

Opening duo resilient but Tigers' task toughens

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Bangladesh bowlers and fielders toiled under the Rawalpindi sun yesterday as Pakistan batters ensured the visitors would have their work cut out for them on the second day of the first Test.

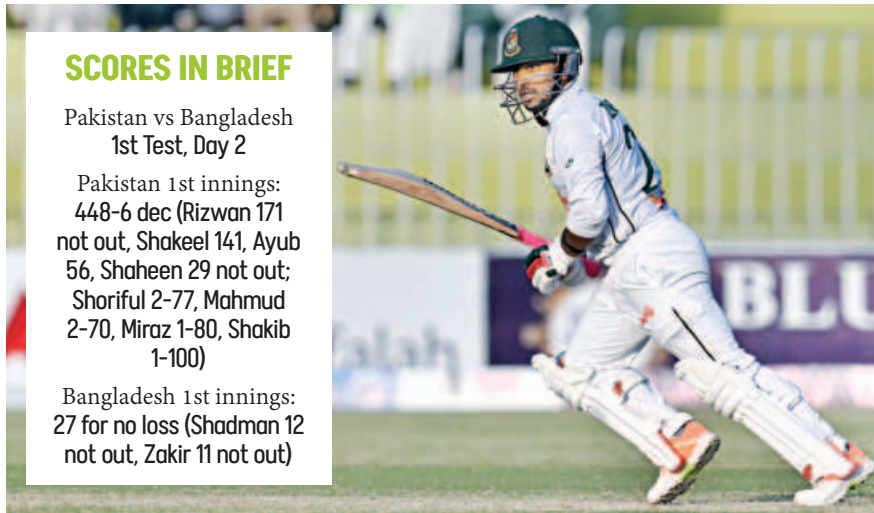
The visitors picked up just two wickets, having bowled 72 overs on day two as Pakistan rode on Saud Shakeel's 141 and Rizwan Hossain's unbeaten 171 to post 448 for six before declaring.

In reply, the Tigers reached stumps at 27 for no loss as Zakir Hasan and Shadman Islam saw out a tricky 12-over period. Bangladesh will certainly take heart from their short vigil at the crease on the day but will be knowing full well that any slip in concentration can prove disastrous.

Batting form, or lack thereof, especially in the red-ball format has seen the Tigers suffer on a regular basis. In the last series against Sri Lanka at home, Bangladesh regularly lost wickets to false shots, not quite being able to apply themselves.

Batting coach David Hemp was impressed by the opening duo's effort.

"We are really pleased with how they



SCORES IN BRIEF

Pakistan vs Bangladesh
1st Test, Day 2

Pakistan 1st innings:
448-6 dec (Rizwan 171 not out, Shakeel 141, Ayub 56, Shaheen 29 not out; Shoriful 2-77, Mahmud 2-70, Miraz 1-80, Shakib 1-100)

Bangladesh 1st innings:
27 for no loss (Shadman 12 not out, Zakir 11 not out)

negotiated the last 12-over block. It can be a challenging time when you have to bat in the last hour of the day's play, especially when you have been in the field all day. The manner in which they played, positive footwork and still looking to score even though you want to be as disciplined and as tight as you can," Hemp said at a press

conference yesterday following the day's play.

The surface looked pretty flat and provided plenty of run-scoring opportunities. Talks of whether 20 wickets could be taken by a team had also begun. Hemp acknowledged that the surface is good enough to not deteriorate

too much, informing that the plan is to carry on batting throughout the third day.

"From our point of view, it was a good declaration [from Pakistan]; an attacking declaration which I would expect. So it didn't catch us by surprise. For us, it's about batting tomorrow and then see where we are going into day four and five.

"There is still a lot of cricket to be played. So the priority for us is to make sure we bat the day tomorrow and see where we are at. If we are in a good position then can we go past Pakistan or at least get as close as possible. We did see the odd ball grip a bit. But from a distance, it did seem like a batting wicket and I think it will remain that way for a couple of days anyway," Hemp said.

Bangladesh pacers did not manage any reverse swing, an aspect of the game Pakistan revel in. Hemp felt that they have to wait and watch, knowing reverse swing can change the trajectory of the match.

"We will see what happens tomorrow [today] but from our point of view, we didn't think the conditions were such to help with reverse swing," he added.

Jaker, Saif hit tons against Pak Shaheens

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Jaker Ali and Saif Hassan struck brilliant hundreds for Bangladesh 'A' against Pakistan Shaheens on the third day of the second four-day match at the Islamabad Club Cricket Oval on Thursday.

After the first two days saw no action due to rain and a wet outfield, the match officially commenced on the penultimate day with Bangladesh 'A' being sent to bat. Jaker smashed an unbeaten 136 while Saif made 111 to steer the visitors to 346-6 at stumps.

Saif and Jaker got together when Bangladesh 'A' were struggling on 77-4 and shared a 131-run partnership for the fifth wicket to bring relief to the tourist camp.

