



## No real options in the middle

SPORTS REPORTER



Soon after the 15-member squad for the recently concluded three-match T20I series against Pakistan was announced, questions were raised about the batting combination as the squad included as many as six batsmen who have opened either in the international or domestic circuit.

While Tamim Iqbal has established himself as the anchor at the top, the roles of the other batters remained unspecified as the Tigers' horrendous batting display saw them being humiliated and lose the series 2-0 with the final game being washed out due to rain.

Even after a decent start by the openers in the first game, the Tigers were only able to manage a modest 141 for five. Liton Das and Afif Hossain, who lit up the BBPL

resulting in Mahmudullah and others having to bat even lower. However, the condition worsened as this time Tigers were restricted to 136 for six with Liton, Afif and Soumya all failing to deliver at positions unfamiliar to them.

But could the team management be actually blamed for putting all these top-order players in new positions? If looked at closely, the answer only reveals how unfortunate and helpless the management is while trying to tackle batting order problems. These aforementioned players were the ones who had impressed in the recently concluded Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League, but none of the locals had impressed while batting lower down the order.

Mushfiqur Rahim opted out of the Pakistan tour due to security concerns while another stalwart, Shakib Al Hasan,



The Bangladesh U-21 hockey team players train at the Maulana Bhashani Stadium yesterday in preparation for the Bangabandhu Junior Asia Cup. The 10-team meet will commence from June 4. PHOTO: STAR



The opening pair of Liton Das and Afif Hossain (L), who lit up the BBPL with amazing performances at the top for Rajshahi Royals, were found wanting in the recently concluded Pakistan tour. PHOTO: STAR FILE

while opening for Rajshahi Royals, did not contribute much after coming to bat at three and five respectively.

Mahmudullah, who usually comes down the order, hit an unbeaten 14-ball 19 at number four while Soumya Sarkar could only manage a five-ball seven playing in the lower order.

A batting change was in the cards for the second game but the only thing that was altered was the inclusion of Mahedi Hasan, who replaced Mohammad Mithun, in the number three position instead of Liton,

has been banned for a year by the ICC.

The void left by Shakib and especially Mushfiqur, who has been the main source of quick runs in the middle order for the Tigers in both T20Is and ODIs, could not be filled with the sudden inclusion of players like Liton, Afif or Soumya in new positions.

While it is also unreasonable to hope that any of these aforementioned players would rise to the occasion and shine in an alien position, the sad reality for the country's cricket is that there are no other options at hand for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) at the moment.

## Shadman in doubt for first Test

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh opener Shadman Islam is doubtful for the first Test of the upcoming two-match series against Pakistan, which will take place in Rawalpindi from February 7, as the left-hander is nursing a wrist injury.

Shadman took an injection on Monday and has been advised a week's rest for a week. The 24-year-old has been struggling with the injury sustained a few months back while playing for Bangladesh Cricket Board XI in the Dr (Capt) K. Thimmappiah Memorial tournament in Bangalore.

The cricketer had to return home early after playing only two matches in



the tournament but he did play in the two-match Test series in India, during which the injury flared up again.

Shadman was also not picked in the upcoming Bangladesh Cricket League's players' draft due to the injury.

"We asked Shadman not to play in the BCL as he has been suffering from a wrist injury for quite some time. He took the injection on Monday, and we advised him to rest a week and due to his current state, we also informed the authorities not to consider him for the first-round match of BCL.

"After two to three days, we will assess his condition again. We can decide whether he will be available for the Pakistan Test after observing his condition a few days later, as this is an old injury. The pain worsens when he tries to bat. Such an injury is manageable for shorter matches, but it gets tough when someone plays in longer format matches," BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told reporters yesterday.

## India U-19s first to semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions India Under-19s became the first team to make their way through to the semifinals of the ongoing ICC Under-19 World Cup, following their 74-run victory against their Australian counterparts in the first Super League quarterfinal at the Senwes Park in Potchefstroom yesterday.

India piled up 233 for nine, courtesy of fifties from opener Yashasvi Jaiswal and Atharva Ankekar down the order. Jaiswal's 82-ball 62 and Atharva's unbeaten 54-ball 55 helped India reach a competitive total.

After the exchange, Kartik Tyagi dismantled the Australian top order and finished with impressive figures of four for 24 in eight overs as Australia were bowled out for 159 in 43.3 overs despite a resilient 127-ball 75 by Sam Fanning.

## Women's league to start among questions

SPORTS REPORTER



After emerging as group champions in 2016 in the qualifying stage to advance into the AFC U-16 Women's Championship, the Bangladesh women's team have been dominating discussions through attractive performances on the ground.

The Bangladesh women's football team, especially the U-15 and U-16 sides, kept up their brilliance to become champions in the SAFF U-15 Championship and again qualified for the AFC U-16 Women's Championship, overcoming two barriers in the qualifying stage.

Those girls, who later featured in the U-18 team, continued to perform well and became champions in the SAFF U-18 Championship and drew more attention than any national men's team.

