

Takeaway from home delivery

India's latest innings victory demonstrates they're making the rest of the Test cricket world play catch-up with them at home

SANDEEP DWIVEDI
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THE MOST intense contest on Saturday at the Holkar Stadium was the thrilling chase between a bunch of hefty security men and a bald-headed semi-streaker. It was the slow reaction time of the men in uniform that saw the fence-jumping, shirtless fan just about win the race to sneak into the Indian huddle and touch Virat Kohli's feet.

Meanwhile, as for the feature event, the India-Bangladesh Test, it was more of a one-sided exhibition tie that toggled seamlessly between India's overwhelming superiority and Bangladesh's overweening. The Saturday crowd of 16,000 raised the proverbial roof when wickets fell and mocked the visitors when they looked technically inept to play the longest, and the most difficult, format of the game.

Virat Kohli & Co.'s 130 run-win — their third straight innings victory and a record sixth consecutive Test match triumph at home — was further evidence that the cricket-watching experience of fans during home Tests has well and truly been changed. These days there's no tumult, no anxiety, no anguish, or even euphoria over the fall of the final wicket.

For those following the World No.1 Test side at home, it's just a wait for the eventual victory when Kohli takes the victory lap. This change is a tribute to the team that has kept complacency far from the dressing room. As the team's batting coach Vikram Rathour said after the win: "It's the team culture, it's not about batting or bowling. The team wants to be the No.1 team in the world. That's why you see the hunger."

The fat lady no longer bothers to turn up at stadiums for India games. She stays put at home, mourning her irrelevance. At Indore, all the singing was done by the fans for Kohli and his fast bowlers. The wait didn't last long. On a sporting pitch, Kohli's team finished the Test in three days.

First, a few numbers to highlight the disparity between the two teams. The grand total of Bangladesh's first-innings score and runs scored by their top order in the second — 150 and 72/5 — happens to be less than Mayank Agarwal's 243. Four of their bowlers bowled 89 overs between them for just 2 wickets. In their first innings, four Bangladesh bowlers — Ebadat Hossain, Abu Jayed, Taijul Islam and Mehidy Hasan Miraz — went for over 100 runs each. For India on Day 1, the three quicks — Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav, Mohammad Shami — conceded only 94 runs between them.

Beyond these depressing numbers there was more darkness looming on Bangladesh's Test horizon. The visiting openers couldn't play the moving ball, their middle-order didn't have the patience to grind out and at least one tailender backed off towards the square-leg umpire when facing the quicks.

Openers Shadman Islam and Imrul Kayes weren't equipped to deal with the new red ball, and inspired little confidence as to how they would fare against the pink ball in less than a week's time. They didn't quite cover the line and try to read the swing or seam movement. Ishant's consistent off-stump line and the away movement was way too much to handle for the men more used to playing in coloured clothing and facing the white ball.

M-barrasment

The three Ms — Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah — did show shades of Test match temperament, but they don't have it in them to be the team's mainstay. In the absence of the main batting stars — Tamim and Shakib — they were pushed into the limelight, but they were found wanting. Mushfiqur's 150-ball 64 in the second innings can qualify to be called good only when there's no Shakib hundred in the scoreboard. In Indore, all that the diminutive batsmen, who famously squan-



ONLY ONE TEAM IS PLAYING

Opener Imrul Keyes has his stump uprooted by an Umesh Yadav delivery on Day 3 in Indore on Saturday. India won the first Test with over two days to spare. **BCCI**

3 It was just the third time in the history of the game that a team has won three successive Tests by an innings and 100-plus-run margin. Australia achieved it in 1931. Pakistan accomplished the feat in 2001.

6 It was India's 6th successive Test win. It's the country's longest winning streak and managed just once before, under MS Dhoni. Kohli also became the joint-fifth successful Test captain (tied with Allan Border).

10 Kohli also eclipsed his predecessor MS Dhoni as the Indian skipper with the most innings wins under his belt. India have inflicted four innings defeats in 10 meetings against Bangladesh.

