

## 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.



ASHFAQ-UL ALAM

If Test cricket is the sporting equivalent of a literary epic, the five-match Test series between England and India was its Iliad -- a battle of two groups of warriors which will go down in history as a tale of valour, heroism and sheer audacity.

The final act of the series, on the morning of Day 5 of the fifth Test at the Oval on Monday, was like a climax of a great play with everything that had gone on for the past one and a half months leading up to this epic conclusion.

England needed 35 runs to seal the series 3-1, while visitors India, who had clawed back into the game the previous day, were just four wickets away from ending their 18-year streak of series defeats on English soil.

The stage was set for someone to emerge as a hero, and that opportunity was grabbed by India pacer Mohammad Siraj.

Prior to Monday morning, Siraj in this series had all the makings of a tragic hero. With spearhead Jasprit Bumrah playing only three of the five Tests to manage his workload, Siraj played every game, bowling a staggering 181.2 overs by the end of the series.

But till the fifth day, Siraj's bighearted effort was almost overshadowed by two unforced errors.

The first one happened in the final moments of the Lord's Test, when Siraj, India's No.11, perfectly defended the ball only to see it bounce back off the pitch and nudge the wicket just enough to dislodge the bails, handing the hosts a 22-run win.

The second happened just the previous day, when he caught Harry Brook on 19 in the boundary but stepped onto the ropes afterwards to make it a six. Brook later went on to make a 98-ball 111 before departing that very day.

It seemed like Siraj was destined to end up as the protagonist of a Greek tragedy, as no matter how hard he tried, fate always intervened to keep him from achieving salvation.

But unlike those literary protagonists, Siraj didn't surrender to his fate, he rebelled against 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 Mohammad, 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.



I've played cricket for years -- Champions Trophy, seen the World Cup -- nothing compares to this. People keep asking if Test cricket will survive, but what we saw over these five games is the answer.

India batter KL Rahul after The Oval Test



## Redemption, bravery, and glory of Test cricket



- ➊ Second-most runs in a Test series: 7,187 (behind only the 1993 Ashes)
- ➋ Joint-most centuries in a series: 21 (equals 1955 West Indies-Australia)
- ➌ Most batters with 400+ runs: 9 (surpassing the record of 8 in 1975-76 WI-Aus & 1993 Ashes)
- ➍ Joint-most century stands: 19 (matches 1967-68 England-Pakistan & England-West Indies)
- ➎ Shubman Gill's 754 runs: The second-most ever by a captain in a Test series (after Don Bradman's 810). Gill became only the third captain to score four centuries in a series (after Bradman & Sunil Gavaskar)

The 31-year-old carried his weary body into the middle, bowled with a big heart for one last time in the series, snapped up three of the final four wickets, and rightfully claimed the final wicket with a yorker and let loose a 'Siuu' celebration, creating a moment that will most likely stand the test of time.

Siraj may have emerged as the hero in the final act, but a thought must be spared for Chris Woakes, who stood at the non-striker's end and looked on as the Indian team erupted in wild celebrations.

Woakes had no business being out in the middle as the all-rounder had

dislocated his shoulder while fielding on the opening day and was effectively ruled out of the rest of the Test.

But with the match and series at stake, Woakes, with his left hand in a sling and a sweater on top, came out to bat after England lost their ninth wicket with 17 runs still to get.

One-handed heroics are nothing new in cricket, and Woakes joined the list of many bravehearts who have put the team ahead of their health.

Mercifully for Woakes, his partner Gus Atkinson shielded him away from the strike, as the all-rounder stood at the

non-striker's end throughout his stay, running a couple of singles and a two for his partner.

But his bravery couldn't save the hosts as India and Siraj had the last laugh.

This series could be the beginning of captain Shubman Gill's India's Test dominance and a sign that England's Bazball approach is losing its novelty.

But those conversations can be left alone for later, as right now, it's time to applaud the redemption of Siraj, the bravery of Woakes, and the incredible entertainment served up by two marvellous Test sides.

## CWAB election on September 4

SPORTS REPORTER

The Cricket Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) announced that its first election in 15 years will take place on September 4, following a meeting yesterday in Mirpur.

CWAB formed the election committee, with Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director Iftekhar Ahmed Mithu appointed as chairman, while Nasir Ahmed Nasu and Habibul Bashar have been appointed as members of the election committee.

Cricketers such as Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mominul Haque, and Mohammad Mithun were present during the media briefing.

## 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.

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

**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.**

PHOTO: COURTESY

## Passara brings technical focus to Bangladesh TT

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, Pattratorn 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 t-shirt, 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

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.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED