



PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Taijul’s statement spell leads TIGERS’ REVIVAL

SPORTS REPORTER

After Zimbabwe’s strong start on the opening day of the second and final Test in Chattogram, where they built a solid foundation through steady partnerships, Bangladesh needed a hero to spark their comeback yesterday.

Enter Taijul Islam, whose 16th five-wicket haul helped the hosts finish the day on a high, bringing them back into the contest after two challenging sessions.

Taijul’s performance in the series opener in Sylhet was underwhelming. He conceded 53 runs from 10 overs without a wicket in the first innings, allowing Zimbabwe to take a crucial lead. In the second innings, he leaked runs at an economy rate of 4.40, claiming only two wickets as Bangladesh failed to defend 174 runs despite Mehedi Hasan Miraz’s

remarkable 10-wicket haul.

The frustration for Taijul was immense. A player who had been Bangladesh’s leading wicket-taker in Tests since his debut in 2014 found himself under fire from both critics and fans.

At Bir Sreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium, the 33-year-old spinner was determined to respond rather than succumbing to the pressure. As Zimbabwe batted first, the visitors initially looked comfortable, with key partnerships forming between Nick Welch and Sean Williams.

The hosts struggled to make inroads, but debutant Tanzim Hasan Sakib provided a crucial breakthrough by dismissing Brian Bennett. Taijul soon followed, claiming the wicket of Ben Curran. Despite this, Zimbabwe continued to build, and it appeared they would post a significant total.

However, the game began to shift as off-spinner Nayeem Hasan claimed two quick wickets, setting the stage for Taijul to take control. He struck with precision, taking four wickets, including three with the second new ball.

Zimbabwe’s batting line-up crumbled under Taijul’s relentless pressure, losing

seven wickets for just 40 runs. At stumps, the visitors were reduced to 227 for nine, and the Tigers had regained a strong foothold in the match.

Taijul’s exceptional performance -- taking five wickets for 60 runs at an economy rate of just 2.20 -- was a remarkable comeback, especially after his struggles in Sylhet.

“It’s a matter of great satisfaction,” Taijul said after the day’s play.

“When a player plays 50 Tests, he can’t be satisfied with the way he bowled in Sylhet. But still, it’s a good feeling that I’ve been able to make a comeback. Most importantly, I could help the team.

“When you bowl in partnership, there’s always a chance of taking wickets -- and that’s what happened,” said the player who was categorised as “underrated” by former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal in a social media post.

Taijul’s words reflected the hard work he had put in between Tests, focusing on consistency and accuracy. He also responded to his critics, noting that “those who criticise someone who has played so many Tests don’t understand the game”.

Debunking Tamim’s ‘underrated’ Taijul label

Former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal yesterday described Taijul Islam as “the most underrated bowler in the world,” following his impressive five-for against Zimbabwe in the Chattogram Test.

“Look at the stats of the other current bowlers and you will understand my opinion. Well done TAIJUL on another five-wicket,” wrote Tamim on Facebook.

However, despite Tamim’s praise, the claim of him being “underrated” may not hold up, as The Daily Star’s Shabab Chowdhury argues, given Taijul’s established role as the team’s lead spinner and his regular impact since making debut in 2014.

While Taijul’s statistics aren’t elite by global standards, with 224 wickets to his credit, his ongoing contributions make him a key figure in the Tigers’ spin department.

Asked about Tamim’s Facebook post in a press conference, Taijul responded, “Yes, I also believe I am underrated. You guys know it better.”

Read the full story on The Daily Star website. The article is titled: Tamim labels Taijul as ‘world’s most underrated bowler’: Is it true?

‘Players have basic skills but lack tactical awareness’

Bangladesh failed to qualify for the Asia Cup for the first time in 43 years after finishing third in the AHF Cup -- a tournament which they had won the last four times. The team has come under heavy criticism from various quarters for their lacklustre display, against sides they used to breeze past in previous times. Head coach Mamun Ur Rashid spoke to The Daily Star’s Anisur Rahman from Indonesia about the reasons behind the failure -- including flawed planning, poor tactical awareness, and the rapid development of other nations.

DS: How do you evaluate Bangladesh’s performance, finishing third instead of defending the AHF Cup title and thus failing to qualify for the Asia Cup?
Mamun Ur Rashid (MR): Obviously, it was a disappointing result. But it’s unfair that some people on social media targeted a single individual -- me. Many focused on one player, Jimmy [Rasel Mahmud], who wasn’t selected due to his age. Can anyone guarantee we would have won if Jimmy played? Instead of blaming individuals, journalists should investigate deeper: why didn’t the team click? What issues existed? Bangladesh barely played any international matches since the 2023 Asian Games -- almost two years without competitive action.

