



## **BALL IN SELECTORS' COURT**

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has been bowling regularly and doing gym work individually at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Ask any Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official, he is still the Bangladesh ODI captain. It is however not clear whether he will play the three-match ODI series against Zimbabwe starting from March 1 in Sylhet. Mashrafe didn't play any international match for the Tigers since Bangladesh's last ICC World Cup match against Pakistan at Lord's last July. The future of Bangladesh's ODI captain in international cricket has been a hot topic after his sordid performance in the World Cup and a generally unremarkable BBPL campaign, but the player himself recently made it clear that he would continue to play cricket and his selection for the national team is up to the national selectors. He had also opted out from the central contracts. The selectors, however has no definitive answer regarding his future, though they have little time to make up their minds for the upcoming series. Apparently, the ball is now in the selectors' court!

# Will there be home advantage against Zimbabwe?



International cricket is set to return to the country for the

first time in 2020 as Bangladesh will host Zimbabwe, starting with the lone Test from February 22 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in

Things have not gone well for the Tigers, especially in the longest format, in the recent past and the Bangladesh team management will be eager to return to winning ways against Zimbabwe, who were competitive in their last series, at home against Sri Lanka. There have been a lot of

questions about Bangladesh's approach in the longest format as the Tigers have lost all five Tests in 2019 and started off the new year with a punishing innings and 44-run defeat to Pakistan in the first Test in Rawalpindi.

Bangladesh have lost five of their last six Tests by innings margins, forcing selectors to make frequent changes to the side.

Apart from the inability to adapt to the longest format of the game the team management have also seemed clueless when it comes to reading pitches, both at home and



Alarmingly, while international sides look to exploit the home advantage with the pitch, Bangladesh have generally appeared confused about how to use home conditions to their advantage and

form an appropriate playing eleven. The last Test that Bangladesh played at home ended in a humiliating 224-run defeat against Afghanistan, who were playing just their third Test, at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram.

During that loss, the team management did not field any

seamer in the playing eleven but it was the visitors who were able to take the advantage from the pitch as Rashid Khan took a toll on the home side with his leg-spin.

The lack of clarity from the Bangladesh team management, when it comes to a proper game plan in the longest format, has subsequently hurt the Tigers' approach and brought about results like the 151-run defeat against Zimbabwe in the first Test in Sylhet back in 2018.

It was the confused approach from the Bangladesh team management

that led the Tigers to defeat against Zimbabwe as the home side fielded iust one seamer, expecting a spinfriendly track. But it was the visitors who went on to enjoy all the advantage with their two specialist pacers in the side after the Sylhet pitch behaved in a sporting manner, with bounce and carry.

However, the theory of the tailormade spin tracks in 2016 and 2017 did work well for Tigers at home where Bangladesh went on to beat England and Australia in Mirpur with great affect.

The Tigers did register a thumping innings and 184-runwin over West Indies back in December 2018 in their last game in Mirpur, courtesy of a spinning track and once again, it's the Shere-Bangla National Stadium that is going to host the lone Test against Zimbabwe.

It will be interesting to see whether head coach Russell Domingo opts for the same spin heavy strategy against Zimbabwe in Mirpur. However, the selectors, who included five seamers and two specialist spinners in the squad, as speculations over the pitch in Mirpur will once again take the centre stage and the question remains, what will be the Tigers' strategy this time?

## Yasir blitzes East into the final

SPORTS REPORTER

Yasir Ali celebrated his Test call-up with a blitzed hundred yesterday at Cox's Bazar as East Zone overcame a tough target in one session on the fourth day against North Zone to reach the final of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL). The final day saw exciting finishes as South Zone managed a nail-biting draw against Central Zone in the other match. The final between East Zone and South Zone will take place at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram from February 22.

North Zone were bowled out for 269 runs just before the tea break in their second innings after resuming the day on 145 for five, to set a stiff 211-run target for East Zone. Spinner Nayeem Hasan claimed five wickets.