But those girls faced stiff challenges beyond the subcontinent and had to contend with well-established teams in the AFC U-16 and U-19 Women's Championships. In addition, the Bangladesh team -- comprising players from U-16 and U-19 levels along with a couple of senior players -- were also helpless against India and Nepal in the 2019 SAFF Women's Championship.

Following their disappointment in higher-level competitions, long-standing demands from all corners to revive the women's football league were heard. The girls needed a platform to mature and gain in experience and competitive matches in the domestic circuit would provide that because the women took part mostly in international tournaments on the back of only training and playing matches with each other.

It is also believed the revival of the women's football league would assist the girls financially and less would drop out of football to get married early. It would also keep them sharp

through the domestic league and they could carry on with their performances at the international level.

Finally, after a year-long discussion, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) revived the women's football league, which is scheduled to get underway from January 31.

Six unknown quantities will join Bashundhara Kings -- who signed 19 national players -- and FC Uttar Bango -- who roped in four national players -- will participate in the tournament.

The remaining teams have formed their squads with local girls who generally represent their respective

Anuching Mogini, Anai Mogini, Ritu Pomo Chakma, Sajeda and others were not getting opportunities to play the domestic league.

"I don't think reviving the women's football league will serve its purpose if all 56 players, who are the best players in the country and fit for matches, are not getting the chance to play," Choton said, adding that he was confident no team pose offer a challenge to Bashundhara Kings.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said they had invited all clubs and DFAs to take part in the women's league but they did not get a positive



PHOTO: STAR FILE

districts in the JFA Cup U-16 tournament and the Bangamata Primary School tournament. This sadly meant that most of the players who have actively been in training camps under BFF supervision were ignored.

"Of the 56 players that were under BFF training round the year, 19 will play for Bashundhara Kings and four more will take part for FC Uttar Bango. They will get financial help from their respective clubs," said national team head coach Golam Rabbani Choton.

He also informed that the best players like Marzia, Shamsunnahar Jr,

response. "We have to start somewhere. Let's see what happens in the future. Well-known clubs may participate in the future and that will strengthen the league. We also have plans to hold another league next September," Shohag said.

However, some club officials, seeking anonymity, said that the timing of the women's football league was a big hindrance to them, claiming they were running men's football camps for the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League and could not run two camps at a time.

## Broad fined

AFP, Johannesburg

England fast bowler Stuart Broad has been fined 15 percent of his match fee for "use of an audible obscenity" during the fourth Test against South Africa.

Broad was cited by the match officials after Monday's incident in Johannesburg, when he approached South Africa captain Faf du Plessis and used "inappropriate language".

He was found to have breached article 2.3 of the International Cricket Council's code of conduct, which relates to "use of an audible obscenity during an international match".

One demerit point has been added to Broad's disciplinary record. It was the second offence in a 24-month period for the bowler.



After completing their three-match T20I series in Pakistan, the Bangladesh team returned early yesterday morning via the same chartered plane on which they departed. According to the BCB, the Tigers will fly via regular commercial flights for the upcoming Test segment of the Pakistan tour. PHOTO: BCB

## Rain halts SL reply

AFP, Harare



Sri Lanka made a solid start to their first innings reaching 122 for two before bad light and rain brought an early close to the second day of the second Test against Zimbabwe in Harare on Tuesday.

The visitors are still 284 runs behind the hosts who lost their last four wickets in the morning to be bowled out for 406.

The early close means play starts half an hour early on the third day on Wednesday at 0730 GMT.

Sri Lanka openers Dimuth Karunaratne and Oshada Fernando added 94 for the first wicket before both fell for 44.

Kusal Mendis, who was dropped at short leg on one and again at midwicket on 13, both times off Sikandar Raza, was 19 not out at the close with first Test double-century Angelo Mathews on four.

Karunaratne was the first to go, the Sri Lankan captain picking the wrong length to sweep a full delivery from off-spinner Raza and falling leg before.

In the meantime, Donald Tiripano was maintaining a steady line and got his reward when, shortly after, Fernando drove loosely. Wicketkeeper Regis Chakabva, who had earlier dropped Fernando off Victor Nyauchi, moved quickly to take a sharp diving catch to his right.

The left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya, who took a hammering on Monday, mainly at the hands of centurion Sean Williams, picked up three of the last four wickets in the morning session to finish the Zimbabwe innings with four for 182.

Resuming on 352 for six, Zimbabwe lost Chakabva for his overnight 31 in the sixth over of the morning after he gave a faint edge off Embuldeniya to wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ZIMBABWE: First innings 406 (Williams 107, Raza 72, Taylor 62, Kasuza 38, Mutumbodzi 33, Chakabva 31; Embuldeniya 4-182, De Silva 3-71, Lakmal 2-37)

SRI LANKA: First innings 122 for 2 (Karunaratne 44, Fernando 44, Mendis 19 not out; Raza 1-39, Tiripano 1-5)