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SPORT

Tigers' spin dilemma in Mirpur

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head into today's crucial first Test against West Indies in Mirpur uncertain about the conditions they will encounter. Pace has been a strength for the Tigers in the current World Test Championship (WTC) cycle, but the visitors also boast a formidable pace attack for the two-match series.

Statistics, however, suggest that relying heavily on spin against stronger opposition at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium has rarely paid off for Bangladesh.

There has been speculation that the team management has requested a spin-friendly pitch in Mirpur. But after the venue recently produced more sporting surfaces, a shift towards a turning track would mean moving away from Bangladesh's pace strength while exposing their batters to the challenges posed by Mirpur's turners.

Bangladesh have played nine Tests in Mirpur over the past five years, six of them against top opposition. Since December 2021, they have hosted Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, New Zealand, South Africa and Pakistan again at the venue. Their only win in those six matches came against Pakistan this year, while the other five ended in defeats.

Bangladesh earned plaudits after that victory, particularly for the balance between pace and spin. Nahid Rana made the difference on the final day, with reverse swing from the old ball working in the Tigers' favour.

The pace attack had also developed well, aided by some assistance from the surface. The Mirpur pitch looked green in the days leading up to the match, but appeared more barren as the Test approached.

"I still think they're going to probably shave down some grass [from the wicket] or have a little more preparation," West Indies skipper Roston Chase said at Tuesday's



press conference.

"Obviously, with the amount of grass, you would think that it may be more spin-friendly, but looking at it, it still looks a bit dry underneath. And it's Bangladesh. Bangladesh is really known for mainly spin, so we think that it will get some spin also," he added.

Exactly how much turn the surface will offer remains to be seen. However, Bangladesh's recent record in Mirpur suggests that spin has often been a double-edged sword. Over the past five years, spinners have taken 80 wickets against Bangladesh at the venue, compared with 73 for pace bowlers.

In 2021, Bangladesh lost to Pakistan by an innings and eight runs despite nearly two days being lost to rain. Off-spinner Sajid Khan claimed 12 wickets across the two innings, including eight for 42.

A year later, Ravichandran Ashwin and Axar Patel combined to take nine wickets as India edged Bangladesh out on a surface that offered little assistance to the pacers.

In 2023, New Zealand's spin trio of Ajaz Patel, Mitchell Santner and Glenn Phillips dominated their Bangladesh counterparts, taking 17 wickets between them in the Mirpur Test. The home side's spin-heavy approach backfired badly.

With Bangladesh still harbouring hopes of reaching the WTC final, their pace resources offer a strong alternative. Captain Najmul Hossain Shanto indicated that the quicks were ready to deliver.

"Our pacers are very clear about what conditions they will play in, and preparation-wise, they are all in a good position. That's a positive, as I can pick them for any match," Shanto said when asked about the pace attack.

With West Indies also armed with a formidable pace unit, the surface could prove decisive. Whether Bangladesh stick to their strengths or put their faith in spin remains to be seen -- as does whether a turning track will work in their favour or backfire once again.



Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and West Indies captain Roston Chase pose with the trophy on the eve of the first of their two-Test series, which begins at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium today. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



HARRY NO WIZARD, but he broke the curse

TANVIR AHMED PRANTO

Harry Kane needed a moment to take it all in as his name was announced as the men's Ballon d'Or winner at the London Palladium yesterday. The England captain sat absorbing the moment, with Lamine Yamal and Rodri applauding beside him. After years of doubt, heartbreak and relentless pursuit, Kane had reached the summit of world football.

The boy Arsenal reportedly rejected as too 'chubby' was now the best footballer in the world.

Football has its wizards, the likes of Kylian Mbappe and Lamine Yamal, whose extraordinary talent marked them out for greatness from an early age. Kane's rise was different. There was no teenage explosion or overnight sensation, but a slower, harder journey shaped by setbacks and closed doors. For him, reaching the top took years, not spells.

Leyton Orient, Millwall, Norwich City and Leicester City offered no guarantees. At Norwich, opportunities were scarce before a foot injury stalled his progress. At Leicester, he was a substitute in the 2013 Championship play-off defeat to Watford.

"If I can't play for Norwich or for Leicester, even in the Championship, then how am I going to get back and play for Tottenham?" he later recalled thinking.

He returned to Spurs to become their record goalscorer, with 280 goals in 435 appearances, and England's all-time leading scorer with 91 international goals.

But one curse refused to loosen its grip.

For all the records and individual accolades, Kane's lack of major trophies became a punchline. At Tottenham, silverware remained elusive. With England, he endured the agony of losing European Championship finals in 2021 and 2024.

It was painful to watch him come so close, only to fall short. He had given the country so many reasons to believe, yet the biggest prizes remained out of reach.

His move to Bayern Munich in 2023 was supposed to change that. Instead, his first season in Germany ended without a trophy, prolonging a narrative that seemed almost impossible to escape.

Then came the breakthrough.