East Zone reached the target in just 34.5 overs thanks to Yasir, who followed up his 165, in the first innings with an 88-ball 110, laced with eight fours and five sixes. He starred in a 170-run second-wicket stand with Mohammad Ashraful, who remained unbeaten on an 86-ball 70. Yasir's departure did not hinder East Zone as Imrul Kayes (17 off 16) and Ashraful saw them off to victory by eight wickets.

In the other match, South Zone required another 348 for victory with six wickets remaining against North after resuming the day on 159 for four.

Shamsur Rahman and Nasum Ahmed paired up in a fantastic 139-run fifth-wicket partnership with Shamsur hitting 133 off 230 balls. Off-



YASIR ALI...110

As East Zone's Yasir Ali put the North Zone bowlers to the sword in chase of an improbable target, wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur

Rahim could not resist trying himself as a bowler. Off-spinner Mushfigur however bowled three overs without any success. It was only the third instance in his career that the former Bangladesh skipper bowled in first-class competition.

spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz brought crucial breakthroughs for North, scalping four wickets in the second innings.

With an hour left to go, South were 356 for

### **SCORES IN BRIEF**

**CENTRAL v SOUTH** 

**CENTRAL ZONE:** First innings 235 and second innings

**SOUTH ZONE:** First innings 114 for 4 declared and second innings 386 for 9 (Anamul 83, Fazle 25, Shamsur 133, Nasum 85, Farhad 27 not out; Mehedi 4-136,

Shuvagata 3-59) Result: Match drawn.

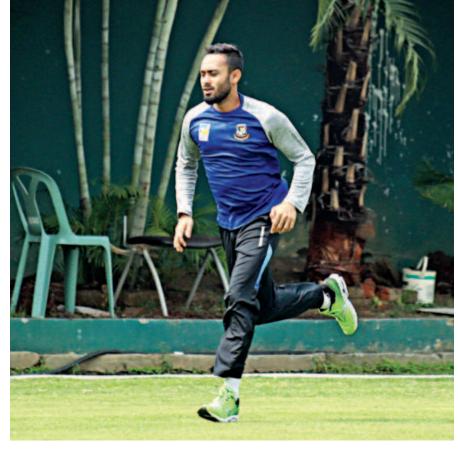
Player-of-the-match: Nasum Ahmed. **NORTH v EAST** 

**NORTH ZONE:** First innings 272 and second innings 269 all out (Junaid 36, Naeem 35, Mushfiqur 38, Mahidul 44, Sunzamul 24, Sanjit 36 not out; Nayeem 5-101, Saqlain 2-58)

**EAST ZONE:** First innings 331 and second innings 211 for 2 (Ashraful 70 not out, Yasir 110; Sunzamul 1-61)

Result: East Zone won by 8 wickets. Player-of-the-match: Yasir Ali.

seven before Nasum, who occupied the crease for 342 minutes, was removed by Arafat Sunny for 83 and Abdur Razzak departed to Suvagata Hom two overs later to leave them with just one wicket in hand. Farhad Reza and Shafiul Islam stood guard and managed to play out almost 10 overs during their last-wicket 14-run partnership to hand a draw to South Zone.



Mohammad Mithun runs during individual training at the BCB Academy ground in Mirpur yesterday. The Tigers' official training camp for the upcoming one-off Test, three ODIs and two-match T20I series against Zimbabwe will begin today.

PHOTO: STAR

We need to look at that Test we won against Bangladesh (in Sylhet); about how we played and achieved that victory. We need to repeat that type of performance. Bangladesh is a difficult away tour to play cricket. We just need to make sure that we are on point again and hopefully we will come out good this time as well.

**REGIS CHAKABVA** Zimbabwe batsman

### Bangladesh broke the mould when beating India in the 2018 Asia Cup but for captain Salma Khatun, the focus is all on the present day.

Salma's side powered past their rivals for the first time in the group stage, going on to show that success was no fluke with victory in the final. Two years on and the two sides will meet

again in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020,

with the Tigers keen to show how far they have come since that breakthrough moment. They will take heart from the feats of compatriots as well, with Bangladesh winning the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup in South Africa

earlier this year. But skipper Salma knows their focus can't just be on India given the challenges posed by New 2 Zealand and hosts in Australia in Group A – two sides they have yet to play in T20I cricket.

"Our U19 World Cup was a great moment. We are ready for the World Cup," said Salma, speaking at the captains' media day at Taronga Zoo, Sydney.

The Asia Cup was a great experience, but the focus is now on the World Cup. We want to be focusing on New Zealand and Australia instead. "We are proud of what has happened before."

## HIGHLIGHTS

Bangladesh twice beat India in the 2018 Asia Cup

The two countries will meet again in the Tigers' fourth Women's T20 World Cup

Salma's side also face Australia, New Zealand and Sri Lanka as they bid for the semifinals



(L-R) The captains of the ten competing teams in the Twenty20 Women's World Cup--Sornnarin Tippoch (Thailand), Harmanpreet Kaur (India), Sophie Devine (New Zealand), Stafanie Taylor (West Indies), Meg Lanning (Australia), Chamari Atapattu (Sri Lanka), Dane van Niekerk (South Africa), Heather Knight (England), Salma Khatun (Bangladesh) and Bismah Maroof (Pakistan) -pose with the trophy during an official photo session at the Taronga Zoo in Sydney yesterday.

India will be Bangladesh's first opponents in Australia, in Perth on 24 February, prior to playing Meg Lanning's team in Canberra.

They then head to Melbourne for two games, against New Zealand and Sri Lanka, to determine whether they reach the Women's T20 World Cup semi-finals for the first time.

Their team may be lacking in experience playing Down Under, but not so Rumana Ahmed, who joined Brisbane Heat as an ICC Rookie for

the Women's Big Bash League in 2017 "Coming here was a big opportunity for me, it was the first time I had been able to come to haven't seen them.'

Australia," said Rumana, who played a starring role in the Asia Cup success over India.

"I learned a lot from here, especially how big teams practice. "Every session I learned something, how they

work in the gym and on their fitness, and it was a very good opportunity for me.

"We were very proud of the U19 team, we were very happy and we have gained some confidence from them.

"We are very confident, it is the first time we are here so Australia haven't seen us and we

## We are ready for the World Cup: Salma Faf quits as SA skipper



Faf du Plessis announced on Monday that he was stepping down as South Africa's cricket captain with immediate effect.

Du Plessis, 35, said he needed to take "a step back" from the captaincy in order to help the emergence of the next generation of leaders under Ouinton de Kock.

De Kock led the team in recent one-day and Twenty20 internationals against England while Du Plessis was being

It was announced last month that De Kock would be South Africa's long-term one-day captain but in Monday's statement, Du Plessis said he was also relinquishing the

Test and T20 captaincy. The announcement clears the way for De Kock to lead South Africa at the T20 World Cup in Australia in October and November and possibly to lead the Test team in a two-

match series in the West Indies in July and August. In a statement issued by Cricket South Africa, Du Plessis

said he wanted to concentrate on contributing to the team as a batsman and senior player.

Du Plessis captained South Africa in 112 matches across all formats, including 36 Tests. He said his time away from cricket since the end of the Test series against England last month had given him "a lot

of perspective". Du Plessis added, "It has been a rewarding, sometimes tough and other times a lonely road, but I would not replace the experience for anything, because it has made

me the man that I am proud to be today. He said the decision to step down was one of the toughest decisions he had made but he said he was committed to supporting De Kock, coach Mark Boucher

and the rest of his teammates. Du Plessis took over as limited overs captain in 2012

and became Test captain in 2016.