

## Overcooked turners, undercooked faith

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

While walking off the ground after the post-match presentation for the third ODI between Bangladesh and the West Indies on Thursday, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul jokingly told the media personnel present there, "You can't call it a paddy field today."

Bulbul was clearly referring to the wicket used in that match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, which produced a one-sided game where the hosts crushed the visitors by 179 runs to take the three-match series 2-1.

The wickets for the first two games in Mirpur had drawn a lot of flak for their dark complexion, and



prodigious spin.

The third ODI took place on the same pitch as the first match, which according to the broadcasters had provided 4.9 degree turn for spinners on average.

More of the same was expected on Thursday. The wicket was still devoid of grass and the soil looked dark, though not as much as it did in the previous two games.

The difference became more apparent when the match began. The ball was still gripping and turning as it had done in the earlier matches, but this time the soil was not exploding when the ball pitched, a sign that this pitch was more compact.

This small detail made a big difference as it meant that the bounce at the pitch was not as erratic as the previous two games.

Batting first, Bangladesh's openers Soumya Sarkar and Saif Hassan took full advantage of it as they judged the turn well and countered with fearless strokes to form a record-setting 176-run stand.

Although the pitch slowed up as the game progressed and Bangladesh's scoring rate dipped after the opening partnership ended, they still posted a commanding 296-8 in 50 overs.

West Indies were crushed under the weight of the target and were bundled out for just 117 by the host spinners.

Prior and even during the series, some BCB officials had said that the wicket can't change overnight. But after the Tigers lost the second ODI in a Super Over, the nature of the surface changed in just two days.

Given the Tiger's recent poor record in ODIs – coming into this series on the back of four consecutive series losses – the management understandably tried to exploit home ground advantage to the fullest, but in the first two games, they went overboard.

This hints at a lack of faith on the players to get the job done on a typical Mirpur surface, which already provides plenty of help for the hosts, against a side that hasn't won an ODI series in Bangladesh since 2011. The defeat brought forth a course correction, which helped Bangladesh get a crucial win and hopefully a lesson that too much of a good thing can also turn costly.

## Miraz's captaincy taking a toll on long-term vision?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Under the captaincy of Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Bangladesh's success rate stands at just 23 percent – three wins in 13 matches. Even Miraz's own performance graph has dipped, both as a batter and a bowler, since being entrusted with the ODI armband.

Beyond the bleak win percentage and his personal decline, it's Miraz's captaincy itself that has come under scrutiny for lacking a long-term vision to shape the team's future.

As a bowler, Miraz has always been considered a vital cog in Bangladesh's wicket-taking mechanism. However, that edge now seems missing, with his bowling strike rate rising to 55.7 as captain, compared to his career strike rate of 45.9.

In fact, against Afghanistan earlier this month, his bowling average, economy rate, and strike rate were all significantly worse than those of part-time off-spinner Saif Hassan.

With the bat, Miraz has produced numbers, but those contributions have had little impact on Bangladesh's success rate. During the ODI series in the Caribbean last November-December, he averaged just over 50, thanks to two 70-plus scores. Yet the Tigers ended that series with a 3-0 whitewash.

His 60 off 87 deliveries in the first ODI against Afghanistan in Abu Dhabi earlier



this month came when Bangladesh were rebuilding after early wickets. But despite batting deep, he failed to provide the acceleration needed, and the Tigers suffered a convincing defeat.

In total, Miraz has struck four fifties as ODI captain – all in losing causes. The main concern remains his slow scoring rate; his strike rate as skipper has dropped compared to his career strike rate, suggesting that the tempo he has tried to set as captain is misaligned with the demands of modern ODI cricket.

At best, those innings have merely

prevented batting collapses and padded his average, but have rarely translated into competitive team totals.

Beyond his on-field performances, Miraz has also struggled to inspire confidence as a leader with a clear long-term plan. After Bangladesh wrapped up their recent three-match ODI series 2-1 against West Indies in Mirpur on Thursday, Miraz said that planning for a World Cup "should start two to three months in advance."

Even a novice would realise that such a short preparation window could spell

disaster.

A captain needs to trust his instincts, but questions remain about how the dressing room operates under his leadership. His decision-making with DRS, for instance, has been questioned several times.

"It's not fair to blame one person here. When a team is together, the coach, the captain, and everyone else are on the same page. If I take a decision, it might be wrong, but the coach supports me. And even if the coach takes a wrong decision, we all back him," Miraz said when asked about criticisms regarding Super Over decisions.

Does that mean every top-level decision is simply accepted? After the second ODI against West Indies, Soumya Sarkar revealed that it was a management call to opt for the slow, low, and dark Mirpur pitches used in the series. Miraz, meanwhile, insisted that any decision coming from the top is collectively supported. Whether that reflects healthy leadership remains debatable.

With players constantly rotating in and out of the side, struggling to find their footing, Bangladesh's ODI setup currently feels like treacherous quicksand – hardly the foundation for long-term growth, especially ahead of the 2027 ODI World Cup. In terms of setting the right tone for the team, a clear vision from the skipper still appears missing.



