

Ranji Trophy: Shardul Thakur adds to his tally, now Bengal suffer



Ranji Trophy: Shardul Thakur's 5/37 was his third five-wicket haul in as many games. (Source: Express Photo by Partha Paul)

As Shardul Thakur came roaring in at Eden Gardens on Monday, the pitch, which had looked so benign during Mumbai's innings, suddenly appeared unplayable. The batters, save Manoj Tiwary, came and went.

Six wickets fell for 130 runs when bad light ended the day's proceedings. Thakur had five of them. Thanks to his efforts, Mumbai are in the driver's seat as Bengal need another 135

runs to avoid follow on.

Opener Arindam Das hung his bat loosely to a Thakur outswinger and was gobbled up at second slip by Suryakumar Yadav. Rohan Banerjee was deceived by a slower one and was caught at cover by Shreyas Iyer.

Sreevats Goswami offered a thin edge to Akhil Herwadkar at first slip, Tiwary got a beauty and was caught behind by Aditya Tare, and Laxmi Ratan Shukla was cleaned up by a delivery that held its line. **Thakur had another five-for — his third on the trot.**

Wilkin Mota took in-form Sudip Chatterjee's wicket, catching him plumb in front with a sharp in-cutter, **but Mumbai's bowling on Day Two of this Group A Ranji Trophy fixture was all about Thakur. At stumps his figures read 16-3-37-5. His overall tally, 23 and counting.**

In the absence of Dhawal Kulkarni and Zaheer Khan, responsibility has been thrust upon Thakur. The 23-year-old is revelling in it. It was very different two seasons back, when Thakur made his Ranji debut against Rajasthan and struggled badly. He managed just one wicket for 82 runs in the only innings he bowled. Still he had been persisted with for a period, but Thakur was finding it difficult to get into the groove at this level. It is now that he has started to make his presence felt.

Unlike his idol Dale Steyn, Thakur bowls medium pace. But he moved the ball both ways and offered very little leeway. Almost every ball was pitched on the corridor. And when he bowled short, it was to set up a batsman. Tiwary's wicket was the best of the lot. Thakur bowled a few bouncers to the Bengal batsman and then came up with a fuller one that pitched on the off stump and moved late. Tiwary nicked it.

Tiwary returned to the pavilion as a tragic hero. He had been batting beautifully till then.

Bengal had lost their second wicket, with only nine runs on the board, when he came to the crease. A couple of rasping cover drives and a flick off Mota followed. Three boundaries on the trot — he was warming up nicely.

Tiwary loves to score big against Mumbai and today he was playing a special innings. Fifty was reached with immaculate ease and he looked set for a lot more. A special delivery needed to get him out and Thakur produced it.

At the end of the day's play, Tiwary, however, alleged there was movement in front of the sightscreen which affected his concentration.

Earlier, resuming at the overnight 306 for 4, Mumbai were all out for 414 in their first innings. Ashok Dinda bowled a fantastic spell to start with and created pressure on the opposition. His partners reaped the benefits. Yadav got out caught behind, attempting a wild swish way outside the off stump.

Debutant Sarfaraz Khan was beaten for pace by a Dinda inswinger and the lower middle-order fell cheaply.

But Siddhesh Lad stood firm at one end and added 43 runs with Kshemal Waingankar for the last wicket to take his team past the 400-run mark.

Brief scores: Mumbai 414 all out in 121.2 overs (S Lad 64; LR Shukla 3/58, VP Singh 3/114). Bengal 130/6 in 46 overs (M Tiwary 63; **ShardulThakur 5/37**).