Kane began winning silverware with Bayern and took his performances to extraordinary heights. His 73 goals in 65 appearances for club and country in 2025-26 underlined his remarkable consistency. No longer just a ruthless finisher, he had become a complete forward, capable of creating chances, dictating play and making those around him better.

There was no teenage explosion or overnight sensation, but a slower, harder journey shaped by setbacks and closed doors. For Harry Kane, reaching the top took years, not spells.

The curse had finally been broken.

Yet the most revealing part of his coronation was his humility. There was no grandstanding or attempt to settle scores with his doubters. His acceptance speech reflected a player who understood the work behind the glory and the people who had helped him along the way.

Soon after the ceremony, he posted: "Work hard in silence. Let success make your noise."

He let his success do the talking, just as he always had.

For England supporters, his triumph feels personal. He has spent years carrying the nation's hopes, enduring its heartbreak and giving it reasons to believe again. In his own way, he has been a Wonderwall for those who followed him through the near-misses and disappointments.

Harry is no wizard. He never needed a magic wand. He needed patience, perseverance and an unshakeable belief in what he could become.

In 2017, it was a dream to be the best player in the world. Now, he is living it.

SAFF tickets ask too much of fans

SPORTS REPORTER

South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) expects Bangladeshi fans to pay Tk1,000 to watch two matches on a single day in the upcoming SAFF Championship. Its general secretary, Purushottam Kattel, has defended the price as Tk 500 per match. But who is getting that bargain? Supporters may only want to watch one fixture, while those seeking value must spend six to seven hours in the galleries.

The six-nation tournament begins on November 5, with two matches scheduled on each of four of the five match days.

"The ticket price has been decided and Tk 1,000 is for two matches [in a day]. So, it's like Tk 500 each and it's a day pass... we are assuming that it will be a full house," Kattel told reporters.

Bundling two fixtures does not make them equally attractive. SAFF's confidence in a "full house" rests on an assumption its day-pass model does little to justify.

For Bangladesh's three home matches in the 2025 AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) charged Tk 400 per match for gallery tickets. All three sold out within hours of online sales opening. Although the comparison is not exact, as the SAFF ticket covers two matches, those sell-outs showed that relatively affordable prices can draw strong demand.

Other seating categories have also become more expensive. Club houses, VIP boxes, red boxes, corporate boxes and the sky lounge cost between Tk 4,000 and Tk 12,000 for the SAFF Championship, compared with Tk



2,000 to Tk 5,000 during the Asian Cup Qualifiers. The Tk 12,000 sky lounge price raises questions, given that state minister for youth and sports Aminul Haque had instructed the National Sports Council and BFF to protect seats in the section allocated to sports journalists.

Kattel explained the high ticket prices to The Daily Star, citing inflation and rising operational costs, including high airfares.

Those costs are real. So is the squeeze on household budgets. If inflation makes staging the tournament more expensive, it also makes a Tk 1,000 day at the stadium harder for fans to justify.

BFF has distanced itself from the decision, saying it is providing logistical support and has no role in ticketing or other financial matters. "The entire event is owned, organised and hosted by SAFF. I would humbly ask you to refer the matter to the SAFF office," BFF president Tabith Awal told The Daily Star yesterday after Kattel announced the prices following the first coordination meeting with BFF officials.

Bangladesh-registered TSA Sports and Entertainment has secured the ticketing rights and will also handle the tournament's wider commercial and event operations. Tickets are expected to go on sale online through Tickify from Thursday.



Abhishek sets new benchmarks

An explosive 133-run partnership between Abhishek Sharma and Vaibhav Sooryavanshi powered India to a six-wicket win over New Zealand in Wellington on Tuesday, sealing the five-match T20I series with two games to spare. India chased down 199 in just 13.2 overs, with Abhishek smashing 113 off 38 balls and Sooryavanshi contributing 45 off 19.

- India smashed 118 runs in the Powerplay, setting a new T20I record.
- India reached 150 in just 7.4 overs, setting a new benchmark in T20s. The previous record was 8.2 overs, set by Sunrisers Hyderabad against Lucknow Super Giants in the 2024 IPL, with Abhishek also featuring.
- India plundered 26 runs in the first over, the most by a Full Member nation in a men's T20I.
- Three of Abhishek's four T20I centuries have come off fewer than 40 balls, a feat unmatched by any other batter.
- Abhishek smashed 11 sixes, reaching double figures in maximums for the third time in a T20I innings -- the most by a batter from a Full Member nation. Chris Gayle achieved the feat twice.
- India chased down the 199-run target with 40 balls to spare, setting a record for the fastest chase of a target above 190 by a Full Member team.

WHAT TO WATCH

T Sports, Nagorik TV
Bangladesh vs West Indies
1st Test, Day 1
Live from 9:30 am

T Sports
NCL GT20
Vancouver vs Brampton
Live from 8:00 pm

Star Sports Network
Nepal Premier League
Pokhara vs Sudurpaschim
Live from 5:30 pm