

Back to basics for Tigers

Mashrafee Whatmore's concern

Cricket

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

While the relaxed Sri Lanka cricketers had late breakfast on Monday morning, the Tigers went to practice straight after the end of the one-day series.

The Bangladeshi cricketers' minds were only working on catching the train of improvement which they have failed to get on board during the three limited-overs matches.

To coach Dav Whatmore, the performance in a 3-0 whitewash at the hands of mighty Sri Lanka was 'below average, below per and disappointing'.

And Bangladesh 's preparation for the coming two Tests was hampered due to overnight rain. They were restricted to some knocking with the bat but tried to make up with intensive fielding drills -- trying to hone reflex, agility, durability and catching -- at the Premadasa Stadium.

Bangladesh began the tour with half a dozen dropped catches in the

warm-up game and followed it up with a similar display in the first one-day international.

Fielding apart, Whatmore's concern remained over batting and bowling as well.

"We couldn't properly use the practice area because of weather. The track was too soft for batting but it looks like that the rainy season is coming to an end. That might help from the practice point of view in near future. Anyway, we have to manage the best we can," the Sri Lankan-born Aussie coach said.

"I expected a little bit better from the batsmen in the one-day series. I am concerned about a few things ahead of the two Tests, particularly about the batsmen. Three matches have come and another three have gone. I am not sure we've utilised the opportunity as much as possible to progress. That's concerning to me."

The batting got worse in the last match and the players were committing suicide against a second-string Sri Lankan attack missing the likes of Chaminda Vaas and Muttiah Muralitharan.

"I would rather say they did not justify their potential. It's mental. As I have said earlier, the difference between the two sides remains the ability to perform the skill under pressure," the 51-year-old pointed out the weakness of his charges.

With eight more days to go before the Test series, Whatmore will try to concentrate on all areas.

"I am not thinking about the batsmen, we have to get 20 wickets as well (in a match). We can't just focus on one area, we need to focus on all the areas. You saw the catching, the potential run outs not taken. If you don't take the opportunities it's going to make the task lot harder to do well."

"As we are not particularly strong in one area, we have to do well in all areas."

When asked about the team's bowling strength without Mashrafee bin Mortuza, Whatmore's expression became more depressed.

"We cannot afford to have injuries to good players, actually to any player. We have already suffered a lot in the one-day series without him. The Tests would be

more difficult if he misses out.

"Mashrafee had a bowl today but I am not sure about his condition. He bowled okay but when he follows through there's a little pain. Nothing in the back area but the pain comes from the hip. I still think it's a soft tissue injury, not bony."

Mashrafee will go through another X-ray on Tuesday to have more information.

The speedster, who also took part in the fielding drills, told that the pain was spreading from the hip and he is not feeling comfortable.

Apart from skipper Habibul Bashar, who returned home to see his ailing mother, Mohammad Rafique was missing.

Rafique was hit on the right knee during Sunday's match but an X-ray confirmed he has only a bruise.

Nafees Iqbal, Shahadat Hossain and Enamul Haque Jr have joined the squad.

Bangladesh will play a three-day warm-up match on Wednesday but the local organisers have so far failed to give any information about the opposition.

With or without Kottan Mukti finish 4th

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite the arrival of high-profile coach George Kottan, Muktijoddha Sangsad had a disappointing pre-shipment campaign. But they at least ended up on a high note outclassing Dhaka Wanderers Club 6-1 in their last game of the Premier Division Football League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The two-time league champions, however, failed to improve on their last year's fourth position in the 10-team fray by securing 34 points from 18 matches.

On the other hand, Wanderers were relegated from the top flight with 13 points from same number of outings.

Midway through the league Muktijoddha pulled off a sensational coup landing the services of former national coach Kottan to replace their long-serving coach Shafiqul Islam Manik but even with the 56-Austrian they never looked capable of challenging for the title they won in 1997 and 2000.