71 71.3 is Ravindra Jadeja's batting average this year—in nine innings, he has collected 428 runs including five half-centuries. Four of those innings and 156 runs were scored outside Asia.

Rather than us (support staff) pushing them, they push us. Somebody like Mayank, after scoring so many runs, is still coming and asking what better he can do, what are the areas he can improve upon. That's a great character to have. And that's not one guy, everyone in the team is like that."

VIKRAM RATHOUR
INDIA'S BATTING COACH

dered a famous T20 chase against India three years ago, got was sympathy.

The worst advertisement of Bangladesh cricket was the sight of the tailenders at the crease. In an era when teams bat deep, the visiting bowlers were backing off towards the square leg umpire when facing Umesh Yadav and Mohammed Shami. Aware of Umesh's consistency with his toe-crushers, they hopped around on the crease even before the ball was released.

It was the kind of humiliating loss that can trigger several drastic thoughts in the losing side's dressing room. Seniors start thinking about retirement and juniors get riddled with self-doubts. With an easier and shorter format as a very viable option, these Test misfits might be tempted to embrace the high-paying T20 franchise model.

Bangladesh's new coach Russell

Domingo has a task at hand. He needs to motivate his defeated side. He has spoken about phasing out the seniors and also following the Indian model. "Bangladesh needs to do so by trying to develop fast bowlers, prepare wickets that help fast bowlers. India no longer rely on spinners. They will prepare good wickets and back their fast bowlers to do the business," Domingo said.

Bangladesh's falling Test standard isn't just a problem for coach Domingo or the Bangladesh cricket officials who are still reeling after the latest corruption scandal involving their biggest star. Even for the International Cricket Council (ICC), which is banking on the ongoing World Test Championship to monetise Test cricket, the three-day India-Bangladesh finish could be a cause of concern. India with 300 points, and 6 wins from as many games, is at the top of the table while Bangladesh is yet to open its account. New Zealand is in the second spot, trailing by 240 points.

The Test Championship has certainly given context to Test cricket. But one-sided three-day games are a spoiler. Indore filled the stadium on Saturday and cheered India all day long. On Sunday, they would have turned up again, but Bangladesh's Test match incompetence killed the contest.

Minus the magical intensity, edge-of-the-seat drama, riveting suspense that even makes the neutrals excited, sport loses its essence. India can't be blamed for it, the world needs to raise the bar.

Focus is on lifting the standard in each game: India captain

INDIA THRASHED Bangladesh inside three days in the opening test to inch closer to their 12th successive home series victory but skipper Virat Kohli is only interested in maintaining high standards and not in flattering numbers.

Table-topping India have now won all six tests since the World Test Championship kicked in, including a 3-0 whitewash against South Africa last month to record their 11th consecutive test series victory at home. India hardly broke a sweat as they triumphed by an innings and 130 runs to get 1-0 up in the two-test series which culminated with a day-night test in Kolkata from Nov. 22.

Saturday's win was also the 10th innings victory under Kohli, the most by any Indian captain. Asked if his team could dominate the game like Australia did in recent past, Kohli said: "The numbers and the records are there for everyone to see, that remains in the books. We haven't really focused on it. Our focus has been on taking Indian cricket higher and higher, to keep the standards up and motivate the next lot of players to come and do the same. The motivation has been right, the intent has been right, we just have to push in that direction. We don't care about numbers at all"

Kohli was visibly encouraging his teammates on Friday. Dismissed for a second-ball

duck, the home captain was seen gesturing from the dressing room to opener Mayank Agarwal to first push for a double century and then a triple hundred. "I know how much time it took me to get those big hundreds. I know the importance of getting big runs," said the batting stalwart. "It's important as a senior batter to let them know that 'you need to focus, they need to keep going'. I want the guys to not make the mistakes that I made as a youngster, and learn quickly so they can be a world-class player very soon."

Mominul Haque began his tenure as Bangladesh test captain with a resounding defeat and the task would only get tougher in the pink-ball test in Kolkata.

Apart from winning the toss, hardly anything went right for Bangladesh, who could not bowl out India in their only innings and managed totals of 150 and 213 at the Holkar Cricket Stadium.