DS: Bangladesh had previously played the AHF Cup with minimal preparation and amid irregular domestic competition. Where exactly did we fall short this time?
MR: When was our last domestic league properly held? The result is disastrous, and it will only get worse if things don’t change. Our so-called development plans are not real plans. Look at Chinese Taipei: they struggled four years ago but responded by building a program, playing regularly in Korea, Japan, and China to prepare for the AHF Cup. Their progress is no accident.

DS: Bangladesh struggled against every opponent. Was it a decline in our quality or an improvement from others?

MR: We have remained stagnant while others have moved forward. If we take two steps, others are taking a hundred. Nobody likes poor results, but we once played World Cup qualifiers -- now we’re far from that level. No one even talks about it. Our players only trained for 40 days after 22 months without competitive matches or practice games. Facilities are poor -- players still receive Tk 400 daily allowance, the same as a decade ago.

DS: Bangladesh’s defence was vulnerable, and the team lacked build-up play despite your success at age-group and domestic levels. What happened?
MR: The conditions were tough -- temperatures around 33°C with high humidity. We also made a mistake: bringing only one set of jerseys. Players were drenched with sweat even before matches began and couldn’t change at halftime. Fatigue hit them after 15-20 minutes. Additionally, I had only two drag-flickers, (Sohanur Rahman) Sabuz and Ashrafal (Alam), meaning I couldn’t rotate defenders properly, and they got exhausted.

DS: Do you believe this group of players lacks the quality of previous generations?

MR: Our system heavily depends on BKSP graduates. They have basic skills but lack tactical awareness -- they don’t know when or where to use their skills during a match. For example, against Oman, we were leading 2-1, but a simple defensive mistake -- failing to let a ball go out -- led to a penalty corner and a goal against us. Many players don’t even understand concepts like full press or half press.

DS: Bangladesh U-21 team have qualified for the Junior World Cup, while the senior team failed to qualify for the Asia Cup. What message does this send?

MR: It’s not a good message. The federation must take it seriously. What we are doing now for development isn’t enough. People keep looking back at the past instead of addressing what needs to be done now.

DS: What must be done to recover from this situation?

MR: We need long-term planning -- not just one-month preparations. The federation should design one- to two-year plans. Failure isn’t the end. It should be used constructively to build a stronger future.



Slot claims glory, chases greater triumphs

AGENCIES

At a roaring Anfield, amid fireworks and songs echoing into the night, Arne Slot stood at the heart of Liverpool’s latest triumph -- a Premier League title sealed with four games to spare in his very first season.

Liverpool’s crushing 5-1 win over Tottenham on Sunday not only crowned them champions but also pulled them level with Manchester United’s record of 20 top-flight titles.

For Slot, the first Dutch manager to win the Premier League, after high-profile names like Louis van Gaal and Frank de Boer struggled here, the victory was sweet -- but also a reminder that at Liverpool, success must be chased relentlessly.

“I don’t have to manage expectations because the expectations of this club are always the same,” Slot said. “We have to compete for every trophy, and that didn’t change when I came in, and it doesn’t change next season.”

Slot’s impact has been immediate and emphatic. Liverpool sprinted from the start and never looked back, losing just two league matches all season while rivals Manchester City, Chelsea, and Arsenal stumbled.



The Dutchman admitted the enormity of his achievement only hit him as the team bus rolled into Anfield, surrounded by thousands of euphoric fans.

“The only moment I was emotional today was when we arrived at the stadium -- to see what it meant for the fans,” he said. “Immediately, it also felt like, ‘We still have to do it.’”

Liverpool’s success wasn’t without its hurdles. A League Cup final defeat and a Champions League exit briefly cast doubts over their momentum. At that time, the futures of Mohamed Salah, Virgil van Dijk, and Trent Alexander-Arnold were unresolved, fuelling uncertainty. But with

Salah and Van Dijk now re-committed, stability reigns, even as Real Madrid continues to circle for Alexander-Arnold.

Slot made sure to pay tribute to Jürgen Klopp during the celebrations, leading the Kop in singing “Live Is Life,” swapping in Klopp’s name.