Under the 56-year-old's supervision, who is best remembered for



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar sits by the bed side of his ailing mother while holding her hand at the National Institute for Cardiovascular Disease on Monday. Bashar arrived back in Dhaka yesterday from Sri Lanka after being granted special leave to see his mother who suffered a stroke on August 28.

Bashar rushes to ailing mom

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar returned home on Monday from Sri Lanka to be by the bedside of his ailing mother.

The 33-year old left Colombo on Sunday night along with four other teammates after the third and final one-day international.

Immediately after his arrival Bashar rushed to the NICDV (National Institute for Cardio Vascular Disease) where his mother Rizia Begum was undergoing treatment following a stroke suffered on August 28.

"It was a terrible situation for me when I heard on Saturday that my mother was in hospital. I feel much relieved now," said Bashar who was granted compassionate leave for a week by the Tigers' team management.

The Bangladesh captain however said that he might fly back earlier to rejoin the Test squad if his mother's condition improves. The first Test begins on September 12.

"She is a little better today but I can only confirm my departure after I have talked to the doctors. She is expected to undergo an angiogram in a couple of days. Hopefully I will be able to leave for Colombo on September 8."

Bashar admitted he was passing a difficult period both on and off the field especially after the Tigers' poor showing in the three ODIs.

"This is a difficult time in my career and my captaincy. My team is playing inexplicably bad cricket and on the other hand my mother, who is

SEE PAGE 13 COL 5

Bond may be the difference

India take on NZ in tri-series final today

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Much has changed since India and New Zealand last contested a final on African soil, at the ICC Knockout in October 2000.

Back then, John Wright and professionalism lay in the future, while Sourav Ganguly was the fresh-faced leader entrusted with dissipating the gloom caused by the match-fixing scandal and a disastrous performance at the 1999 World Cup.

In those days, Ganguly was also the best one-day batsman in the world, outshining even the peerless Sachin Tendulkar with classy contributions in the matches that mattered.

At Nairobi, only his second assignment as captain, he led from the front, smashing a brilliant century that obliterated the South African challenge in the semifinal, and carried on in the same vein in the summit clash, stroking a delightful 117 as New Zealand were set 265 to win.

But Ganguly wasn't the only one enjoying a halcyon year in 2000. Chris Cairns had put injury troubles and a lack of consistency behind him to become one of the world's most-feared all-rounders, and it was his blistering century that saw New Zealand home with two balls to spare after India had reduced them to 132 for 5.

The other high-profile African clash resulted in a seven-wicket

victory for India at the last World Cup, a result that was nowhere near as straightforward as the scoreboard suggests.

And since then, the two teams have journeyed in very different directions, with India regressing and New Zealand -- despite Shane Bond missing over two years of cricket -- becoming one of the few teams hard on Australia's heels.

They have won 26 matches and lost 21 since their failure to make the World Cup semifinal, and the fact that 10 of those defeats have been against Australia indicates just how competitive they've been against othersides.

India too have suffered at Australian hands, losing eight of 10 encounters, but an overall record of 27 wins -- a whopping 13 of them against minnows -- and 29 losses since the World Cup reveals just how badly this team has lost the ODI plot.

New Zealand also have the edge in the head-to-head stakes, having won nine and lost six of the 16 matches the teams have played since Nairobi.

The two matches in this tournament suggested that there was little between the two teams, with the sheer pace and accuracy of Shane Bond the only X-factor on view.

Bond, who was rested for last Friday's game against India, ran riot in Bulawayo and will need to be seen off if India are to harbour any hopes of success.

Daniel Vettori will also be back, having no doubt observed how the Indian batsmen, with the exception

of Mahendra Dhoni, have struggled to put away the slow bowlers.

Cairns, hero of New Zealand's finest ODI hour, will miss out injured, but recent performances didn't indicate a telling contribution in any case. Like Ganguly, he's a man whose best years are well in the past.