The partnership ended with Saif departing soon after completing his eighth first-class ton, falling to Mehran Mumtaz (2-69).

Jaker then put up a 131-run stand for the following wicket with Mahidul Islam Ankon (39), during which the wicketkeeper-batsman completed his fourth first-class hundred.

Ankon got ran out late in the day as Jaker remained unbeaten alongside Tanzim Sakib (0) at stumps.

Earlier, the opening four-day match of the two-match series ended in a draw at the same venue.

'Girls upset' but preparation in full swing

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Women's wing head of Bangladesh Cricket Board Habibur Bashar insisted that even though the girls are upset about missing out on playing the upcoming ICC Women's T20 World Cup on home soil, it won't hamper their preparation for the global tournament.

"Everyone has the desire to play World Cup on home soil. Most of the girls had the same dream. So, they are a bit upset about it. Of course, we will miss playing on home condition," Bashar told reporters in Mirpur on Thursday.

International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday that the ninth edition of the Women's T20 World Cup has been moved out of Bangladesh because of travel advisories from governments of a number of the participating teams due to the current situation in Bangladesh.

The tournament will now take place in the UAE with BCB continuing to host the event. The tournament will take place across two venues in the UAE -- Dubai and Sharjah -- from October 3 to 20.

Although the venue of the global meet has been changed, BCB is trying hard to give the girls adequate preparation before they compete against England, South Africa, West Indies, and Scotland

in Group B of the marquee event.

As part of the preparation, the cricketers reached Rajshahi on Thursday to feature in the 13th Women's National Cricket League 2024-25 where eight divisional teams will compete in the T20 format, beginning on Saturday.

"The preparation isn't being hampered much. We were taking preparation keeping the World Cup in mind. We made arrangements for one-to-one training for the girls. Our local coaches were there. The coaching staff are also

here. The NCL is part of our preparation," Bashar said.

Apart from that, BCB is mulling to send the national team to Sri Lanka under the 'A' team banner following the WNCL before they leave for the UAE for the World Cup.

"The wickets in Rajshahi are good. We want girls to play on good and sporting wickets. The monsoon is going on but there is less rain in Rajshahi. We will also get two venues. We will have to finish the tournament in a fixed time. As this is going to be a part of our World Cup preparation, so we decided to hold the matches in Rajshahi.

"We will send our 'A' team to Sri Lanka after the league. That will also be our part of preparation... Those, who will be in our World Cup plan, we will make the 'A' team with them," he said.



AFC Challenge League Kings, East Bengal in same group

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Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings have been drawn in Group A of the inaugural AFC Challenge League along with outfits from India, Lebanon, and Bhutan.

The draw of the AFC Challenge League was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia yesterday.

West Zone of the AFC Challenge League will see 12 teams, split into three groups, competing in a round-robin league with three group champions and the best runners-up among three groups advancing into the quarterfinals of the third-tier club competition in Asia.

Along with Bashundhara Kings, East Bengal of India, Nejmeh SC of Lebanon and Paro FC of Bhutan will play the Group A matches between October 26 to November 2 in Thimphu.

Bashundhara Kings had earlier played the now-defunct AFC Cup four times, getting eliminated from the group stages three times while once the tournament was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Meanwhile, Kings have completed registrations of 34 players, including five foreigners, for their upcoming domestic season. Romanian coach Valeriu Tita is expected to arrive early next month as the club management is likely to decide on the date for the start of the club's pre-season.

Fumble proves costly as U-20s fall to Nepal

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Bangladesh struggled to recover after a costly fumble by goalkeeper and captain Mehedi Hasan Srabon led to the first goal in their 2-1 defeat to Nepal in a SAFF U-20 Championship fixture in Lalitpur yesterday, coach Maruful Haque said.

The defeat in the second match -- mirroring their losses to Nepal in 2015 and 2017 -- meant Bangladesh finished as Group A runners-up, and they now face a strong possibility of encountering the reigning champions in the semi-finals as India need a draw against Maldives in today's encounter to become Group B champions.

However, Maruful remains optimistic about going all the way in the tournament.

"We lost to Nepal, but we have not lost the championship. If we want to become champions, we have to beat everyone, and we have no choice but to face any team in the semi-final," said Maruful at the post-match conference.

With both teams having already secured semi-final berths, Bangladesh adopted a counter-attacking strategy at ANFA Complex with the objective of at least securing a draw to

overtake Nepal in the points table.

However, the home side took the lead in the 17th minute after the advancing goalkeeper Mehedi failed to intercept Nepal's clearance in midfield, leading to forward Samir Tamang snatching the ball from his feet and slotting into open net.

One minute later, Bangladesh conceded again, with Niranjana Dhami doubling the lead with a near-post finish from Abinash Syangtan's low cross.

"Our plan was to allow them to come into the attack in the first 10 minutes, as Nepal needed to score if they wanted to become group champions, but conceding the first goal brought the players' morale down and they could not bounce back for the rest of the match," said Maruful, adding that even world-class goalkeepers concede goals in such a manner.

