

I am sorry to say I always want to defend my club – especially in these modern days. It's like everyone doesn't expect us to be not just relegated, they want us to disappear off the face of the earth.

PEP GUARDIOLA,

Manchester City manager in response to what the club's rivals would expect from the hearing of City's 115 charges relating to financial regulations.



Shanto's resilience and the missing steps in batsmanship

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chennai

Bangladesh batters' lack of batsmanship got exposed against India's superior attack in the Chennai Test, where skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto's valiant knock was the only exception in an otherwise dreadful batting performance.

Shanto's knock of 82 off 127 balls did little in changing the outcome of the match, which the hosts won by 280 runs with over five sessions in hand, but it set an example for the rest of the Bangladesh batters of how one can stand their ground against India's lethal attack and score runs.

Although there were some hiccups, Bangladesh batters found ways to make an impact in the two Tests against Pakistan last month in Rawalpindi.

In just a matter of weeks, the same batting line-up looked out of its depth in Chennai with Shanto being the only batter to score a 50-plus innings.

This dip in performance makes it seem like a chasm had opened in

the batters' application in less than a month.

But a more realistic explanation would be that against Pakistan the batters could exploit some apparent weak points of the attack whereas against India, they had no way out, as all five Indian bowlers were constantly gunning for wickets and this relentless pressure was too much for them to handle.

"I am not going to compare [India and Pakistan]. Both are quality sides. We have a lot of challenges overall, but we are not in control of a lot of things," Shanto said about the gap in performance from Rawalpindi to Chennai.

Heading into the first Test against India, Shanto was going through a lean patch. The half-century in the Chennai Test was his first 50-plus knock for Bangladesh in any format after 24 innings.

Yet, in many of those innings, Shanto did not look out of touch, he got starts but just could not carry on.

Even in the Pakistan Tests, where his highest score was 38, he got his drives and backfoot punches right, not a sign of a cricketer out of form.

After he got to the crease on Day 3, he showed no lack in belief, coming down the wicket and hitting two big sixes against Ravichandran Ashwin.

Yesterday, Shanto got beaten multiple times by the Indian pacers, with pacer Mohammad Siraj troubling him the most. Siraj even tried to lure the batter into a verbal spat to get him to lose his focus.

But the provocation did not work on the Bangladesh skipper, who survived the tense period before eventually falling to Ravindra Jadeja as the eighth batter of the innings.

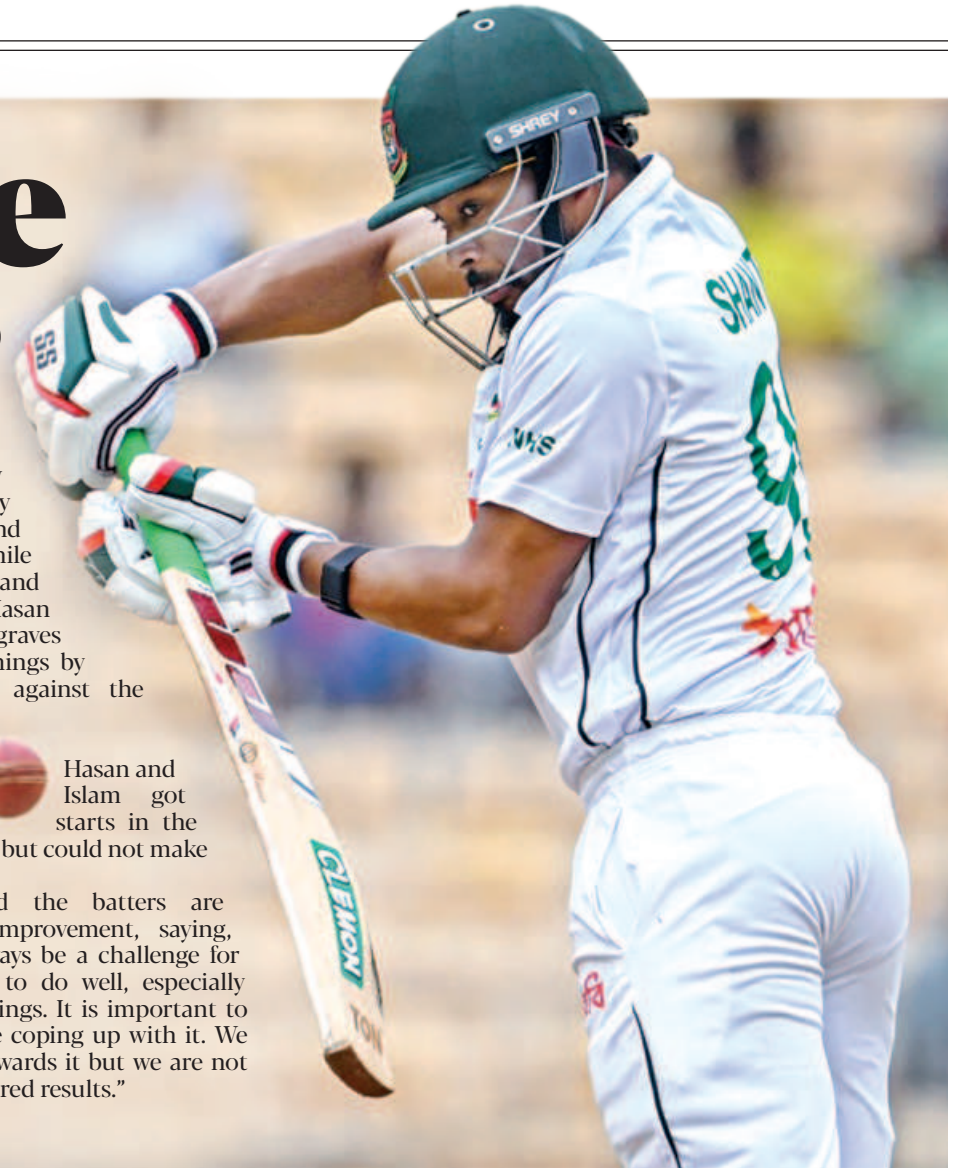
In order to score runs against a top bowling attack like India's, the batters have to be prepared to deal with tough periods, back their technique and not budge from their game plan no matter what. In simpler words, they need to show better batsmanship.

