL: Guardiola

REUTERS, Manchester

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola insisted his team are the ones to beat in the tightest Premier League race for years even though they remain third in the standings following a goalless draw with rivals Arsenal on Sunday.

City had scored in 47 consecutive league games at the Etihad Stadium before coming up against Arsenal's mighty defensive effort on Sunday. Mikel Arteta's side held them scoreless at the Etihad for the first time in the league since they were beaten 2-0 by Crystal Palace in October 2021.

The draw allowed Liverpool to go top of the table on 67 points with nine games remaining, while Arsenal are second on 65, a point ahead of Guardiola's reigning champions.

When asked who is the current best side, Guardiola said: "Man City," then added: "Your reaction, you don't agree?"

"We would not be here. Semi-finals of FA Cup, quarter-finals of Champions League and fighting against Liverpool and Arsenal," the manager said.

Guardiola pointed to more parity in the league than in recent years, including last season when City pulled away from rivals Arsenal down the stretch to win by five

Manchester City failed to score in a Premier League game at the Etihad Stadium for the first time since a 0-2 defeat to Crystal Palace in October 2021; they had scored in 47 straight home league matches prior to this draw with Arsenal.

Arsenal have kept a clean sheet in both of their league meetings with Manchester City this season, making them just the fourth side to do so against a Pep Guardiola side in league matches after Borussia Mönchengladbach in 2014-15, Manchester United in 2020-21, and Crystal Palace in 2021-22.

Before this 0-0 draw, Manchester City's previous 75 Premier League games had not ended without a single goal being scored.

This was also the first time since January 2011 that a Manchester City and Arsenal game had ended in a goalless draw. Their last 33 meetings in all competitions had seen at least one goal.

points. Manchester United were a distant third with 75.

"When you see Liverpool play, I said we cannot (go) 10 points in front, when I see Arsenal play, we cannot (go) 16 points in front, they are really good," he said.

"Juergen (Klopp) and Mikel with the teams are exceptional. But still we are there."

"So do we want to win? Yeah. We play to win? Yeah. We created more chances (on Sunday)? No. They created a lot? No. So it was a tight game, yes. It was a battle, yes," added the Spaniard, who had appointed

Arteta as an assistant coach at City when he took charge in 2016.

"I'm satisfied. I said to the team 'Don't be sad guys.' I know my players and how they behave, and I give credit to Arsenal for the many good things they do."

City have so far only taken four points off top-five teams this season, compared to 16 last season.

"We prefer to win obviously," Guardiola said.

"(But) we take the point, nine games (remaining), we'll see what will happen. The only thing we can do is refresh mind, legs for Wednesday, Aston Villa."

Mohammedan edge Mariners

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club reduced the gap with leaders Abahani after notching up a hard-fought 3-2 win over defending champions Mariner Youngs Club in a protracted Green Delta Premier Division Hockey League fixture in Dhaka yesterday.

With seventh triumphs in nine matches, Mohammedan leaptfrogged to the second position with 23 points, two less than Abahani, while holders Mariners fell behind the race to stay at the fourth position of the 11-team table, with 19 points from nine matches.

Ahead of the crucial tie at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium, both teams were aware of the consequence of dropped points. Thus, it was no surprise to see the two title aspirants fight neck and neck throughout the 60-minute match. However, it eventually took nearly two-and-a-half hours to complete due to frequent protests by both sides over decisions made by foreign umpires and TV reviews.

From the onset, Mohammedan appeared hungrier, creating a couple of good scoring chances, and the first breakthrough arrived in the 11th minute as Din Islam Emon changed the direction of a fierce hit from Malaysian Faisal Bin Sarri.

The Black and Whites continued their dominance in the second quarter but could not hold the momentum. Sarri narrowly missed to connect a Rasel Mahmud Jimmy cut-back to save a chance in the 20th minute before Fazle Hossain Rabby brought Mariners into the match with a fierce hit, availing a cut-back from Moinul Islam Koushik after they threatened through the right flank.

Boosted by the equaliser, Mariners then took the lead in the 39th minute after a quick resumption of play following a free hit around Mohammedan's box, as Abed Uddin ran diagonally into the box before unleashing a powerful shot past keeper Nuruzzaman. Mohammedan did seek a review, but the TV umpire upheld the on-field umpire's decision.

As the match kept swinging like a pendulum, Mohammedan bounced back to level the margin in the 42nd minute as Jimmy worked hard inside the box to feed Sarri, who made no mistake to tap it home.

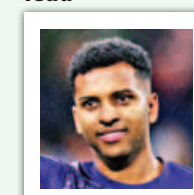
And 12 minutes later, Amirul Islam struck the winner from a rebound following a penalty corner to send Mohammedan fans into raptures.

SHORT CORNER

Shaheen fuming after PCB uses 'fake quotes' in statement

Pakistan's Shaheen Afridi, who was recently replaced by Babar Azam as Pakistan's T20I skipper, was reportedly left furious as the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) yesterday sent out a statement carrying quotes attributed to him which he claimed to have not said.

Rodrygo brace helps Real maintain Liga lead



Rodrygo fired La Liga leaders Real Madrid to a 2-0 win over Athletic Bilbao with a superb brace on Sunday to restore their eight-point advantage on Barcelona. After the second-place champions

beat Las Palmas on Saturday, Los Blancos responded with a solid showing at home.

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