Trailing by two goals, coach Maruful showed urgency with his substitutions, bringing on forwards Mirajul Islam and Asadul Molla in the 32nd minute. Bangladesh pulled one back when Mirajul converted from the spot in the 43rd minute after being tackled but failed to cash in on the momentum later.



Leverkusen eye repeat after 'magic' title triumph

AFP, Donaueschingen

Bayer Leverkusen are vowing to achieve great things again this season after an unprecedented unbeaten league and cup double last campaign.

Leverkusen kick off the 2024-25 Bundesliga campaign at local rivals Borussia Muenchengladbach on Friday.

Xabi Alonso's side have been tipped by many to become the first side other than Bayern Munich to win back-to-back German top-flight titles since Jurgen Klopp's Borussia Dortmund in 2012.

Bayern have spent big and Dortmund and RB Leipzig have had impressive summers but that does not scare Leverkusen in their pursuit of a successive title.

Speaking with AFP at Leverkusen's pre-season training camp in the Black Forest village of Donaueschingen, forward Nathan Tella said: "There's no reason why we can't defend the title."

"We've seen Bayern do it for so many years. Why can't we do something similar to that?"

"There's no limit to what we can achieve. Last year, no one believed in us, and at the end of the season, we were undefeated champions.

"Being a part of this team, anything is possible."

Tella's bullish statements are a far cry



from even a season ago, when the club was still derided as 'Neverkusen' for failing to win a league title despite five second-place finishes.

Much of Leverkusen's success last season, including their run to the Europa League final, was set up by late goals from a side who did not know they were beaten.

Leverkusen's summer training base was at the same venue from where Spain's triumphant Euro 2024 campaign just a month earlier launched.

Asked if Leverkusen could benefit from a bit of La Roja's magic this season, Tella

said his side did not need any external assistance.

"No, we have our own magic to be fair. Last season, it was him," Tella said, pointing at Leverkusen's midfield maestro Florian Wirtz.

Despite attention from some of Europe's biggest clubs, Leverkusen held onto Wirtz this summer, as well as the remainder of their squad.

Perhaps most importantly, coach Alonso has committed to stay on for at least another season despite interest from several of his former clubs including European giants Liverpool, Real Madrid, and Bayern.

Financial advantages aside, Bayern's long dominance of the Bundesliga has been underpinned by a constant desire to get better, even when the club is already at the top.

Despite a barnstorming campaign where the club broke through for their first Bundesliga title, Leverkusen were not resting on their laurels.

Alonso, a serial winner during his playing career, set the tone in pre-season training, saying last year's incredible level "probably wouldn't be enough" this season.

"We have many fundamentals," the coach said. "We need to add something, update it, incorporate other elements. We have to evolve and improve."

PAPON the loose cannon

Nazmul Hassan Papon recently stepped down as the president of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) after spending 12 years at the post. Bangladesh cricket reached some sporadic highs in his tenure but overall, his administration was blighted by allegations of nepotism, corruption as well as sub-par performances over long periods for the men's and women's national teams. Papon's tendency of stirring up controversy with his words, pulling back the curtain on the national team dressing room and bringing up matters which would have been better left untold, made him a colorful figure in the country's cricket. But his loose mouthed nature only added to the chaos, turning a bad situation even worse. Following are a few of his most controversial remarks:



"Mushfiq's father, Miraz's aunt... beat up someone in some village or so, I had to solve all of that from abroad. These [claims] are a shock to me."

Papon said regarding the players' protest over pay-rise in October 2019.

"I was really surprised to see they chose to bat because it was decided the day before [that we would bowl if won the toss]. Both coach and captain said they would take fielding. It was decided. Then when I saw we won the toss and chose to bat, that was the first shock for me."

Papon on Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque's decision to bat first against India during the pink-ball Test in November 2019 in Kolkata.

"Our main focus is the next World Cup, not this one. You can't change everything overnight. We are planning long-term and trying to prepare a squad for the next World Cup. Even if the upcoming World Cup does not go well for us, I won't be disappointed."

Papon said this, in September 2022, about Bangladesh's short-term and long-term plans regarding the T20 World Cup in the following month and the one in mid-2024.

"This is not a healthy dressing room, this I can guarantee you. This thing [rift between Shakib and Tamim], it's not that I have not tried to sort it out. I have spoken with both of them and I felt that it will not be easy to settle the issues [between them] at the moment. This is my observation."

the former board president opening up a can of worms, quite unprovoked, when he told the media in February last year that there was a rift between Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan.

"These are rumours. When I was with the team, I neither said nor heard about this. Some people are saying that the atmosphere in the dressing room is not good. I don't know, I haven't seen anything like that."

Papon taking a U-turn a few days later.

"I'm not the same person I used to be. I have not been with the team for the last three-and-a-half years.... I am voluntarily staying detached from the team."

Papon said in July this year, on mending his ways of meddling with the team, following the T20 World Cup.

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