

# From Perth to Antigua, a visible gulf in quality

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This week, what Yashasvi Jaiswal did at Perth and what the Bangladesh batters failed to do in Antigua could be enough to realise why the two countries are on opposite sides of the spectrum in Test cricket.

After edging a Mitchell Stac delivery to gully to be dismissed for an eight-ball naught in the first innings of the opening Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test against Australia, Jaiswal realised what he had done wrong – driving on the up at a rising delivery – and amended his methods in the space of just one innings in such a way that the left-handed opener went on to score a brilliant 161 in the second innings.

On the other hand, three of Bangladesh's top-order batters – Zakir Hasan, Mahmudul Hasan Joy, and Shahadat Hossain – fell victim to identical set-ups or similar pace plays of the West Indies pacers in both innings in the first of the two Tests.



Top-order was the biggest concern heading into the Antigua Test and the second innings in particular saw a familiar lack of application on foreign conditions against quality fast bowling.

Zakir had struggled in the first innings but was able to contend with the new ball till the 10th over. The one going across him from Jayden Seales seamed in just enough to produce the bottom edge and crash onto his stumps in that innings. On Day 4, with the Tigers beginning an uphill task of chasing 334, Zakir was done by a similar shot in the very first over – this time by Kemar Roach from around the wicket.

Zakir's bat once again came down at an angle which led to yet another inside edge crashing onto his stumps.

The case was similar for Zakir's opening partner Joy. The right-hander edged short of a length deliveries to the slip cordon in both innings, either due to poking at the cherry or

not being able to contend with the bounce.

Shahadat, meanwhile, fell to a ball that went away from the body in the first innings and then to an angled-in delivery in the second – but the similarity in his failure lies in the fact that he failed to figure out a way to survive longer against pacers who were constantly using similar lengths, trying to generate movement and bounce off the pitch.

The inability of at least one of the top-order batters to come up with some resistance put the pressure squarely back on the middle order, just like it did in the first innings. And, without the experienced Mushfiqui Rahim and Najmul Hossain Shanto, the Windies attack came hard at the rest.

However, unlike the first innings, Mominul and Liton in the middle order could not survive for long. In the second innings, the Windies created chance after chance and

Mominul fell to a straight drive, caught and bowled by Roach.

Liton, meanwhile, was favouring the pull shot, and the trap was once again set for him with short deliveries. A fielder at backward square leg was put there for a particular shot and another short arm pull resulted in Liton's dismissal on Day 4.

Run-scoring had been difficult in the first innings too but cooler heads had prevailed after the shine was taken off a bit by Mominul and Co which allowed the Tigers to play 98 overs.

A declaration with a wicket remaining, just 10 minutes before the start of play on the fourth day, might have caught Windies batters a bit off-guard but with such batting resistance as was showcased in the second innings, Bangladesh's Test merits have once again come under the cosh despite bowlers' impressive performance to bowl Windies out for 152 in the second innings.

## ‘Many trolled me, but I stuck to my principles’

Despite lacking star power, particularly in the batting unit, Sylhet Division secured their maiden National Cricket League (NCL) title with a match to spare yesterday, beating Barishal Division by five wickets in their sixth-round match at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. Head coach Rajin Saleh, who represented Sylhet for nearly 20 years but never won the NCL as a player, shared his thoughts on the achievement, the team's journey and future plans in an interview with The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan. Excerpts from the interview are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS): Your feelings after this achievement.**  
**Rajin Saleh (RS):** Championship has always had a different taste. Many of us national players have played the NCL together for such a long time for Sylhet, but we couldn't win the tournament. Today, Enamul Haque Jnr called me [after the title win] and said that we had tried for 20 years to secure the trophy but couldn't achieve the feat.

**DS: What differences do you see in this Sylhet team compared to the ones in your playing days?**  
**RS:** With all respect to the previous coaches, I think there was a lack of team bonding previously. For that reason, I feel that such results didn't come to light... In the last three to four years, I worked really hard. Many people from Sylhet criticised me and trolled me because they often wanted their



favourite players to get match opportunities, but I stuck to my principles and did what was best for the team in the selection of the playing eleven.

**DS: You must've had specific plan for batting, which was an area of concern for Sylhet.**  
**RS:** If you do quality work, your result will be great... This year, some young players played for us. For example, I picked an 18-year-old player, Bishal, from the YCL [Youth Cricket League]. I tried to be tough with that player, who needed strong words. And for those who didn't take pressure, I gave them full freedom. We focused on the process initially, which is very important in cricket.

**DS: How do you manage senior players who refuse to leave their places?**  
**RS:** Those who are in the national team were really supportive throughout the season, possessing the mindset to play rotation-wise.

**DS: Your plan for the upcoming NCL T20?**  
**RS:** For T20s, it will be a different tournament. There are many players in our squad who are yet to be mature enough to play such tournaments, especially our batters... [but] hopefully, we will fight for the championship there as well.

**DS: Having operated as a coach with Bangladesh Cricket Board on a short-term basis, are you willing to work again?**  
**RS:** I don't want to work for a short time anywhere. I was hired as a fielding coach in the national team for two series. But after one series, I was dropped. If such things happen in the future as well, neither can I teach them anything nor will I learn anything... I think it's a matter of pride to work for the Bangladesh team. I played for the national team and also captained the side. If I get any good offer, I will consider it.

