



Young Tigers eye uncharted territory

SPORTS REPORTER

History beckons the Bangladesh Under-19 side as the young Tigers face their New Zealand counterparts in the ICC Under-19 World Cup semifinal, hoping to make it to their first ever final of the biggest age-level event with a win at Senwes Park in Potchefstroom today.

Aside from the final group stage game against Pakistan, where rain saved the young Tigers' blushes and helped them finish top of the group, it has been a very good campaign for the Akbar Ali-led side.

A dominant all-round performance from Akbar and Co helped the young Tigers oust South Africa with a thumping 104-run victory in the Super League quarterfinal. More than the impressive performances in the ongoing tournament, Bangladesh's recent record against the young Kiwis would help their confidence.

Bangladesh registered a powerful 4-1 series victory against New Zealand

in their own backyard when the young Tigers toured the country in September-October last year. However, Bangladesh did lose against New Zealand during their final World Cup warm-up fixture last month.

According to skipper Akbar, the young Tigers would need to stick

Just expect everyone to support us the way you support the national side.

AKBAR ALI
CAPTAIN, BANGLADESH UNDER-19S

to their plan and implement them well in today's game for the team to succeed.

"New Zealand played good cricket to reach here [the semifinal]. Our aim is to stick to our plan and try to get them out for as low a score as possible. They have a strong lower order and they have a long batting line-up. I just

hope that we can stick to our plan and hope that our bowlers do well.

"If I talk about preparations then I should say that we are prepared well both mentally and skills-wise. Now we just need to implement on the field and if we are able to do that, I hope that the result will be in our favour," said Akbar yesterday.

Going into today's semifinal, the U-19s have the opportunity to surpass the achievements of the 2006 batch that boasted the likes of Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal and the 2016 group led by Mehedi Hasan Miraz, which finished third -- Bangladesh Under-19s' best finish in the tournament.

However, Akbar remained unfazed and mentioned that only by taking it as another regular game could the young Tigers yield a positive result today.

"I think everyone in our team is very relaxed. If everyone takes it as a normal game and not see it as a semifinal or an opportunity to get to the final, then I think everyone can do better and get a good result."



The Bangladesh cricket team landed in a chilly Islamabad yesterday ahead of their first Test against Pakistan at Rawalpindi. The Test begins tomorrow.

PHOTO: BCB

I can be a proper batsman: Miraz

SPORTS REPORTER

A genuine all-rounder in his under-19 days and in domestic cricket, Mehedi Hasan Miraz burst onto the international circuit as an off-spinner with a dream Test debut in October 2016 when he picked up 19 wickets in his first two Tests and was instrumental in Bangladesh's maiden Test win over England.

There was always potential for the 22-year-old to become a proper all-rounder at international level and so there have often been questions about his batting ability, which the cricketer has yet to utilise at the highest level.

In early 2016, Mehedi led Bangladesh to their maiden third-place finish in the ICC Under-19 World Cup. It was his all-round performances with bat and ball, scoring 242 runs in six games at an average of 60.50 and also scalping 12 that earned him the player-of-the-tournament trophy and the unofficial label of the next big thing in Bangladesh cricket.

But since making his international debut, Mehedi's batting has not been a prominent feature of his game mostly because of his place in the batting order as he is mainly picked as a spinner rather than an all-rounder.

Averages of 17.72, 19.05 and 10.44 in Tests, ODIs and T20Is respectively do not justify his batting ability as Mehedi has often batted lower down the order with not much opportunity to prove his worth.

However, the last edition of the Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League has witnessed his batting ability after he was promoted to open the innings and enjoyed a lot of success in that position. Mehedi ended up scoring 292 runs in 14 games at an average of 32.22 and more importantly, managed to give good starts



for Khulna Tigers which helped his side to reach the final of the tournament.

The cricketer, who is suffering from a finger injury sustained during the BPL is currently out of action and is eyeing a comeback from the third round of the Bangladesh Cricket League.

"I have spoken about my batting with selectors and they have supported me a lot to bat up the order in the domestic circuit. I got the support from my BPL team Khulna Tigers this season where Mushfiqur Rahim bhai encouraged me and said I can be a proper batsman and I also feel that," Mehedi, who is currently rehabilitating from his injury, told reporters yesterday.

According to Mehedi, he won't be able to bat up the order in the BCL but is keen on spending more time at the crease in longer-version cricket. He is also hopeful of batting higher up the order in the upcoming Dhaka Premier League.

Rawalpindi brings a new challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh team spent their entire day at the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad after the cricketers reached Pakistan for the second phase of the tour after a long flight yesterday.

Unlike the first phase of the tour, when the Tigers flew by chartered plane to take part in a three-match T20I series last month, the Bangladesh Cricket Board this time opted to fly through regular commercial flights.

Mominul Haque and his troops will start training today after taking a thirty-minute drive to the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

The weather, which was at around four degrees Celsius when the team landed in Islamabad, will be a big challenge for Bangladesh.

"We have opted to rest the whole day today [Wednesday] because it was a long flight. We will practise from tomorrow but we have only one day before the Test starts. It was pretty cold when we landed here and although we didn't go out of our hotel, it will be interesting to see how the weather behaves in the coming days," national

HIGHLIGHTS

Sri Lanka managed to draw the last Test against Pakistan in Rawalpindi after rain hampered the game. Sri Lanka declared their first innings on 308 for 6 riding on century from Dhananjaya de Silva where Pakistan in reply finished on 252 for 2 courtesy of centuries from Abid Ali and Babar Azam.

Rawalpindi offers something for seamers. The pacers will definitely have a big role here as well as the batsman to adapt to the pitch.

HABIBUL BASHAR
SELECTION COMMITTEE MEMBER

selection committee member Habibul Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium has hosted nine Tests, with the last -- when Sri Lanka drew against the hosts -- played after a gap of nearly 15 years.

There has been a lot of discussion about the Tigers' need to improve in the longest format, with both Bangladesh captain Mominul and coach Russell Domingo emphasising on winning Test matches away from home, something they want to kickstart from Pakistan.

Bashar was the highest run-getter for the Tigers in a three-match Test series on a tour of Pakistan in 2003 although the visitors lost 3-0 and he informed that pacers would play a big role in Rawalpindi.

"Although I have never played in Rawalpindi, my experience in Karachi and Lahore were on more batting-friendly pitches compared to Rawalpindi, which offers something for seamers. The pacers will definitely have a big role here as well as the batsman to adapt to the pitch," Bashar added.



New Zealand's Ross Taylor hit an unbeaten century to take the hosts to a win in the first ODI against India at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday.

Taylor pilots NZ's record win

AFP, Hamilton

An unbeaten century from veteran batsman Ross Taylor powered New Zealand to a stunning four-wicket win over India in the first one-day international in Hamilton on Wednesday.

The hosts completed the second highest run chase in their history to finish on 348 for four and overhaul the imposing target set by India.

It was a morale-boosting victory for the Black Caps, who went into the match as underdogs after a 5-0 whitewash in the recent Twenty20 series, when they repeatedly squandered winning opportunities.

The roles were reversed at Seddon Park, with India posting a mammoth total of 347 for four after losing the toss, including a maiden century to Shreyas Iyer and half-centuries for skipper Virat Kohli and KL Rahul.

But the tourists' bowling attack failed to prevent a match-turning innings from Taylor, who scored a 73-ball century, his

21st in ODIs, and ended the match on 109 not out.

He was supported by a quick-fire 69 from captain Tom Latham and Henry Nicholls' hard-fought 78, although three late wickets gave India hope of rescuing the match.

"It's been a long time between drinks," said Latham, whose side suffered a 3-0 Test series defeat in Australia before the T20 drubbing on home soil.

"It's nice to get over the line and we managed to keep our composure at the end and get there."

Kohli was gracious in defeat, saying India produced a "decent" performance that was not quite good enough on the day.

SCORES IN BRIEF
INDIA: 347 for 4 in 50 overs (Agarwal 32, Kohli 51, Iyer 103, Rahul 88 not out; Southee 2-85)
NEW ZEALAND: 348 for 6 in 48.1 overs (Cuptill 32, Nicholls 78, Taylor 109 not out, Latham 69; Yadav 2-84)
Result: New Zealand won by four wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Ross Taylor.

'I'm black, that's my skin, but play cricket because I love it'

REUTERS, Cape Town

Temba Bavuma hopes his eye-catching innings in South Africa's seven-wicket victory over England in the first one-day international at Newlands on Tuesday will end the debate over whether he deserves his place in the side.

Batting at number three, Bavuma's excellent 98 comes after a difficult month in which he was temporarily dropped from the Test side for a home series against England that South Africa lost 3-1.

His axing stirred debate on social media about whether his place in the team was deserved or whether he was only being picked because of efforts to redress imbalances from



the country's apartheid era.

Cricket South Africa targets the inclusion of two black African players and four from the mixed-race and Indian communities in each team, averaged through the year.

"It has been hard. It's not so much the dropping part, all players get dropped, everyone goes through slumps of not scoring well," Bavuma told reporters.

"The awkwardness and discomfort from my side is when you are thrown into talks of transformation."

"Yes, I am black, that's my skin. But I play cricket because I love it."

"I'd like to think the reason I am in the team is because of performances I have put forward in my franchise side, and also for the national team, whenever I have been able to."

The 29-year-old, who has been a top performer across all formats in domestic cricket over the past few years, has hit out at what he saw as double standards in the transformation debate.

NATIONAL SCHOOL CRICKET



Centurions (L) Mizanur Rahman (136) and Rizan Hossain (103) powered Tangail School and College to a massive 293-run victory over Shaheed Jahangir School at the Tangail Stadium yesterday in the ongoing Bangabandhu National School Cricket tournament, presented by Prime Bank. In another encounter of the same event, player-of-the-match Junaid's (R) eight-wicket haul, which featured a hat-trick, guided Kowkhali Govt High School to an eight-wicket victory against Town High School at the Pirojpur District Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED