



Bazball pulled over

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

Fast bowler Mohammad Siraj wears his heart on his sleeve. Charging in with purpose, draped in India's whites, he barrels in, undeterred by conditions or expectations. Up against the Bazball bandwagon -- England's intimidating swashbuckling batting style? It barely registered on his radar and was the least of his worries, it seemed. If anything, it was a challenge he relished.

Siraj, a Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) in the Telangana Police, seemed to have handed Bazball a speeding ticket, grounding the Ben Stokes-Brendon McCullum duo to a screeching halt in the fifth and final Test on Monday.

The 31-year-old workhorse was the only pacer to play all five Tests, sending down a series-high 185.3 overs and topping the charts with 23 wickets -- including a career-best 9 for 190 -- finally stepping into a spotlight that often misses the supporting cast.

While the home side attempted to set the tempo, Siraj kept at it throughout the tour and managed to create moments of brilliance for himself and his team, sometimes as the sidekick to star pacer Jasprit Bumrah, but in others as the sheriff himself. He did it without an ounce of thought spared about how England would try to impose their aggressive approach on the game.

In the Oval Test, he decided enough was enough, and it was his time to shine. He revelled in the limited sunshine on offer over the five days and wreaked havoc when the light was obscured.

When India faltered to 224 in first innings, it was Siraj who hauled them back, scalping four crucial wickets. His in-swingers sliced through England's middle order, leaving even the likes of Joe Root and Ollie Pope flailing. When England came out to chase a record 374, it was again Siraj who claimed vital scalps -- removing Zak Crawley with a deceptive slower yorker and cutting Pope in half before sealing a six-run win on a tense final morning.

And he did it without Bumrah. All series long, the narrative revolved around India's spearhead. But when it mattered most, Siraj rose from the wings again -- justifying his average which improves from 35.00 to 25.10 when Bumrah is absent.

"You always feel good when given extra responsibility," said Siraj on missing Bumrah after his four-fer in the first innings.

The badge he wears off the field now seems just as fitting as the whites he wears on it.



Can Sohan make it count this time?

SPORTS REPORTER

When Nurul Hasan Sohan smashed three sixes and three fours in the final over to guide Rangpur Riders to a thrilling win over Fortune Barishal in last year's Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) league phase, many believed he was ready for the national T20I side.

Sharp behind the stumps and increasingly consistent as a finisher in both the BPL and Dhaka Premier League (DPL), Sohan appeared to be the ideal successor to Mahmudullah Riyad, who had long served as the team's late-order enforcer.

However, Sohan hasn't featured for Bangladesh in T20Is since the 2022 World Cup in Australia, where his batting fell short of expectations. In the most recent DPL, he impressed with 522 runs for Dhanmondi Sports Club, averaging 58 with a high strike rate. His two centuries, including a counter-attacking 132 against Mohammedan, highlighted his ability to anchor innings.

Despite his domestic form, a national recall remained elusive. Ahead of the Sri Lanka series earlier this year, hopes were high for his return, but his wait continued.

"Regarding Sohan, he is under consideration, but due to team balance, we can't include multiple wicketkeepers in the same squad," said BCB chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu when explaining Sohan's omission from the 16-member ODI squad for the Lanka series.

Lipu also noted that Litton Das needed ODI opportunities to regain form and lead the T20I side effectively.

"Sohan is certainly in our minds. He's very effective in the No. 6 and 7 positions. I believe we'll see him again soon," the chief selector added in June.

That opportunity may now be within reach. On Monday, Sohan was named in both the Bangladesh 'A' squad for the Top End T20 tournament in Australia (August 14-24) and the preliminary national squad for the upcoming Netherlands series and the Asia Cup.

With the three-match Netherlands T20I series to start from August 30, the Top End T20 could be a crucial platform for Sohan's national return. After a frustrating wait, the door is ajar with the Asia Cup just around the corner. Now, it's up to Sohan to make it count.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

ANISUR RAHMAN

Under the low light at the Shaheed Taj Uddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium, it was somewhat difficult to spot the newly appointed Thai table tennis coach, Pattaratorn Passara, among the 30 or so paddlers preparing for the upcoming Asian Youth Games, Islamic Solidarity Games, and South Asian Games. The 25-year-old coach blended in with the players, wearing a jersey, shorts, and sneakers -- just like the rest of them.

However, it didn't take long to identify the lanky Passara, who was seen engaging with the players, demonstrating techniques on how the ball should be served and returned, where to position their hands, and offering numerous other technical instructions. He wasted no time and began working with the players in the morning session yesterday, following his arrival in Dhaka on Sunday night.

Passara called time on his playing career last year after an illustrious run, which included becoming the singles champion at the All Thailand Table Tennis Championships 2024 and

at the King's Cup Thailand Championships in 2021. He was also a gold medal-winning member of the Thailand team during the 31st Southeast Asian Games in 2021. Since retiring, Passara has taken up the challenge of coaching at the domestic level and has now joined the Bangladesh table tennis team on a two-month assignment.

"I know two months is a short time to improve the players significantly, but one thing I want to instil in the Bangladeshi players is technique," Passara told The Daily Star yesterday. "I want to teach the players specific techniques during the first month. If they can improve technically, then I will focus on developing their strength, which is also crucial for their performance. If they can manage both, they will improve in their respective games."

After conducting two training sessions with the paddlers, Passara believes that the Bangladeshi players already possess the basics, which he aims to reinforce. He noted, however, that the players lack strategic play.

Despite various limitations facing table tennis in Bangladesh, the 25-year-old coach remains

SHORT CORNER

Pakistan clinch series against WI

Sahibzada Farhan and Saim Ayub combined for a 138 opening partnership and Pakistan defeated the West Indies by 13 runs on Sunday to capture their T20 International Series. Pakistan won the series opener by 14 runs but dropped the second match by two wickets to set up a Sunday night decider at Lauderhill, Florida.

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PHOTO: COURTESY

Bangladesh football team's captain Jamal Bhuyan has become a brand ambassador of Surf Excel Bangladesh. Jamal follows the footsteps of global football stars such as Vinicius Jr. of Brazil and Bukayo Saka of England.

Passara brings technical focus to Bangladesh TT

optimistic about the potential of the players.

"Actually, I'm not fully aware of the types of limitations Bangladesh table tennis is facing, but I think the players can progress if they are taught the correct techniques," said Passara, who aims to instil three key qualities in the team -- power, speed, and service.

Although Passara holds a degree in Business Administration with a focus on Logistics Management, he does not possess a formal coaching licence. However, Captain Maksud Ahmed Sonnet, general secretary of the Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation, is unconcerned about this.

"I brought in Passara through a Thai coach who is currently training in the USA. According to him, young players are turning to Passara because those receiving training under him are performing better. Even paddlers from Myanmar are coming to him for coaching," said Sonnet. He added that the BTTF is considering participating in an invitational tournament to assess the players' improvement under Passara's supervision.