New Zealand will be more worried about the fitness of Jacob Oram, back from a long-term layoff.

India have few worries on the bowling front, except for the pallid performances of Harbhajan Singh -- seven wickets from eight matches at 43.71 this season.

Ashish Nehra and Irfan Pathan will be back for the final, with Rudra Pratap Singh and the unimpressive Murali Kartik making way. The batting should also see a change with Suresh Raina, a lively presence in the inner circle, replacing Venugopal Rao, whose methods suggest that Test matches would be his natural habitat.

TEAMS

INDIA (likely): Sourav Ganguly (captain), Virender Sehwag, Mohammad Kaif, Rahul Dravid, Yuvraj Singh, Mahendra Singh Dhoni (wk), Jai Prakash Yadav, Ajit Agarkar, Irfan Pathan, Harbhajan Singh, Ashish Nehra. Supersub: Suresh Raina.

NEW ZEALAND (likely): Stephen Fleming (captain), Nathan Astle, Lou Vincent, Hamish Marshall, Scott Styris, Jacob Oram, Craig McMillan, Brendon McCullum (wk), Daniel Vettori, Andre Adams, Shane Bond. Supersub: Kyle Mills.



TICKET CONFIRMED! (L) An ecstatic Robinho (top) is lifted by Brazil mate Adriano after Adriano had completed his hat-trick against Chile at Brasilia on Sunday. (R) A Brazil fan finds every reason to dance after the world champions booked their ticket for Germany 2006.

Brazil samba into finals

REUTERS, Brasilia



World champions Brazil maintained their record as the only country to have played at every World Cup when they routed Chile 5-0 with an Adriano hat-trick on Sunday to qualify for next year's tournament.

Brazil, who are the first defending champions who have been forced to qualify for the subsequent tournament, also dealt Chile's hopes a severe blow on a hot afternoon at the Mane Garrincha stadium.

Brazil raced to a 4-0 lead in half an hour as defender Juan headed his second international goal. Robinho finished an end-to-end move and Adriano added two more. The Inter Milan player completed his hat-trick in injury-time.

BFF finds no 'fix'

SPORTS REPORTER

As expected the match-fixing saga ended without fuss as the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) dismissed the allegations made by three leading clubs against defending champions Brothers Union.

The BFF executive committee met yesterday to discuss the 13-page probe committee's report and came to the conclusion that Brothers was not guilty of 'arranging matches'.

"The three-member probe committee mentioned that it was impossible for them to probe the allegations effectively due to insufficient evidence. We will send letters to the respective clubs tomorrow about the findings and hope they will accept it in the greater interest of football," said BFF president SA Sultan.

Former government official Osman Ali Khan chaired the three-member probe committee that was asked by the BFF to submit its findings on the alleged fixing as raised by Mohammedan, Abahani and Sheikh Russel.

"The probe committee was disturbed by the attitude of the clubs who made the allegation as no prominent figures of those clubs appeared in front of the probe committee," he added.

Mohammedan, who led the campaign, however became pacified knowing the outcome.

"We are not in a position to boycott the league in the greater interest of football as we thought we had achieved a moral victory especially as Brothers lost two games after we had raised the allegations," said Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan, the clubs secretary.

On the other hand, Brothers Club general secretary Nizamuddin Ahmed expressed satisfaction over the verdict.

School soccer

SPORTS REPORTER

Khilgaon Model High and Shaheed Nabi High romped into the second round of the Pran-Cola school football tournament after winning their group finals at the Birsheshthra Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Khilgaon Model thumped Khilgaon Government High School 7-0 and Shaheed Nabi blanked Ali Ahammad High School 5-0.

The only frustration for Brazil was that Ronaldo, who was rested at halftime after complaining of a groin strain, completed his sixth international without scoring.

Fullback Roberto Carlos went off injured after landing awkwardly on his left knee in the second half but team doctor Jose Luis Runco said the injury did not appear to be serious.