The 28-year-old found positives in Abu Jayed's lion-hearted bowling effort and Mushfiqur Rahim's fighting knocks in both innings. "We take quite a few positives, especially the bowling of Abu Jayed who picked four wickets. In batting, Mushfiqur was superb with the bat in both innings. Liton Das did well too," he said. **REUTERS**

SCORECARD >>

Ind vs Ban

1st Test | Indore | Toss: B'desh

B'DESH 1ST INNG 150 IN 58.3 OV

IND 1ST INNG 493/6D IN 114 OV

M Agarwal c Jayed b Miraz	243
(330b, 28x4, 8x6)	
R Sharma c Liton b Jayed	6 (14b, 1x4)
C Pujara c sub (Sai) b Jayed	54 (72b, 9x4)
V Kohli lbw b Jayed	0 (2b)
A Rahane c T Islam b Jayed	86 (172b, 9x4)
R Jadeja not out	60 (76b, 6x4, 2x6)
W Saha b Ebadat	12 (11b, 2x4)
U Yadav not out	25 (10b, 1x4, 3x6)

- Extras: (lb 1, nb 3, w 3) 7
- Fall of wickets: 1-14 (Rohit, 7.2 ov), 2-105 (Pujara, 29.5 ov), 3-119 (Kohli, 31.5 ov), 4-309 (Rahane, 85.4 ov), 5-432 (Agarwal, 107.3 ov), 6-454 (Saha, 110.5 ov)

■ Bowling:	
Ebadat Hossain	31-5-115-1
Abu Jayed	25-3-108-4
Taijul Islam	28-4-120-0
Mehidy Hasan Miraz	27-0-125-1
Mahmudullah	3-0-24-0

B'DESH 2ND INNG 213 IN 58.3 OV

S Islam b I Sharma	6 (24b, 0x4)
I Kayes b Yadav	6 (13b, 1x4)
M Haque lbw b Shami	7 (20b, 6x4)
Mohd Mithun c Agarwal b Shami	18
(26b, 4x4)	
M Rahim c Pujara b Ashwin	64
(150b, 7x4)	

Mahmudullah c R Sharma b Shami **15**

L Das c & b Ashwin	35 (39b, 6x4)
MH Miraz b Yadav	38 (55b, 5x4, 1x6)
T Islam c f Saha b Shami	6 (43b, 1x4)
A Jayed not out	4 (9b, 1x4)
E Hossain c Yadav b Ashwin	1 (3)

- Extras: (b 2, lb 9, nb 1, w 1) 13
- Fall of wickets: 1-10 (Imrul Kayes, 5.1 ov), 2-16 (Shadman Islam, 6.6 ov), 3-37 (Mominul Haque, 12.5 ov), 4-44 (Mohammad Mithun, 14.1 ov), 5-72 (Mahmudullah, 26.3 ov), 6-135 (Liton Das, 39.2 ov), 7-194 (Mehidy Hasan, 54.5 ov), 8-208 (Taijul Islam, 66.3 ov), 9-208 (Mushfiqur Rahim, 67.5 ov), 10-213 (Ebadot Hossain, 69.2 ov)

■ Bowling:	
Ishant Sharma	11-3-31-1
Umesh Yadav	14-1-51-2
Mohd Shami	16-7-31-4
Ravindra Jadeja	14-2-47-0
Ravichandran Ashwin	14.2-6-42-2



A spectator intruded the pitch on Day 3 and hugged Virat Kohli.

Kohli's dream pace pack keeps getting wilier and craftier

SRIRAM VEERA
INDORE, NOVEMBER 16

VIRAT KOHLI ran out from the slip cordon to Ishant Sharma with a suggestion. Until then, Ishant was providing the person entrusted with highlights package with eye-popping visuals of balls curving away sensationally from the stumps, away from the left-handed openers. Aesthetically appealing stuff from round the stumps but the wickets column wasn't populated. Kohli gestured him to bowl straighter at the stumps, and even signalled for the ball coming in with the angle and mimicked a left-hander's prod. Until then, the curlers weren't forcing the batsmen to play; bereft of the surprise nip-backer, they were letting everything go. The occasional ones that landed on the middle and off were still curving away and were pushed out to the off-side without much fuss.

