

Perseverance was the key to success says Mahela

by Rex Clementine

The Sri Lankan cricket team's perseverance during demanding situations throughout the three Test series against India went a long way in enabling them to win the series 2-1. Sri Lanka's captain Mahela Jayawardene told journalists yesterday. The series that was expected to be a close contest was completely dominated by the hosts as they handed India their third worst Test defeat by an innings and 239 runs at the SSC and then sealed the series by winning the decider by eight wickets. India had squared the series earlier by winning the second Test in Galle by 170 runs.

"It was a very hard series. We showed a lot of character after the Galle Test. We kept the standards high and kept pushing and never gave up. I thought the difference was that. Whenever we were in a tough situation we needed someone to do the job and someone put up the hand and did it for us. That's the most pleasing thing," the Sri Lankan captain who led by example scoring the most runs in the series for his side (279 in six innings at 69.75) said.

"I am very satisfied. The credit should go to the bowling unit. At the beginning of the series, we knew what a tough challenge it was going to be. I said that numbers can be there, but you needed to work hard. But I thought the bowlers did a fantastic job."

A deciding factor in the series was the ability of the Sri Lankan bowlers to keep India's formidable middle order quiet. Known as the fabulous four, Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly and V.V.S. Laxman managed just three fifties among the four of them in 24 innings. Tendulkar and Ganguly weren't able to score a single half-century and managed less than 100 runs each in the series. Jayawardene admitted that their failure to contribute with big scores went a long way in sealing the series in Sri Lanka.



The power of our youth Ajantha Mendis



Lanka's favour:

"We knew Sachin was a big factor in their line up. They bank a lot on him. Then they have guys like Rahul and Sourav and we knew that we had to target them as their nucleus were there. Those three guys are the ones who can play big knocks and take a game away from you."

"We had a lot of discussions on how to do that and we attacked from day one and executed the game plan well. That made the difference. When you need to beat a team like this, you have to identify individuals and target them; I think we did that pretty well," the Sri Lankan captain added.

Mystery spinner Ajantha Mendis came into the series with little exposure, but did enough to create worries in the Indian minds after his match winning spell in the Asia Cup final. He had a ball picking up 26 wickets in three Tests at 18.38 and while breaking many records, created a World Record as well when he overtook Sir Alec Bedser's record for most number of wickets in a three-Test series that had stood since 1946.

"Ajantha is very quiet and it's very difficult to get anything out of him. The only time he's very bubbly is when you ask him to come and bowl. I think he has fitted into the dressing room very well. He has blended nicely with everyone and is a quiet sort of bloke. He's got a very good role model in Murali, who is very humble in all his achievements. If he can follow him, Sri Lanka cricket is in good hands," Jayawardene said shedding light on the mystery man who was Man of the Match in the series.

All three Tests ended inside four days and Jayawardene was asked whether the referrals system that was in place had been a contributory factor for the early finishes. He admitted that it had played a part, but was quick to add that the quality of the bowling of both sides had forced an early end more than anything else.

"Referrals probably played a part. There were lot of quality cricketers in both these sides. I think the bowlers controlled the series. You should put it down to that," he said.

Kumble says Mendis no mystery, but a fine bowler

by Rex Clementine

Following a disappointing Test tour of Sri Lanka, Indian captain Anil Kumble expressing his thoughts said his side didn't deserve to win, but heaped praise on Sri Lankan spinner Ajantha Mendis, who picked up almost half of the Indian wickets in the three Test series.

The Indian batsmen struggled to pick the Sri Lankan debutant and their failure was attributed to the subtle variations the bowler possessed. Mendis was called a 'mystery spinner', but Kumble felt that more than any mystery, Mendis had the quality to trouble world class batsmen and he stood between victory and defeat.

"I felt that Mendis made the difference. Picking up 26 wickets is no mean achievement for any bowler. When Murali and Mendis operate in tandem, it's not easy to score runs and we kept losing wickets. The pressure created by the two of them was massive," the leg-spinner who finished the series with just eight wicket at 50.00 said.

Understandably, he blamed India's batting for the poor show. While India's openers provided them with good starts consistently, the entire middle order failed to back up the openers' efforts.

"The batsmen didn't put up a good show here and that cost us the series. There wasn't any consistency from the batsmen at all. We won the toss here. It was very good wicket. We got to a good start too, but didn't capitalize. People got starts, but didn't go to get big scores. For a new batter to go in and face two spinners is not easy. People who got starts should have gone on to get big ones. But having said that, I am not here to give any excuses.

Although Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene had given thumbs up for the referral system that was in place during the series, Kumble wasn't sure whether it was good to use technology for leg before wicket decisions.

"There are few things that we need to assess. Television technology is not 100 percent accurate. We need to have some improvements. You don't know

whether the ball tracking is 100 percent accurate and whether television gives you the proper decisions on the height and other things. If that's the case, there's no point in going to the third umpire. I am sure people will sit down and have a discussion."

Sri Lankan bowler Ajantha Mendis holds the man of the series trophy presented to him after his team won the third and final Test cricket match against India in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Monday, Aug. 11, 2008. (AP Photo/Eranga Jayawardena)



Brazilian Vieira smashes Sri Lankan dreams

Anuruddha Ratnayake suffered a 13 points to 3 defeat at the hands of Brazilian Robenilson Vieira in his first bout of the 51 kg flyweight category Boxing Championship at the Beijing Olympics at the Worker's Gymnasium Beijing yesterday.

Ratnayake collected a point each in the last three rounds but couldn't amend for the early lead taken by the Brazilian whose quick jabs proved too strong for the Sri Lankan.

Robenilson having the advantage of height took the lead in the first round collecting two vital points against Ratnayake who was left pointless.

In the second round, the Brazilian improved by four points against Ratnayake's single point.

In the third round, too, Robenilson scored three more points against Ratnayake's one.

However, Ratnayake showed aggression in the last round attacking the formidable opponent who opted for a defensive strategy having gained advantage in the first three rounds. Anyway, the Brazilian managed to collect four more points to record a 13-3 victory over Ratnayake.



Anuruddha Bandara Ratnayake, right, of Sri Lanka fights Robenilson Vieira of Brazil during a men's flyweight 51 kg preliminary boxing match at the Beijing 2008 Olympics in Beijing, Tuesday, Aug. 12, 2008. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer)

Malinda included in ODI squad

Sri Lanka's selectors named opening batsman Malinda Warnapura (29) in their One-Day squad for the five match ODIs that begin in Dambulla next week. Warnapura, had a consistent Test series scoring 243 runs in five innings at an average of 60.75 with a hundred and two fifties and was expected to be a part of the Sri Lankan ODI outfit.



Malinda Warnapura

Pakistan in Abu Dhabi last year.

Veteran Sanath Jayasuriya also returns to the side along with fast bowler Dilhara Fernando and middle order batsman Jehan Mubarak.

There was no place for Thilana Samaraweera (32), who topped the averages in the Test series and exhibited an aggressive

Test veteran lacked since he made his debut eight years ago against India.

Sri Lanka squad

Mahela Jayawardene (Captain), Kumar Sangakkara, Sanath Jayasuriya, Mahela Udawatte, Chamara Silva, Chamara Kapugedara, Tillekeratne Dilshan, Chaminda Vaas, Muttiah Muralitharan, Dilhara Fernando, Ajantha Mendis, Thilina Tushara Miranda, Nuwan Kulasekara, Jehan Mubarak and Malinda Warnapura.

(RC)