An experienced and in form

batter like Mushfiqur Rahim threw his wicket away in the second innings while Liton Das and Shakib Al Hasan dug their own graves in the first innings by trying sweeps against the spin.

Openers Zakir Shadman and Islam got wonderful starts in the second innings but could not make hay.

Shanto said the batters are working on improvement, saying, "There will always be a challenge for the top order to do well, especially in the first innings. It is important to see how we are coping up with it. We are working towards it but we are not getting the desired results."



'A mind like no other'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chennai

India all-rounder Ravichandran Ashwin is 38. Yet he appears to be just easing into the process of refining his art, ball by ball. The delivery that beat Bangladesh batter Mominul Haque on Day 4 of the first Test in Chennai yesterday was so belligerent that it almost defied any explanation.

It went on an arc, not a big one though, drawing Mominul forward. The delivery's deception came in that arc and the flight. It landed just around off and the turn was big enough to beat the bat but also small enough to hit the off-stump.

Ashwin bagged a six-for, having already notched a ton earlier in the Chennai Test to rescue India from a batting collapse. This was his game and equaling late Shane Warne's record of second most five-wicket hauls (37) in Test cricket was just the cherry on top at Chepauk for the local boy.

He wondered if it was his swansong in his home venue, and then wittily joked, "If that was my swansong, what a swansong." Indeed it would have been.

Ashwin is never shy of laughing one out but the age of 38 hits differently to any international star. "Thirty-eight is different to 35," Ashwin said at the post-match press conference yesterday, adding he has to work doubly hard.

But the maturity of that flight and trajectory was embedded in how the boy from Chennai grew up.

From his age level through to his senior years, he has had the guidance of Sunil Subramaniam, a former first-class cricketer, who also served in many capacities for Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) and also as India team's manager till 2019.

Subramaniam has been Ashwin's wall to bounce ideas off of.

"State academy [TNCA] wanted to find the next generation of spinners and it was when I saw him [Ashwin]. He had height, bounce, and turn and you look the world over, the most potent are tall spinners because they generate bounce," Subramaniam told The Daily Star yesterday.

But that was not all for Subramaniam which makes Ashwin what he is.

"It was not all, because he had a mind that was not like any other. Having worked at that level, I saw kids that are inquisitive but not as intelligent as he was. His intelligence was shining even then

person he found Ashwin to be.

"He won't just ask, he would bombard you and disagree with you. He would cover all the bases. He was bouncing off ideas and he would give his perspectives and the why and how. An outsider would think two mad guys are talking. He is a sponge and soaks what works. He is intellectually aware, and a very sensitive soul. Dumb ideas don't suit him. If I gave a certain view, he could disagree and say 'I can do it this way'. That was a sign," Subramaniam explained

SCORES IN BRIEF

India: First innings-376 all out and Second innings-287-4d

Bangladesh: First innings-149 all out and Second innings-234

all out in 62.1 overs (Zakir 33, Shadman 35, Shanto 82, Mominul 13, Mushfiqur 13, Shakib 25, Liton 1, Miraz 8, Taskin 5, Hasan 7m Nahid 0; Bumrah 1-24,

Ashwin 6-88, Jadeja 3-58)

Result: India won by 280 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Ravichandran Ashwin.

and has grown from what I have seen. He is a genuine all-time great, in terms of intelligence too," he added.

Subramaniam said that age-group selectors thought Ashwin would become a great batter.

"He always had that ability to play in the mould like that of V.V.S Laxman. I told him not to ignore batting but said he had the skills to be a spinner. He loved bowling and I found out he was a very good tactician, like in field placing and what to bowl," he said.