## Liverpool host Real Madrid in blockbuster clash

AGENCIES

The Champions League will boast perhaps its most mouth-watering fixture of the season so far as reigning champions Real Madrid will travel to Anfield on Wednesday to take on the hottest team in Europe Liverpool. The Reds top the table in the Premier League as well as the Champions League in which they are the only team to have won all four of their games and will be eager to test their credentials against 18th-placed Los Blancos under new boss Arne Slot.

\*Real Madrid are the team who Liverpool have lost most often against in European competitions, having being beaten by Los Blancos seven times, including heartbreaking Champions League final losses in 2018 and 2022.

\*The teams last faced off in the round of 16 in 2022-23, when



Madrid trounced Liverpool 5-2 at Anfield before sealing qualification with a 1-0 home win.

\*That away triumph made Madrid the first team in Champions League history to go two goals down but recover to win by a three-goal margin, as well as the first visitors to net five times at Anfield in a European fixture.

\*Liverpool could win their first five matches of a major European campaign for just the second time. They previously did so in 2021-22, losing to Real Madrid in the Champions

League final.

\*Across all competitions this season, Vinicius Jr has at least seven more goal involvements than any other Madrid player (12 goals, 6 assists), while also creating a team-high 43 chances.

\*However, Los Blancos have coped well without Vinicius in the past. Since the start of last season, they have won 41 of 57 games across all competitions with the Brazilian appearing (71.9%), but have won 75% of matches (12 of 16) when he's been absent. Madrid have also scored marginally more goals per game (2.4 to 2.3) without the winger.

\*Liverpool boss Arne Slot has won 16 of his 18 matches in all competitions.

\*Mohamed Salah has spearheaded the flying start with 12 goals and 10 assists in all competitions.

## IPL snub a reminder of Bangladesh's talent drought

Observing IPL's propensity to bring the best T20 talents from across the world, the question the cricket authorities in Bangladesh should ponder is why have no IPL franchise ever plucked a talent from over here. This year, 12 Bangladeshi cricketers had registered for the IPL auction and of them only two – Rishad Hossain and Mustafizur Rahman – went under the hammer, but remained unsold.

*\*Read full story on The Daily Star's website*



Batsmen Martin Crowe and Graham Thorpe will be honoured by New Zealand and England playing for a trophy named after them during all future Test series between the sides. The Crowe-Thorpe Trophy, a collaboration with the men's families, is made from wood sourced from their bats. England will be searching for redemption after their series loss in Pakistan when they face a buoyant New Zealand in three Tests starting in Christchurch on Thursday. England have not won a Test series in New Zealand since 2008. Meanwhile, New Zealand are full of confidence after a rare 3-0 Test series sweep in India, ending their hosts' 12-year unbeaten streak at home.

PHOTO: AFP

## SA's next two Test series are like cup finals: Bavuma

REUTERS, DURBAN

South Africa's home Test series against Sri Lanka and Pakistan over the next six weeks could possibly be considered like cup finals as the country bids to reach the World Test Championship showpiece, captain Temba Bavuma said on Tuesday.

A clean sweep of the two-match series against Sri Lanka, which starts at Kingsmead on Wednesday, and the two Tests with Pakistan from Dec 26, would put South Africa into June's final at Lord's.

"We have four games left in our Test Championship (campaign), and every game is as important as a final. The guys are excited and I think you should be seeing some good stuff from the guys," Bavuma told a press conference.

Sri Lanka are also chasing a place in the final and can stay on course if they win the two tests in South Africa and then have success at home over Australia in February.

## Tigresses ready for Irish challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team will focus more on playing match by match rather than concentrating on direct qualification to the upcoming World Cup when they take on their Irish counterparts in the opening WODI of the three-match series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur today.

The match is scheduled to start at 10:00am and will be telecast live on T Sports.

Bangladesh will start the crucial series knowing that only a 3-0 outcome in their favour will keep them in the hunt for a direct World Cup qualification place but skipper Nigar Sultana Joty claims she doesn't want to think too far and wants to dominate their opponents at their own backyard.

"World Cup thought is still far away. We need to give attention match by match. We have two bilateral series [now against Ireland and then West Indies]. It's important to take points," Joty told reporters in the pre-series press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

The Tigresses have had a forgetful year so far, especially



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

in the 50-over format where they lost all their three games. The hosts will be back in the format for the first time since a home series against Australia in March.

Bangladesh will look to end their misery against Ireland, with whom they have a 3-1 record

in this format. Knowing that a majority of the opposition players don't have the experience of playing in Bangladesh, Joty expressed her confidence of doing well in the series. However, she was concerned about their 'continuous batting failure'.

"As we will be playing on our home soil, we will be stronger... We will try to dominate them. Ireland are ranked below us. If we can't play against them dominantly, how can we fight keeping eye-on-eye against big teams?" Joty questioned.

Ireland have beaten England both in WODIs and WT20Is in recent months while having also defeated Sri Lanka 2-1 in the preceding ODI series.

Although the Irish side doesn't have much experience of playing in Bangladesh, skipper Gaby Lewis sounded confident about overcoming the hosts' challenge.

"I think Bangladesh are a team that we've been really competitive with over the years, and so, we're looking forward to coming up against them again. It's been a while since we've played them and we've taken great confidence from the summer with our success against Sri Lanka, England, and we're ready to dominate the series," she said, adding that they are ready for the spin challenge in Bangladesh.

"I think it's just about adapting. We obviously don't know how the pitch is going to play, but we predict a good bit of spin and judging by their team, they like to play a spin-heavy XI. So that's something that we have focused on and we've been working really hard on our spin game. And yeah, we're ready for tomorrow," she concluded.