## NCL four-day competition gets underway today

The 27th edition of the National Cricket League's (NCL) four-day format will get underway today across three cities and four venues in the country. As in previous editions, a total of eight teams will feature in the 2025-26 season of the prestigious domestic first-class competition.

► Mymensingh Division are set to make their debut, replacing Dhaka Metro.

► Kookaburra balls will be used for the first two rounds to help the national Test cricketers prepare for the upcoming two-match Test series against Ireland, scheduled from November 11 to 23 in Sylhet and Mirpur, where Kookaburra balls will also be used. The remaining five rounds of the NCL, which will not feature the national Test cricketers, will revert to Duke balls, as in previous editions.

► Veteran Mushfiqur Rahim will represent reigning champions Sylhet Division this year. Mushfiqur was expected to play for Sylhet during the recently

concluded NCL T20, but due to personal commitments following the tournament's rescheduling caused by inclement weather, he withdrew from participation.

► The competition will run until December 9, with all matches streamed live on the BCB's YouTube channel.

► On paper, Barishal Division appear the least star-studded side, with no current national Test cricketers in their squad. The team will be led by white-ball left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam. A similar situation applies to Rangpur Division, who recently clinched back-to-back NCL T20 titles, though they have Litton Das, Shoriful Islam, and

Rishad Hossain listed as reserve players.

► Sylhet Division look the strongest on paper, with several national cricketers in their ranks. Sylhet will be boosted by the presence of Zakir Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Ebadot Hossain, and Khaled Ahmed, while Jaker Ali, Tanzim Sakib, and Nasum Ahmed are among their standbys.

► Even though NCL T20 saw an increase in players' match fees, the four-day version of the competition will not see a hike in this regard, remaining 80,000 BDT as in previous editions. However, the day allowance will see an increase of 500 BDT, similar to the T20 version.

## Topu, Gomez confident as Kings take on Al-Seeb

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings coach Mario Gomez and captain Topu Barman have expressed their confidence about making a positive start to their AFC Challenge League campaign when they take on Omani league winners Al-Seeb at the Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Stadium in Kuwait today.



The match will get underway at 10:00pm Bangladesh time.

The five-time Bangladesh league winners have failed to get past the group stage of the continental competition in all five of their previous continental competition attempts but hope to turn things around this time.

"We are playing with a wonderful team (Al-Seeb), also away. Our team is strong and we are ready for the win," Kings' Argentine coach Mario Gomez told a pre-match press conference on Friday.

Topu, echoing his coach's sentiment, said: "We have taken good preparation for this competition. We have been training together for a long time. For us, this [tournament] is very very important. We'll do our best. Especially, the first match is very very important for us and we'll go for a win tomorrow."

## Butler slams players' attitude after defeat to Thailand

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team coach Peter Butler expressed anger and disappointment over what he described as "a lack of respect and bad manners" from some of his players following a 3-0 defeat against Thailand in the first of two FIFA international friendlies on Friday.

The hosts took the lead within the opening minute and doubled their advantage five minutes into the second half before sealing victory with a third goal four minutes from time. Ranked 51 places above Bangladesh in the FIFA standings, Thailand dominated proceedings throughout the match, and if not for a number of saves from goalkeeper Rupna Chakma, the margin of defeat could have been bigger, according to a report from the Bangladesh Football Federation.

The game, played at a university ground in Bangkok, left Butler questioning the status and conditions of the fixture.

"I don't know whether we were playing a Tier 1 friendly because we played at a university in an environment where the lights weren't strong enough," Butler said in a video message shared by the BFF. "It didn't feel like a national team game. It felt more like a development fixture. We have to be careful when organising games like this and ensure everything is up to standard."



Butler made six substitutions in the second half, introducing Mosammat Sagorika for Tohura Khatun and Shaheda Akter Ripa for Munki Akter right after the break. Later, Sheuli Azim, Shamsunnahar Sr, Ritu Porna Chakma, and Afeida Khandaker were replaced by Joynob Bibi Rita, Nabiran Khatun, Halima Akter, and Sinha Jahan Shikha respectively.

Butler did not hold back in his post-match criticism, taking issue with what he perceived as poor attitude and discipline among some of his players.

"I think a few girls came with the wrong attitude, and I won't tolerate sloppiness," he said. "If people want to play for me and

represent the country, they can't come with an attitude that's not belittling of national team football."

The former West Ham United midfielder, who has banished several senior players following a boycott controversy, warned that he would take similar action again if necessary.

"If people want to come and test me, let them test me. It's happened before, and if it happens again, I'll stand firm. I will not tolerate a lack of respect and bad manners," Butler declared.

Bangladesh will play their second friendly against Thailand on Monday, where Butler will be looking for a stronger response from his players.



## Volleyball team on a roll

Bangladesh players celebrate during their 3-2 sets win against Sri Lanka in the CAVA Cup at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Bangladesh, who won their first two matches, took a 2-0 sets lead in the third match before the Lankans staged a fight-back with back-to-back sets wins. However, the hosts prevailed 15-11 in the decisive final set. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED