

JOURNEY TO A MILESTONE

A path carved through reverence

ASHFAQ UL-ALAM

What does it take to play a 100 Tests?

After sifting through the statements of the 83 players who have achieved this feat till now, a few common qualities stand out: hard work, grit, discipline, and a bit of luck.

But the one quality that doesn't get mentioned enough, but is arguably is of equal importance is reverence -- truly understanding the value of the format and the dedication it demands.

It's not because these players did not revere Tests, it's just that in the countries they represent, the five-day format is naturally seen above all others -- it's an accepted and practiced truth.

But in Bangladesh, things are a bit different. From its nascent stage, cricket in Bangladesh has mainly been a limited-overs affair. The system tried to integrate the longer format in late 90s when the country was already pushing for Test status -- not because it was eager to play Tests, but because it wanted the privileges that come with full status.

This lack of reverence is evident with how players were handed the Test cap almost at random at the naughties, getting tried out for a few matches before disappearing from the team forever.

During this period, a young 18-year-old boy, who looked 15, was given his debut at Lord's in 2005. He went out to bat at the hallowed ground with the top-order already blown to bits against a deadly English pace quartet.

From the looks of it, Bangladesh had just sent another player to the gallows, whose international career was set for an early execution.

But that player with small stature showed tremendous



heart, survived 56 deliveries and played a 19-run knock that was enough to make everyone realise that he was here to stay.

Over two decades have passed since then. That wide-eyed teenager is now a veteran international cricketer and just one Test away from becoming the first Bangladeshi to play 100 Test matches.

As a batter, he has only become better with time. In his first 50 Tests, he averaged a tad below 32 and in the 49 that have followed, his average has grown close to 45. Only four players in the world have scored more runs at a

higher average than him since 2017.

He has three double-centuries to his names -- two as a wicketkeeper, which is a world record --, has been part of numerous record stands and has led Bangladesh to their maiden Test wins over sides like England, Australia and Sri Lanka.

When trying to dissect what has been at the heart of his storied career, most have credited his discipline, dedication and hunger to get better.

But arguably Mushfiqur's secret has been on display this whole time -- his worn out cap.

Mushfiqur has carried on playing Tests with the same baggy green he was handed on debut.

Severely discoloured now, that cap symbolises his reverence for Test cricket -- a testament to the way he dedicated himself to the red-ball format with the devotion of an artist to his craft.

Mushfiqur has been the first Bangladeshi cricketer who has, in belief and practice, revered Tests as much as it warrants, and has created a blueprint of what it takes to play a 100 Tests from Bangladesh.

And now, the format is set to reward his dedication with a milestone that would forever place him alongside the greats of the game.



MUSHFIQUR IN TESTS	
Matches	99
Innings	182
Runs	6351
Average	38.02
50/100	27/12
Best score	219*



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED, AFP

A CENTURY OF TESTS IN STATS

Mushfiqur is set to become the first Bangladeshi to play a 100 Tests if he takes the field against Ireland in the second Test in Mirpur, starting Wednesday. He will be the 84th player overall to reach the feat in the world.

The time span between Mushfiqur's debut and 100th Test will be 20 years and 179 days -- the longest in history. This record earlier belonged to England's Graham Gooch, who took 17 years and 203 days to reach the landmark.

Mushfiqur debuted in Tests on May 26, 2005. Since then, 20 players have played 100 or more Tests and 12 of them have already retired from the game.

Bangladesh will have its first cricketer reaching the 100-Test mark after 25 years of its debut in Test cricket. This is the second-fastest timeline for a country to produce a 100-Test player, behind Sri Lanka, who achieved the feat in 24 years when Sanath Jayasuriya reached the milestone in 2005.

A perfect role model

MOHAMMAD ASHRAFUL

I was already a regular member of the Bangladesh team when Mushfiqur Rahim arrived on the scenes in 2005 in the England tour. He announced himself by scoring a hundred and a fifty in practice matches against County sides. He then debuted at Lord's as a specialist batter as Pilot bhai (Khaled Mashud) was still our wicketkeeper. But after the Test, he unfortunately twisted his ankle while coming down the stairs and had to return home.

From the very beginning, we all could see that he was a bright kid -- a talented cricketer who was also excellent in academics.

In 2007, he was going through a difficult phase and was dropped. He returned to domestic cricket, scored over 600 runs in DPL for BKSP and returned for the Sri Lanka tour, which was also my first tour as captain.

Pilot bhai and Mushfiqur were both in the Test squad. Pilot Bhai played the first Test, which we lost heavily. After the match, he told me, "Ashraful, if you feel you should rest me and play Mushfiqur, do it." He knew Mushfiqur was the better batter at that stage. So,



in the next Test, I brought him back. In the second innings, I scored 129 not out, and he scored 80. From that point on, he was settled in Test cricket.

Later, when Mushfiqur became captain, we again toured Sri Lanka in 2013. Before leaving, I told the journalists that if I score a hundred, I had a feeling I would convert it into a double hundred. I ended Day 3 of the Galle Test on 189 while Mushfiqur was on 152. I was dismissed for 190 the next day, but he went onto become Bangladesh's first double centurion.

Since 2013, Mushfiqur has shown that he belongs among the top batters in the world. What I admire most about him is his extraordinary discipline. From 2004 until today, he has lived the same structured life: asleep by 10:00pm, up for Fajr, and then straight to training after performing namaz.

This consistency has shaped his career. His achievements, combined with his discipline, has made him the perfect role model for all future Bangladesh cricketers. I consider myself lucky to share the dressing room with him during his 99th and 100th Tests.

**The writer is the specialised batting coach of the national team*

His legacy will inspire generations

CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA

As Mushfiqur Rahim walks out to play his 100th Test, Bangladesh cricket celebrates not just a milestone, but a man whose impact on our game goes far beyond statistics. I have had the privilege of coaching Mushfiqur in two different periods -- first from 2014 to 2017, and again from 2023 to 2024 -- and what remained constant was his unwavering professionalism, commitment, and leadership.

Mushfiqur is one of the most meticulous cricketers I have ever worked with. His preparation is world-class -- intentional, disciplined, and consistent every single day. Whether we were playing at home in Mirpur or away in foreign conditions, Mushfiqur never allowed standards to drop. He arrives early, studies conditions, and makes sure every session has purpose. For younger players, observing him is an education in what it means to be a true professional.

Beyond his technical skill and mental



resilience, what stands out most is his character. Mushfiqur is one of the most trustworthy and genuine leaders I've had in any team I have coached around the world. He sets the cultural tone. He leads through action, not words. When he speaks, players listen -- not because of seniority, but because they know his intentions are always for the team.

During my two stints as the Bangladesh head coach, a significant portion of our success can be traced back to his influence. His willingness to put in the hard work, to take responsibility

'MUSHFIQUR LEAVES NOTHING TO CHANCE'

When Mushfiqur Rahim debuted for Bangladesh back in 2005 at the age of 18, Dav Whatmore was the head coach of the Tigers. On the occasion of Mushfiqur's 100th Test, the 71-year-old former Australia batter talked to The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan and shared his observations about his illustrious career.

The Daily Star (DS): Mushfiqur started playing for Bangladesh during your tenure. Can you share some insights of that time?

Dav Whatmore (DW): He [Mushfiqur] was only a very young boy. We took a chance and gave him his debut at Lord's, but he earned it. He got a 100 the game [in a practice game] before and he showed he was the in-form batter and certainly didn't get to play other than by merit.

*Read the full interview on The Daily Star website.

FIRST TO 100 TESTS BY COUNTRY

ENGLAND
Colin Cowdrey
(1968 v Australia)

INDIA
Sunil Gavaskar
(1984 v Pakistan)

WEST INDIES
Clive Lloyd
(1984 v Australia)

AUSTRALIA
Allan Border
(1988 v West Indies)

PAKISTAN
Javed Miandad
(1989 v India)

SOUTH AFRICA
Gary Kirsten
(2004 v New Zealand)

SRI LANKA
Sanath Jayasuriya
(2005 v Bangladesh)

NEW ZEALAND
Stephen Fleming
(2006 v South Africa)