

MUSHY CROSSES 6K MARK

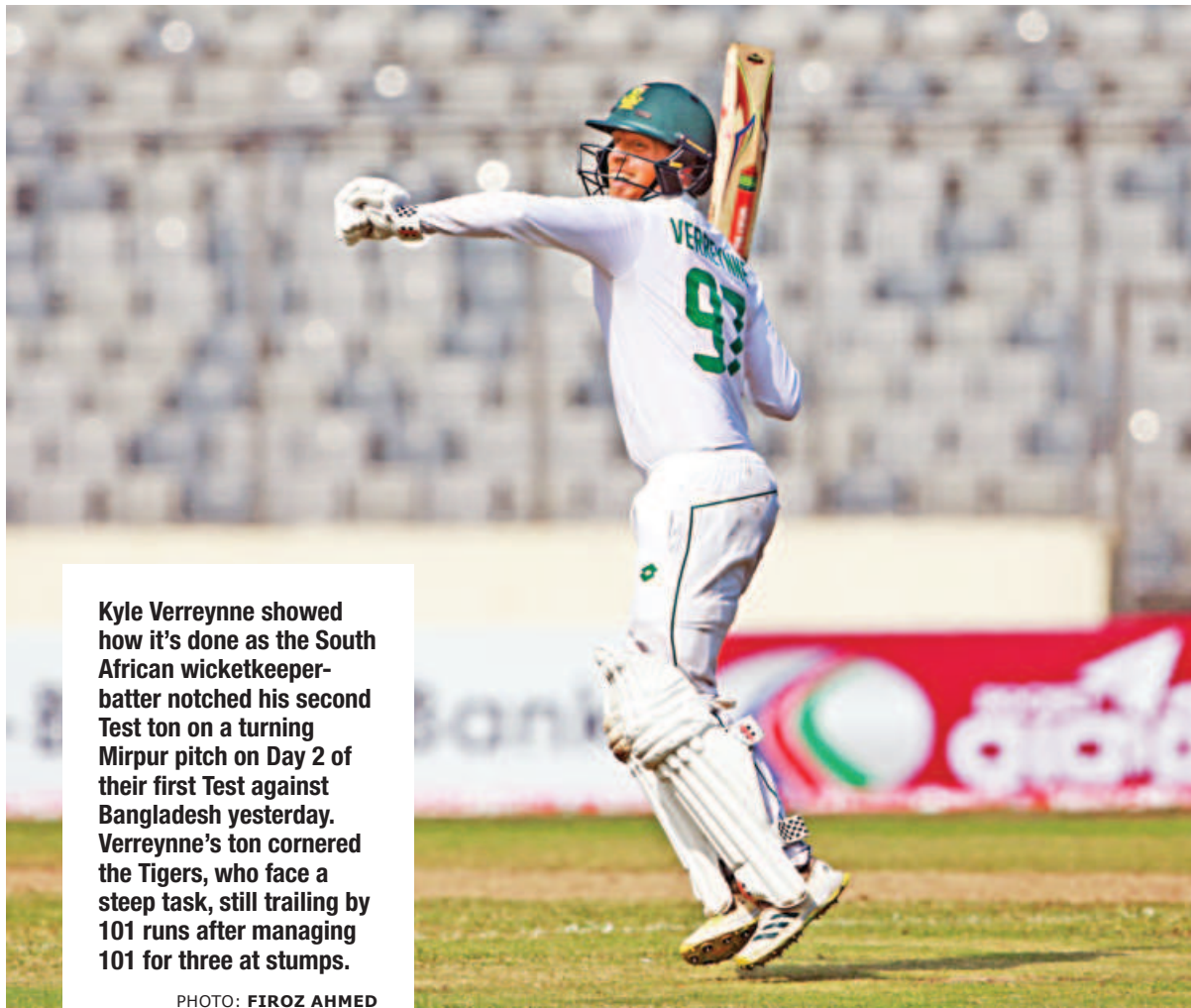


● Mushfiqur Rahim became the first Bangladeshi batter to go past 6000 Test runs on Day 2 of the Tigers' first Test against South Africa at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

● Mushfiqur, unbeaten on 31 off 26 deliveries, is also the leading run scorer in the format for Bangladesh. He has now taken his total run tally in Tests to 6003.

● Playing in his 93rd Test, Mushfiqur also holds the record for most Test appearances by a Bangladeshi.

● Among current players, Mushfiqur has the longest Test career (19 years and 149 days). Next to him is Shakib Al Hasan, who has had a Test career of 17 years and 136 days.



Kyle Verreynne showed how it's done as the South African wicketkeeper-batter notched his second Test ton on a turning Mirpur pitch on Day 2 of their first Test against Bangladesh yesterday. Verreynne's ton cornered the Tigers, who face a steep task, still trailing by 101 runs after managing 101 for three at stumps.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Survivor Sabbir relishes new life

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

The opening round of the National Cricket League (NCL) 2024-25 witnessed some notable performances from both the batters and bowlers but it was Rajshahi Division opener Sabbir Hossain who stood out with his first-class career-best 150 off 139 balls against Khulna Division during his side's second innings at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

The 27-year-old all-rounder, who made his first-class debut in 2017, became a regular member of the Rajshahi squad only last year after overcoming a number of hurdles – including a fatal car accident while returning from his wedding in 2021.

"In 2021, I had an accident while returning from my wedding. I was in the car with my newly-wed wife, my elder sister, brother-in-law, and their two children along with the driver," Sabbir recounted that incident when he talked to The Daily Star yesterday.

"When I was leaving Khulna for Rajshahi, the accident happened on the Jashore bypass road. The road usually does not have heavy traffic. I was driving and the accident happened at around 9:00 pm, an hour after we left for Rajshahi," he added.

Sabbir needed around two years to recover completely from the accident, both mentally and



physically. When he returned to the field, he scored 400 runs in five matches – the highest by a Rajshahi batter – in the last edition of NCL at a staggering strike rate of 89.48. That edition Sabbir got his maiden first-class hundred and two fifties.

Sabbir didn't enjoy much success in the next two tournaments as he scored only 77 runs in three matches of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) for North Zone and in his maiden Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) earlier this year, he could make only 10 runs in four matches for Durdanto Dhaka.

However, his Dhaka head coach Khaled Mahmud Sujon kept faith in Sabbir and included him in a star-studded Abahani Limited squad in the last Dhaka Premier League (DPL). Sabbir lived up to the expectations of his coach by scoring 307 runs in eight matches at a strike-rate of 106.59. He also played some crucial knocks, including a brilliant 91 off 78 balls against Mohammedan in a Super League match.

"If you ask me about the biggest tournament in the domestic circuit, it's the DPL. I initially doubted playing for Abahani as there were so many national cricketers. But Sujon sir told me that if you play a lot of matches in other teams and score 100 or even score higher, there will be one type of hype. But if you score a fifty for Abahani, it will add more value to my career," he said about the support he got from Sujon, who is also the head coach of Abahani.

"I always try to score runs whether it's four-day or one-day or T20. I always try to hit the bad balls whatever the format is," added Sabbir, who will represent Durdanto Rajshahi in the upcoming BPL.

Other than the severe accident, Sabbir also had to see himself on the sidelines often early in his career due to the team's combination and also faced a tough time during the Covid period.

According to Sabbir, returning to cricket was a "huge challenge" and the hard-hitting batter would only like to carry on leaving his mark on the field going ahead.

Trailing Tigers' Test woes deepen

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh were looking down the barrel after South Africa posted a 202-run first innings lead on the second day of the first Test in Mirpur yesterday.

A fantastic ton under pressure from wicketkeeper-batter Kyle Verreynne nullified the hosts' apparent spin advantage before Kagiso Rabada once again threatened to cut open the Tigers' top order.

After the visitors were restricted to 308 all out before Tea, Rabada's lengths and pace created all sorts of trouble, especially with the new ball taking a bit of extra bounce. First up, he got one to zip into Shadman Islam at pace, leading to the left-hander being caught at short leg. Three deliveries later, a length delivery gained on Mominul Haque, and the catch was taken at third slip. Two down early, the Tigers were in trouble heading into the day's final session.

However, skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy steadied the ship with a 55-run stand, with the latter sticking to a clear process. Joy, who had faced the most deliveries (97 out of 241) in the first innings, made the likes of Rabada bowl closer to him, allowing him to drive at low risk.

Shanto, meanwhile, played his natural game but was beaten by flight after an exaggerated movement – perhaps looking to go over the top initially – resulting in him missing the line of a Keshav Maharaj delivery and falling leg before.

The inability to maintain focus for big knocks has been Bangladesh's problem in Test cricket recently. In the 13 innings over seven Tests this year, Bangladesh have managed 300-plus in just two innings: 318 against Sri Lanka in Chattogram and 565 in Rawalpindi against Pakistan. They also chased down Pakistan's total in the second Test in Rawalpindi, reaching 185 for four, in one of their more solid efforts this year.

But in six innings, the Tigers were unable to even reach 200 this year. Before bad light ended play, Joy had a rush of blood that almost cost him his wicket after

he charged down the track to a Dane Piedt delivery. He could count himself lucky as the third umpire decided his bat was grounded before Verreynne could take the bails off. Before that, he and Mushfiqur Rahim strung together a 42-run stand, with Mushfiqur employing a different ploy by attacking with sweeps.

Shot selection has been a big part of Bangladesh's problem in Tests recently. The risk-versus-reward assessment often goes missing in terms of shot selection,



frequently skipping the match scenario in question.

Verreynne, in particular, employed sweep shots for fun. The South African recognised early that he had to get on top of the bounce to use the sweep shots effectively.

"[On the sweep shot] It is something that I have worked on quite a bit against spinners. It is not really a sub-continent specific thing. I would play it back home against spin as much as possible," he said, clarifying that there was no premeditated attempt at playing those sweep shots.

With the home side still trailing by 101 – five fewer than their first-innings total – the Tigers may take a leaf out of Verreynne's book to keep their heads above water today.

SAFF WOMEN'S C'SHIP

Troubled Bangladesh face India hurdle

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team will face India hurdle today in their second and final group fixture of the SAFF Women's Championship, knowing that a big-margin defeat would end the defending champions' campaign in the group stages.

There is bigger worry for the team, though, that is the environment. Currently, the team is in a bit of a mess in the aftermath of what midfielder Monika Chakma told media on Monday.

The charges of Peter Butler made a disappointing start to their title-defence with a 1-1 draw against Pakistan, a team they had beaten 6-0 in their previous meeting during their triumphant SAFF campaign in Kathmandu's Dasharath Stadium, the same venue where the current edition is also taking place.

The coach had kept senior players like Masura Parvin, Sanjida Akter, Maria Manda and Krishna Rani Sarkar on the bench. Even though the latter two came off the bench late in the game as Bangladesh desperately searched for an equaliser after going 1-0 down early, the former two did not get any game-time.

Monika, speaking to media the following day, claimed that the coach does not like senior



players, and does not want to involve them unless absolutely needed. She also said that the coach might have been happy but players were not at all satisfied with their result or performance in the first match.

Monika's words apparently didn't go down well with the coach as he did not speak to media following the practice session at the Army Ground on Tuesday, sending two young players – Munki Akter and Kohati Kisku – in front of the media.

Munki, who did not get to play in the opening match, hinted that the coach might give more senior players a chance in this crucial match, which Bangladesh cannot afford to lose by more than a two-goal margin.

"There may be some changes from the team that the coach fielded against Pakistan. There are seniors in the side," Munki said, before adding: "We are young, if we are fielded suddenly, we won't be able to play like that. Maybe we will play, but we won't be able to make decisions like the seniors."

Kohati, who made her SAFF Championship debut against Pakistan, said that she would try to do her best if she gets a chance alongside the seniors.

"The seniors will play (against India). If we get a chance, we will play with maximum effort," the defender said, adding that they have got to be more alert in defence to stop the speedy Indian forwards from scoring.

Buoyant Barca ready for Bayern battle

AGENCIES

Hansi Flick has rapidly moulded a ragged Barcelona into a potent threat to Europe's elite and the visit of his former Bayern Munich side in the Champions League on Wednesday is their first acid test.

The Catalans have not reached the semi-finals of the competition since 2019 and were humiliated thrashed 8-2 by the German giants in 2020, when Flick was at the helm in Bavaria.

"We want to test ourselves against the best – it's a Champions League game against Bayern Munich, it's going to be great," Flick told reporters in yesterday's pre-match press conference.

"(I had) a great time there, with great memories, but I'm living a new chapter now at Barca."

Under Flick, Barcelona have started La Liga in stunning fashion with nine victories and just one defeat in 10 matches, while scoring 33 goals.

The league leaders delivered a stylish

● Bayern have beaten Barcelona in each of their last six meetings and the Catalans have failed to score in the last four of those.

● Five-time Champions League winners Barcelona last won the Champions League in 2015.



display of attacking football to rack up a 5-1 win over Sevilla on Sunday ahead of the Bayern Munich clash and Saturday's La Liga Clasico battle against Real Madrid.

Flick, who led Bayern to a sextuple in 2020, has swiftly transformed a Barcelona side who won nothing last season under



Xavi Hernandez into a swashbuckling force despite injuries to several key players.

Perhaps the most crucial difference has been former Bayern striker Robert Lewandowski's return to form.

Flick has backed the Polish striker to the hilt despite his struggles last season

and the 36-year-old has responded with 14 goals in 12 matches across all competitions.

The German coach has given Raphinha and Lamine Yamal freedom to roam in attack and pushed the team as a whole up the pitch, allowing Lewandowski to spend more time in the area.

However, Flick said his and Lewandowski's Bayern reunion would not just be a battle between the striker and Bayern hitman Harry Kane.

"It's never a battle about players, it's a battle about the (whole) team," said Flick on Sunday.

Raphinha's work-rate has proven essential for Barca and Marc Casado is tireless in midfield and proving a revelation after the club failed to sign a pivot in the summer transfer window.

Barcelona still have limited financial resources and only brought in Dani Olmo, another player who has missed weeks out injured and will be on the bench against Vincent Company's charges.

With the club's good form, the players are in high morale, and Flick's Barcelona are ready for their sternest test yet when six-time Champions League winners Bayern Munich visit the Olympic Stadium. "Whatever happened in the past we can't change, we can only influence what happens tomorrow [today]. Of course, we want to try and beat Bayern Munich," Flick said.