The ball that comes in from around the stumps—with the angle that triggers some doubts in batsmen about not just that particular delivery but the subsequent away-benders—wasn't a left-of-the-field suggestion but it was something Ishant wasn't comfortable doing. Ishant nodded at Kohli and walked back briskly — a trait he picked in the county last year where his team's coach Jason Gillespie felt Ishant's slow trudge was stifling the game and hurting his momentum.

It turns out that Ishant had been working on that in-with-the-angle delivery with bowling coach Bharat Arun on Friday. "It's something he started to do yesterday,"

Arun would say later. But probably the confidence to try out in the middle wasn't there or perhaps he wanted to wait a little longer—whatever may have been the reason, he course-corrected after the chat with Kohli.

The result came not too far after that. A surprised Shadman Islam, unsure of its destination, stabbed hurriedly at a delivery that tilted into the bat-pad gap and clattered the stumps. "I'm 31, bowling is taking a toll on my body but I am enjoying trying out different variations," Ishant said later.

Ever-evolving attack

It's in these little things that this Indian attack continues to evolve. Take Umesh Yadav for example. Last year, when he was out of the Test team and mopping around in domestic cricket, he was a bit down. Understandably so, of course. The fastest Indian bowler reduced to a home-conditions bowler. He has reverse swing and the pace to hurry the batsmen in slower spin-friendly Indian tracks but abroad the more skillful seamers were ahead.

So what does he do? He gets more control over the outswinging curler and makes it more venomous. It's a perfect gut-buster for the left-handed batsmen, who now can't push their front foot too far across to tackle the away-slanting deliveries that Umesh bowls a lot to them. Harried by packed slip cordon, Imrul Keyes was worried by the ones that shaped away with the angle and wanted to get closer to the ball. Mistake. The moment he chose to press his front foot across was also the moment that Umesh chose to rip out the incoming curler. Boom. It crashed



Mohammed Shami took seven wickets in the match.

through the defences to leave a red stain on the stumps. No wonder it was Umesh's "character" that stood out for Arun in this latest comeback.

Mohammed Shami has to be the most improved fast bowler in the world in the last couple of years. Barring Zaheer Khan, and probably Ishant Sharma to an extent, India's pace bowlers have tended to wither as years rolled on. Shami, however, has

gone to a different zone. Fitter and hence pacier through the day, he has developed immense control over his art. In Arun's estimation, "Shami has the best seam presentation in world cricket these days". And who can argue with that?

How many other pacers can skid the ball and also produce the 'heavy ball' that kicks up from back-of-length and hits the bat rather than the other way around? Skidder

and hustler — double jeopardy that batsmen have struggled to handle. He skidded one from around the stumps to trap the Bangladesh captain Mominul Haque, easily the batsman who looked most compact and aware of his off-stump. So after testing out his GPS reading of the off-stump and finding it pretty good, Shami switched tracks, went round the stumps and skidded one in to trap his man.

Shami then produced the heavy ball and Mohammed Mithun, who was in an aggressive mood, having hit 4 fours, went for the pull but found the ball had not only climbed more than he thought but had arrived much quicker than he anticipated. The ball lobbed up to short midwicket where Mayank Agarwal pounced it. It was a good surprise option considering that until then Shami was trying to nail him lbw with the skidders like he had done him in the first innings. When that didn't work, he effortlessly changed his options. "The more we get tired, the better fun we have, we push each other, and enjoy each other's success," Shami said about his pace colleagues.

No Bumrah, no matter

Such has been the searing bowling attack that India have achieved a hat-trick of innings wins without the help of Jasprit Bumrah and Bhuvneshwar Kumar.

"It looks like a different pitch when they (Indian fast bowlers) bowl. Right now Jasprit is not a part of the attack, when he comes back, it will be one heck of an attack to counter, a dream bowling combination for any skipper," Kohli said.

So much so that a question was shot at