“Klopp helped me even more by the team he left behind and the culture he left behind,” Slot said. “The quality of the players was obvious, but the culture of hard work was even more important.”

Slot also knows the challenge ahead. He acknowledged that Manchester City’s dip helped Liverpool this season and expects the competition to be fiercer next year.

“Next season could be even tougher,” he warned. “There are so many great teams in this league and in the Champions League -- it’s never going to be easy.”

For now, though, Slot allowed himself a brief moment of pride.

“To be part of the history of this club is something I could only have dreamt of,” he said. “Winning the league here -- it’s very special.”

Liverpool’s sky-high expectations remain. And with Slot at the helm, it feels like the take-off is only just beginning.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE SEMIFINAL

Arteta up against mentor Enrique

AFF, LONDON

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta will have to beat one of the most influential figures in his football life when the Gunners face Luis Enrique’s Paris Saint-Germain in the Champions League semi-finals.

Arteta’s side host PSG in the first leg tonight as the Spaniard aims to lead Arsenal to only the second Champions League final appearance in their history.

Standing in his way is a close friend who, along with Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola, played a major role in his compatriot’s impressive transition from the pitch to the dug out.

Luis Enrique was a senior star at Barcelona when Arteta started his playing career at the Camp Nou. “He was extremely supportive with the young players, he was one of the main characters by far. I have really good memories of him,” Arteta said.

The pupil has already got the better of his mentor once this season, when Arsenal eased to a 2-0 win over PSG in the league phase at the Emirates in October. But PSG have improved dramatically since then. “For me he’s one of the best coaches in the world and someone who helped me a huge amount,” said Arteta.

The feeling is mutual, with Luis Enrique saying: “He is one of the best coaches at the moment.

- ⚽ Arsenal have never lost to PSG in European competition, having faced them five times previously.
- ⚽ PSG have lost five of their past six away games against English sides in the Champions League.



PHOTO: AI-GENERATED

“He changed Arsenal’s fortunes from a somewhat winless streak to one of the best teams in the world that is competing for titles.”

While Arteta and Luis Enrique are sure to share a private moment together after the tie, they will put their friendship on hold to focus on finally delivering maiden Champions League glory to their clubs.

DHAKA PREMIER LEAGUE

Abahani, MSC to go all in

SPORTS REPORTER

Having been billed as a virtual final last week, today’s Dhaka Premier League encounter between Bangladesh’s two biggest clubs -- Abahani and Mohammedan Sporting Club -- in Mirpur has all the ingredients of a title decider.

Abahani holds a narrow advantage of two points, having won one more match in the Super League than Mohammedan, meaning the latter must win at Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

The weather, however, predicts bad news for Mohammedan, with forecasts of rain throughout the day potentially disrupting the match. Their practice was already hampered by rain yesterday, and if the game is abandoned, they will be declared runners-up.

“Abahani-Mohammedan is always a heated match, and there is excitement. Hopefully, that will be the case tomorrow. The weather is a bit gloomy,



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

and let’s see; if the weather is fine, we will have a 100-over game,” Mohammedan pacer Ebadot told reporters.

Missing Towhid Hridoy due to a four-match suspension, Mohammedan will look to veterans Mahmudullah Riyad and Rony Talukdar for inspiration.

Opener Anisul Islam, who scored a century in their last meeting, along with bowlers Ebadot Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Nasum Ahmed, and Mohammad Saifuddin, will strengthen the side, who have not won the DPL since gaining List A status.

On the other hand, if Abahani win, they will clinch their third consecutive title and sixth since the DPL got List A status.

A young Abahani team will rely on dynamic openers Parvez Hossain Emon and Shahriar Komol, or Jishan Alam to take charge, with Mohammad Mithun and captain Mosaddek Hossain providing balance in Najmul Hossain Shanto’s absence.

Abahani head coach Hannan Sarkar said, “That Abahani are a club with traditions has continued this year. Yes, [political] circumstances have changed, that’s true, and management and coach have changed too, but there’s a saying that some names carry weight, and that’s what’s working for us.”

Remainder of Fed Cup final today

STAR SPORTS DESK

Twelve-time winners Abahani and defending champions Bashundhara Kings will play the remainder of the unfinished Federation Cup final today, with the match remaining 1-1 from the 105 minutes of play from the last week.

The match, which will be get underway at 3:30pm at the Mymensingh venue where it was halted for bad light last week, will see the second half of extra time played. If the scoreline doesn’t change or there is not an outright winner after regulation time, the match will roll into penalty shootout.