Brazil stayed second in the 10-nation South American group with 30 points from 16 games and closed the gap on leaders Argentina to one point.

Chile are sixth with 20 points and have dropped five behind fourth-placed Paraguay. The top four teams qualify for Germany and the fifth play off against the Oceania region winners.

Brazil were without suspended Ronaldinho while Chile suffered a late blow when striker Marcelo Salas pulled out of the game with a muscular problem half an hour before kick-off.

The rout began in the 11th minute when, from Kaka's corner, Juan rose above the defence to flick in a header.

Eleven minutes later, Brazil increased their lead with a superb flowing move. Juan played his way out of trouble and found Robinho in midfield. The Real Madrid player set Adriano free on the right and, from his cross, Kaka and Ronaldo combined to set up Robinho, who fired home from six metres.

Adriano then added two more goals in a three-minute spell. His first was a simple low shot into the far corner from Robinho's pass, his second even more straightforward as he headed in Ze Roberto's corner

from close range.

Chilean had one good effort when Mauricio Pinilla found Eduardo Rubio unmarked, but the Universidad Catolica player's first touch let him down.

Brazil took their foot of the pedal in the second half and Chile nearly pulled one back when Cristian Alvarez was close with a header.

At the other end, Robinho headed over after another flowing move and Juninho Pernambucano forced Nelson Tapia into a difficult save with a long-range shot.

Adriano completed his hat-trick in injury-time when he fired home after a Robinho counter-attack.

"We've achieved the first task," Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira told Efe news agency.

"Now we have nine months to see what we can do with our team."

Venus wins sibling rivalry

Sharapova comes out tops



REUTERS, New York

Flushing Meadows witnessed another curiously unsatisfying episode of the Venus and Serena Williams story on Sunday.

This time Venus enjoyed the happy ending, winning 7-6, 6-2 to level their head-to-head record at seven-all and move through to the US Open quarterfinals.

There the Wimbledon champion will face in-form Belgian fourth seed Kim Clijsters, who embarrassed Venezuela's Maria Vento-Kabchi 6-1, 6-0.

They were joined in the last eight by Russian top seed Maria Sharapova, who produced her best

tennis of the tournament to beat hard-hitting Indian Sania Mirza 6-2, 6-1 and reach the quarterfinals for the first time.

Men's defending champion Roger Federer fended off tenacious Belgian Olivier Rochus, winning their third round match 6-3, 7-6, 6-2 despite lacking some of his usual fluency.

Third seed Lleyton Hewitt was stretched to limit by American Taylor Dent in a five-set thriller but won to stay on course for a semifinal showdown against Federer.

As so often in the past, the meeting of sport's most famous siblings was a strangely muted, messy affair.

Venus won a protracted first set 7-5 in the tiebreak and after that Serena's inferior physical condition

ultimately counted against her.

"Weird, awkward, bizarre," were the words Serena chose to describe the unusual early round meeting with her older sister, who like her is a twice former US Open champion.

The last time they played at a grand slam Venus was stricken with an abdominal strain and lost a low-key Wimbledon final to Serena in 2003. This time eighth seed Serena's left knee and ankle problems came home to roost.

"It was super strange for sure," said 10th seed Venus, who contributed 29 of the 59 unforced errors that littered the match.

"It was tough but I don't think Serena had her best (game) today."

"Serena is so tough she'll never admit to anything...but to me it

SEE PAGE 13 COL 5



PHOTO: AFP

DON'T WORRY, I'LL WIN THE OPEN FOR YOU! Venus Williams comforts sister Serena after beating her in the fourth round of the US Open on Sunday.

DAY'S EVENT

Premier Football League
Abahani vs YMC Club (5:00 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

TALK TURKEY

What to WATCH

ESPN
Videocon Cup Tri-Series
India vs New Zealand (Final)
Live at 1:30 pm

TEN Sports
US Open
Live at 5:00 am & 9:00 pm