

Muzarabani wins battle of pacers

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

Zimbabwe pacer Blessing Muzarabani stood tall and won the battle against the much-hyped pace unit of Bangladesh in the first Test in Sylhet.

Much of the talk from the Bangladesh camp was about their pace sensation Nahid Rana, and how he could dismantle batters with sheer pace. But instead, it was Muzarabani who shone, putting all those chatters to bed as he starred with match figures of nine for 122 -- the best for a Zimbabwean against Bangladesh -- to help his side to a three-wicket win at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Standing at six feet and eight inches tall, Muzarabani produced an accomplished display throughout both innings, using not just his physical abilities to great effect but also having his wits about him.

The 28-year-old persistently challenged Bangladesh batters with short deliveries -- an Achilles heel for the Tigers -- and perhaps had the best read on the wicket on offer.

Muzarabani had several top-order batters jumpy by ruffling them with deliveries directed at the bodies, winning the mind-game with the Bangladesh batters. The right-arm quick then went for the kill with nipping deliveries just on a length or just short of it. He had as many as five batters, most of them key in the Bangladesh lineup, succumbing to the short ball.

But, perhaps, what Muzarabani did best was identify how the grassy wicket offered extra bounce for the bowlers. He remained adamant about bowling short of a length, surprising the batters almost at every turn.

Pacers usually get high dividends for bowling it full and on a good length, especially when the cherry is shiny and the wicket is conducive to fast bowling.

But Muzarabani opted to go against the norm, and perhaps, it was not a surprise.

"That's my strength, to bowl the hard length on the body. It is my No. 1 skill," Muzarabani had said on Tuesday.

The Zimbabwean quick deciphered what was going to work for him and stuck to shorter lengths. Till Day 4, his short ball percentage was the highest -- 69.6% -- amongst bowlers from both sides.

Muzarabani, undoubtedly, stood out in Zimbabwe's pace attack but his fellow quicks also played their part in making him shine as Victor Nyachi and Richard Ngarava bowled with discipline and sacrificed on extravagance. The trio definitely won the pace battle between both sides as they accounted for 13 wickets in the match, while Bangladesh's pace battery, comprising Nahid Rana, Hasan Mahmud, and Khaled Ahmed, picked up five in total.



Even after an underwhelming game overall, Bangladesh almost turned things around in the final session of Day 4 of the first Test against Zimbabwe at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. It was all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who almost made it seem like the Tigers had a chance of defending a low 174-run target. Miraz scalped fifers in both innings, becoming the only Bangladeshi player to get 10-wicket hauls three times in Tests, surpassing Taijul Islam's record of two 10-wicket hauls. Miraz finished with figures of 10 for 102 runs in the game, with most of his wickets coming in the final session yesterday which helped Bangladesh reduce Zimbabwe to 161 for seven after the visitors got off to a flying start by amassing 95 for no loss at one stage of the game. With the final wicket of the day, Miraz, playing his 52nd Test, also became only the third Bangladeshi to reach 200 wickets (after Taijul Islam and Shakib Al Hasan). However, despite providing a scare to the visitors, Miraz could only help Bangladesh reduce the margin of defeat as Zimbabwe ended up winning the contest by three wickets.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Shanto blames 'mental lapses' as home woes mount

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Sylhet

During the current ICC World Test Championship cycle, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) opted for a significant shift -- moving away from spin friendly pitches to more balanced, sporting wickets for home Tests. The change came after years of criticism, with many arguing that doctored pitches may have helped secure occasional home wins but left the team exposed abroad, where they consistently suffered heavy defeats.

Criticism had long come from all quarters -- journalists, organisers, administrators, players and coaches -- over the preparation of pitches tailored to Bangladesh's spin strength. But once BCB committed to preparing fairer wickets for both domestic and international matches, the response was largely positive.

And initially, the gamble appeared to work as the Tigers began to show results overseas. Last year, they won three of their six away Tests -- the most in a single year in their history. Highlights included a historic first-ever Test series win against Pakistan and a long awaited victory over the West Indies on their turf after 15 years.

However, the picture at home was less encouraging. Since beating New Zealand in the opening match of the WTC 2023-25 cycle at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in November 2023, Bangladesh have lost six consecutive home Tests -- the latest being a three-wicket defeat to Zimbabwe at the same venue yesterday, which gave the visitors a 1-0 lead in the series.

As in this Test match -- where

"I think the more Tests you can win, the more you'll be on the radar. As tough as Tests are, it is what every player wants to play and get better at. It really does test you over four or five days. The smaller teams want to play good, hard Test cricket against tough opposition. That's the only way you'll improve as a team."

Zimbabwe captain CRAIG ERVINE

Bangladesh batters failed to put up good numbers on the board -- managing only 191 and 255 runs in their innings -- the main reason behind their home Test debacle has been the inconsistent performance from their batters.

Out of the 14 home Test innings since the start of the last WTC, the Tigers have folded for under 200 on nine occasions, and only four times have they crossed the 300-run mark. Meanwhile, during this same period, their highest score was 338 runs against New Zealand in Sylhet.

Captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, who has led the side throughout this period, was asked to explain their continued poor form despite the shift to better wickets. He didn't go into great detail, but admitted that "mental lapses" and poor decision-

making were to blame.

"It's difficult to say what the problem is. If you see our batting, all were soft dismissals. I don't think we threw away our wickets to good balls," Shanto said during a press meet after the match.

"There can be mental errors and every individual can talk about their dismissals. I reckon the batters should have taken more responsibility -- especially those who were dismissed after getting set at the crease."

Bangladesh will have a chance to redeem themselves in the second and final Test, starting April 28 in Chattogram. However, unless they address the problems quickly, they risk further embarrassment -- particularly against a Zimbabwe side that just ended a four-year wait for a Test win.

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**** Out of the last 14 home Test innings, the Tigers have folded for under 200 on nine occasions, and only four times have they crossed the 300-run mark.**

**** With yesterday's three-wicket win, Zimbabwe ended a four-year wait for a Test win.**

What to WATCH

T Sports

DPL Partex vs Borthers

Live from 9:00 am

IPL

Bengaluru vs

Rajasthan

Live from 8:00 pm

Nagorik TV

PSL

Lahore vs Peshawar

Live from 9:00 pm

AHF CUP

Bangladesh set up semifinal against Oman

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh emerged Pool B champions with an all-win record in the AHF Cup following a 5-0 win against Sri Lanka in their fourth and last final pool match in Jakarta, Indonesia on Wednesday.

The result set up Bangladesh's semifinal on April 25 against Oman, who emerged Pool A runners-up by virtue of goal difference against group winners Chinese Taipei.

Like the previous matches, the men in red and green initially struggled against Sri Lanka and were held goalless in the first half.

Rashid, however, broke the deadlock from open play with Rakibul Hasan giving a 39th-minute lead before Bangladesh added four more goals in a span of only 11 minutes.

Rakibul doubled the margin in 42nd minute from open play before Fazla Rabby and Arshad Hossain widened the margin in the 43rd and 49th minutes with field goals. Naim Uddin sealed the victory from a penalty corner in the 50th minute.

SHORT CORNER

Nazmul appointed convener of CCDM technical committee

Following the upheaval in relation to the reduction of Towhid Hridoy's suspension which led to Enamul Haque Moni's resignation as convener of technical committee, BCB director Nazmul Abedeen Fahim has been appointed as convener of the technical committee. The umpires' committee had also embroiled itself in controversy by signing a sanction table revision, which allowed Hridoy to play after serving a one-match ban.

Soumya hits 153, Abahani-Mohammedan title race going down to the wire

Abahani maintained their two-point advantage over Mohammedan at the top of the table as the title race builds up ahead of the final stages of the Dhaka Premier League Super League stage. Meanwhile national team opener Soumya Sarkar hit a blistering 153 not out for Legends of Rupganj against Agrani Bank at BKSP four to help his side to a big win.

Remainder of Fed Cup final next Tuesday in Mymensingh

The Professional League Management Committee (PLMC) of Bangladesh Football Federation on Wednesday decided to hold the remainder of the Federation Cup final between Abahani and Bashundhara Kings next Tuesday at the same venue -- Rofique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh. The meeting also decided to restart the game at 3:30pm.

**Read full stories on The Daily Star website.

Cabrera asked to reconsider Fahamedul for Singapore tie

SPORTS REPORTER

On the eve of the national team's departure for Shillong to face hosts India in their Asian Cup qualifier on March 25, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Tabith Awal found himself addressing a group of disgruntled fans. Their concern centred around the omission of Italy-based teenager Fahamedul Islam from the squad.

Head coach Javier Cabrera had released the young winger from the training camp in Saudi Arabia, explaining that he needed more time to adapt to the team's system and that more suitable options were available.

Media reports, however, later revealed that Fahamedul had grown frustrated during the camp, alleging a lack of support from local teammates in practice matches. He repeatedly voiced his concerns to Cabrera, who, displeased with the player's attitude, ultimately sent him back to Italy. Nevertheless, Cabrera acknowledged the player's talent and praised his efforts during the camp.

The issue resurfaced during Wednesday's meeting of the national teams committee, where the Spanish coach was asked to include Fahamedul -- along with other interested foreign-based players -- in the upcoming training camp for the June 10 fixture against Singapore.

"The meeting focused on our preparations for the

Singapore match," BFF media committee chairman Amirul Islam Babu told reporters at the BFF House on Wednesday. "We stressed the need for a strong performance and positive result, and the coach gave his assurance after we discussed the shortcomings from previous games."

Fahamedul's name inevitably popped up in the discussions. "The committee recommended his inclusion in the next camp," Babu confirmed.

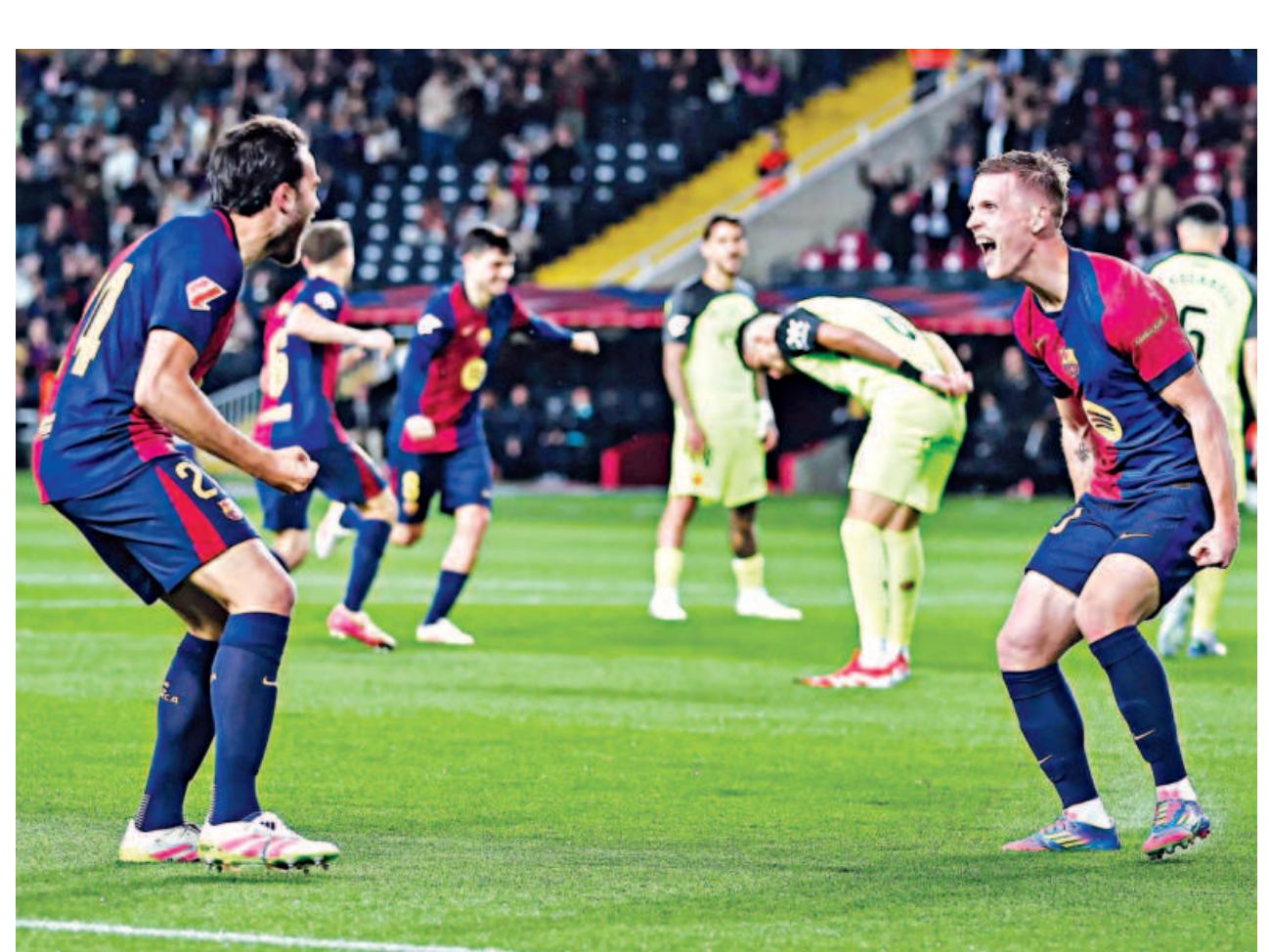
"Of course, to field a foreign-based player in the national team, we need the necessary clearances. The BFF president is already trying to get Fahamedul's clearance..."

When asked if the committee had interfered with player selection, Babu clarified that the coach has full authority to include any foreign-based player he sees fit, and the board will support the decision.

To aid preparations, the committee also announced plans for a practice match against a foreign team on June 5.

"With the domestic league ending on May 29, we'll call up the national squad on May 31," said Babu, further informing that Sudan have shown the most interest to play the friendly in Dhaka.

Additionally, the meeting explored the idea of forming a selection committee to assist the head coach, though no final decision was reached. The committee also urged the BFF boss to appoint a foreign goalkeeping coach to strengthen the backroom staff.



Dani Olmo celebrates the only goal in Barcelona's hard-fought 1-0 home win over Mallorca on Tuesday with Eric Garcia, who provided the assist inside the first minute of the second half of the LaLiga game. The win saw Barcelona extend their lead over Real Madrid at the top of the table to seven points with five games to go. Real visit Getafe late on Wednesday and will be in with a chance to cut the gap with Barca to four points.

PHOTO: BARCELONA