Subramaniam talked about the kind of

the type of character Ashwin is.

Subramaniam was watching quietly from the bowler's end at Chepauk, not even receiving any calls as Ashwin bamboozled delivery after delivery yesterday. "I wanted to watch in private," he said.

Watching the master at work, a bliss for his childhood coach as it is for so many around the world.



Wasteful U-17s held by Maldives

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh wasted numerous scoring chances in a 1-1 draw against Maldives in their second and last group match of the SAFF U-17 Championship, jeopardising their chances of reaching the semifinals from the two-team group, at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu yesterday.

Mohamed Ilan Iman of Maldives cancelled out Murshed Ali's 49th-minute strike in the 79th minute from a counter attack to put Bangladesh on the verge of elimination from the championship.

Coming back off a 1-0 defeat against India in the tournament opener, Bangladesh needed a victory to stay in the race, instead they will now have to wait for the outcome of final Group A match between Maldives and India to learn their fate.

If Maldives can secure a point against India, then they will advance to the semifinals along with India but a 2-0 win for India will see Saiful Bari Titu's charges to the last-four battle.

Bangladesh did almost everything right, setting up copious chances to score but when it came to putting the ball at the back of the net, they were so wasteful that the coach was left fuming at the players throughout the game. Bangladesh were unlucky on one occasion, though, with the referee harshly disallowing a goal in the second half while one shot came off the crossbar.



Stars had aligned for Real Madrid on Saturday as Los Blancos staged a comeback to beat Espanyol 4-1 at home, thanks to goals from each of their sensational frontline of Kylian Mbappe, Vinicius Junior, and Rodrygo after Dani Carvajal's strike had cancelled out Thibaut Courtois' own goal. The win saw Real Madrid move a point behind LaLiga leaders Barcelona.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

'I play only for fun'

Eighty-one-year-old WIM Rani Hamid, who is fondly referred to as 'grandma' in the chess fraternity, was the second oldest woman chess player in the 45th Chess Olympiad after 83-year-old debutant Pauline Woodward of Guernsey. Hamid secured six wins in a row after skipping the first three rounds in Budapest, Hungary. The 20-time Bangladesh national women's champion, three-time British Women's Chess Champion, and Commonwealth Chess gold medalist, Hamid, talked about her experience, memories, and more during an interview with The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman after the 10th-round matches. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): What does it mean for you to represent Bangladesh in all Chess Olympiads except the 2022 edition since your debut in 1984?

Rani Hamid (RH): It feels really good because representing Bangladesh in the Chess Olympiad is a matter of pride. I came to this stage after being qualified. Besides, it has always been a good feeling to play against players from around the world.

DS: From almost missing out on playing in the 45th Chess Olympiad after finishing sixth in the national chess championship to notching up six straight wins in the competition, how do you feel about putting up such a performance at the age of 81?

RH: I was also surprised by such a performance -- made no blunders in all six games I won. However, today [Saturday] I made a blunder [in the 10th round] thinking how I have been flawless till this stage. I could have at least secured a draw in the 10th round. Besides, I felt hot in the chess room and that was another reason

to suffer defeat.

DS: You are performing like an 18-year-old. How do you feel about this?

RH: [Laughs loudly] Because I always love to play chess and I enjoy the game. I can't think of stopping. I don't have any shortage of motivation to play chess. I am still performing because of my love for the game. I forget everything [results] because I play only for fun. Besides, I never think of opponents. Sometimes, I don't even know about my opponents.

DS: You have certainly built up a steady relationship with the players and officials of other countries since you have been playing for the last 40 years. What were their reactions regarding you this time around?

RH: I played against British champion Susan Kathryn and many other famous players and have a good relationship with them. Today [Saturday] Susan Polgar [Hungarian-American chess grandmaster] took a photo with me and uploaded it to her X account. Everyone sees me positively in the chess Olympiad.



DS: Which one is your most memorable Chess Olympiad campaign?

RH: I first participated in the Chess Olympiad in Greece [1984] and played in the open section where I had to play against the world no 4 Grandmaster from New Zealand, and I fought a long time against him. It was a very memorable tournament for me. I encountered an interesting incident there because I was not initially allowed to enter the premises. I was informed that this place was for the male players and, due to a language

barrier, it took me a long time to convince them that I would be playing in the open section against male players.

The 2018 Olympiad was also a special one for me as I was honoured with the Journalist Choice Award, introduced in that edition.

DS: How do you evaluate the current women's chess players like Noshin Anjum, Walijah Ahmed, Wadifa Ahmed, and Nusrat Jahan Alo who were playing in the Chess Olympiad? Do you see any difference between them and the players from before?

RH: They have improved a lot in the recent past and they can improve further. They fought hard against their opponents. Even though they lost, they played really well because of the training they received from the chess federation.

I don't see any difference [between the current and the players from the past]. The standard, however, has been similar. If these groups of girls can earn more norms like IM and GM then they will be sharper and more mature in the future.