

No-nonsense Afif leads batsmen's resistance

SPORTS REPORTER

After rather disappointing batting displays across the first three games of the BCB President's Cup and more talk of rust, all eyes were on the batsmen. Ahead of the tournament, selectors stated they would keep a close eye on the attitude and approach of the players regardless of their score and perhaps they will be impressed to see someone like Afif Hossain finally stepping up.

Rated as one of the cricketers with the most potential, Afif was unable to make an impression in his first two games, scoring just four and 15. Finally, the 21-year-old, who has already made his international debut in the limited-overs format, showed his class and played a magnificent 98-run knock.

It was yet again a pressure situation for Najmul XI, who found themselves struggling on 31 for three after being sent in to bat. That is when the left-hander strode onto the crease to join Mushfiqur Rahim, who followed up his century in his last outing with a half-century.

The duo added a magnificent 147-run fourth-wicket stand and, coupled with left-hander Irfan Shukkur's quick 48, Najmul XI posted a challenging total of 264 for 8 in fifty overs.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Known for his electrifying presence, Afif took no time to get settled and kept pushing for cheeky singles. The pair gradually started to accelerate, with young Afif assuming the role of the aggressor and caught the eye with his stroke-making ability.

There was also concern about

throwing wickets away after being set, but Afif this time utilised the opportunity and looked hungry to score big.

His hand-eye coordination and good use of feet made life difficult for the bowlers and he reached his 50 off 69 balls with a gorgeous inside out drive to the boundary

off off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz.

At the other end, Mushfiqur took his time despite being in brilliant touch as Afif took bowlers all over the ground.

The left-hander calmed after reaching his fifty and paced his innings well in the middle overs, rotating the strike every now and then.

But after getting into the seventies, Afif once again started to put pressure on the bowlers without taking any extra risks and employing proper cricketing strokes. His classical cover drive for a boundary to pacer Sumon Khan off the full face of the bat was perhaps the shot of the day.

He then took Mahmudullah Riyad for a six over deep mid-wicket, followed by a boundary to reach his nineties.

But, as in the previous game, Mushfiqur was involved in some miscommunication while taking a quick single and Afif's knock ended two runs shy of a well-deserved century.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NAJMUL XI: 264 for 8 in 50 overs (Mushfiqur 52, Afif 98, Irfan 48 not out; Ebadat 2-60, Rubel 3-53).

MAHMUDULLAH XI: 133 all out in 32.1 overs (Nurul 28 not out; Nasum 3-23, Rahi 3-34, Rishad 2-26)

Result: Najmul XI won by 131 runs.

'Don't do that again'

AGENCIES

"Don't do that again," Mumbai Indians head coach Mahela Jayawardene told Quinton de Kock after the South African went out to bat in his training apparel, and was seen pulling his match jersey down over an orange jersey, which he had forgot to change out of.

De Kock was adjudged man of the match for his 44-ball 78 as Mumbai Indians comprehensively beat Kolkata Knight Riders on Friday, but there was one thing he did which made some Mumbai Indians personnel 'go nuts', said Mumbai head coach Jayawardene after the match.

As De Kock and Rohit Sharma were seen walking out to bat in the chase, the South African was seen suddenly rushing back towards the dugout. However, with time possibly being a constraint, he was then seen making his way back to join Rohit again, adjusting his match jersey to conceal an orange band that was showing.

Rohit Sharma, waiting and watching his opening partner's discomfiture, burst out in laughter.

A STADIUM INDEED!

The Rangpur Stadium has been in shambolic state for quite a while now. Built in 1968 near Islampur, the stadium which used to stage both football and cricket matches has now been left to rot due to a lack of maintenance and renovation. The ground and the gallery have become breeding grounds for shrubs while the premises have developed massive holes, posing a danger to anyone venturing into the area. A year ago, talks had initiated over converting the venue into an international standard stadium and a meeting was held in this regard with the participation of the city mayor, but talks did not progress. A part of the stadium was declared abandoned five years ago, but no renovation or reconstruction has taken place since. The National Sports Council is the owner of the stadium while the District Sports Association is the authority in charge of managing and maintaining infrastructure. But it seems like no one is keen on either owning or maintaining the stadium, which could have been the centre of sporting activities of the northernmost division. When contacted, Monjur Ahmed Azad, vice-president of District Sports Association (DSA) in Rangpur, said: "The old part of the stadium was declared abandoned five years back. A new structure will be built after demolition of the old ones." Advocate Anwarul Islam, secretary of DSA in Rangpur, added: "The front part of the stadium already declared vulnerable. Its demolition to be started soon. Tender will be invited to build a 4-storey building there very soon. A proposal of the international stadium has already been sent to concern department for approval."



PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER



We have so many options, says Jose

AGENCIES

Gareth Bale is expected to make his second Tottenham debut against West Ham tonight, but Jose Mourinho claims even the Welsh star's place is not guaranteed as he revels in the squad depth at his disposal.

"We have a squad where every player has to fight a lot and play very well to deserve a place in the team," said Mourinho.

"The squad is so good, so strong. We have so many options that I refuse to say this player is a first choice. I can feel even in the players this feeling I love. They are happy but they are worried. "They are happy that the squad is good, that people are coming to make the squad better. But they are worried about themselves, 'am I going to play?' This is the kind of feeling you have in the top teams and we are having that now."

Bale has plenty of experience of those demands from his time at Madrid, which is regarded as bittersweet despite winning 13 trophies.



A VERY HAPPY RETURN

Kylian Mbappe's double strike confirmed that Paris St Germain would make a happy return to the capital ahead of their Champions League opener against Manchester United at the Parc des Princes. Le Parisiens left it late to wrap up a 4-0 win at 10-man Nimes on Friday and move top of the Ligue 1 standings. PSG, however, lacked Neymar's creative touch as he was rested for the trip south after returning from successful international duty for Brazil.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

PCB warns players for breaching protocols

REUTERS

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) warned players and officials of expulsion if they breach Covid-19 protocols after 12 people violated the "bio-secure bubble" at the ongoing National Twenty20 Cup in Rawalpindi.

Nine players and three officials tested negative for the new coronavirus after they were found to have spent time outside the bubble area near their hotel.

The people, identified as senior players and officials, received warnings and were made to pay for the tests.

"They have put at risk the integrity of the tournament and, health and safety of their colleagues," PCB director of high performance Nadeem Khan said in the statement.

'Nepal fixtures ideal use of FIFA window'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh national football team will be eager to earn a few ranking points when they end their long hiatus caused by the coronavirus pandemic with two international friendly fixtures at home against Nepal next month.

Football in the country came to a halt in the middle of March due to the pandemic and despite a resumption of camp in the first week of August, the postponement of World Cup qualifiers have kept footballers out of the game for the last seven months.

With no other international assignment left for this year, the November FIFA window comes as an opportunity to improve rankings for Bangladesh, who languish at 187th position in world football. Nepal, ranked 170th, have had no football of their own, too, during this period.

Despite the lack of preparation, BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag believes Nepal's consent to playing the two matches gives them an ideal

opportunity to use the FIFA window.

"We want to utilise FIFA windows more and more and this is an ideal opportunity. If we can start preparation soon, there is enough time for the players to prepare for the matches. Furthermore, Nepal won't have an advantage as they have not stated training yet either," Shohag told The Daily Star yesterday.

The proposed matches will be held between November 11 and 19 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka and the BFF high-ups are eager to get the players back on the pitch. The BFF spokesman said that they would engage in talks with the foreign coaching staff today.

"We invited quite a few South Asian teams, including Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives, for two friendly matches in November about a month ago. Nepal have verbally corresponded to us about its government's green signal. So we will now start our preparations with a meeting with our national team coaches," BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to an ANFA press release, Nepal team will start their preparation for the matches after the Dashain festival (Durga Puja), which ends on October 28.

Bangladesh coach Jamie Day was a bit concerned about the amount of time left for the two games, according to the BFF spokesman, but he said that the head coach and assistant coach, Stuart Watkiss, are eager to come to Bangladesh and start preparation.

"The two coaches will be there in the meeting and so will Paul Smalley (BFF's technical director). We will discuss all the aspects of preparation, including whether we will need to add a fitness trainer or any other personnel. And then after the meeting, we will have a series of meetings with government agencies regarding Nepal team's mode of arrival, state of health protocol, quarantine, practice facilities and access of spectators at the venue," Shohag said.

The last time Bangladesh met Nepal was during the SAFF Championship in Dhaka in September 2018, with the home team suffering a 2-0 defeat.