

Anxious hours for a few

SPORTS REPORTER

Few changes are on the cards when the national selectors meet today to decide the 15-member Bangladesh squad for next month's one-day international series in Zimbabwe.

Habibul Bashar's men will leave Dhaka on January 31 to play four one-dayers on February 4, 6, 9 and 10 in Harare as part of their March-April World Cup preparation.

The long-serving wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud's fate will definitely be a major issue in the discussion; not only for his poor batting form but also the injury he has suffered during a recent Premier Division Cricket League match, which has sidelined the veteran for the last three games.

It was learnt that the former national skipper was fit for batting but it will take more time for him to be in shape for standing behind the stumps.

Mashud, who has been considered as an automatic choice for long, has already come under the scanner for his fragile batting in recent times, and by drafting Mushfiqur Rahim into the national fold the selectors have already expressed their intention of looking for a replacement for the key position.

Ahead of the World Cup, the Faruque Ahmed-led panel was also looking for a third opener and two new players -- Tamim Iqbal and Zunaed Siddique -- have already come under the spotlight for their big-hitting ability, a far cry from the formerly defensive pairing of Javed Omar and Rajin Saleh.

Mehrab Hossain has had some good partnerships in the last few games with the national team but his slow batting is of real concern for the think-tank and a crucial reason to opt for a big-hitter up the order. Many however feel that it's too early to think about Zunaed, whose fielding and running-between the wickets are still far from the required standard.

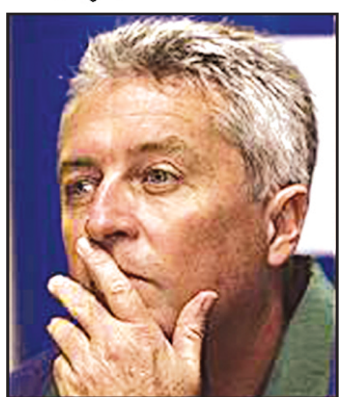
There is a bright chance for Mohammad Sharif to make a comeback in the national team after a three-year hiatus due to

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Did U Know?

Sourav Ganguly of India scored 98 runs in the first ODI against West Indies in Nagpur on January 21. It was the sixth time that he has been dismissed in the nineties.



Bob Woolmer

(Pakistan cricket coach)

"I have always been proud of playing for England and just missed out on coaching them (in the past) because the timing was not right. I was part of a side that beat Australia as a player and have a yearning to do so as a coach."

Expressing his desire to become the England coach.



Neo Sports

India v West Indies

Second ODI (D/N)

Live at 3:00 pm

ESPN

Sportscenter India

Live at 9:30 pm

STAR Sports

Australian Open

Men's/Women's Quarterfinals

Live at 6:00 am



PHOTO: STAR

CROUCH LOWER: Victoria opener Imrul Kayes tries to sweep the ball on a dodgy Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium wicket during their Kai-Altech Premier League encounter against Sonargaon yesterday.

Mohammedan keep the chase

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammedan Sporting Club shrugged off a challenge by Young Pegasus to stay on leaders Abahani's heels in the Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League yesterday but Bangladesh Biman further slumped when they were caught napping by another bottom-half side Partex.

Mohammedan's 16-run win at the Fatullah Stadium was the title aspirants' fourth in five rounds which placed them level with Sonargaon on eight points, two adrift of archrivals Abahani.

Biman suffered their second successive loss after beating Mohammedan and third defeat overall to climb down to fifth place with four points.

MOHAMMEDAN-PEGASUS

Mohammedan put on a frustrating show after electing to bat on a batting-friendly strip as they were all out against a moderate attack for 215.

Fresh from a match winning four-wicket haul in the last round against Brothers, Pegasus captain Lal Mohon ripped through the rival tail grabbing five wickets for 33.

The off-spinner dismissed Mohammedan's two top scorers, Faisal Hossain (47 off 58 balls) and skipper Habibul Bashar (37 off 75 balls) in his 7.2 overs and also contributed 27 runs in his side's reply of 199.

The fate of the match was evenly balanced after Pegasus recovered from a precarious 80-5 but man-of-the-match Tapash Baisya (4-44 from 9.4 overs) tamed Raisul Islam (41 off 50 balls) and Saif Mahmud (27) who threatened to turn the tide at one stage.

BIMAN-PARTEX

At BKSP, left-arm pacer Rezaul Haque claimed five wickets to inspire newcomers Partex to a five-wicket win over Biman. The first-change bowler ran havoc in a star-studded batting line after Mohammad Azim hit the inroads with the new ball by removing openers Raqibul Hasan and Javed Omar.

Rezaul, named man-of-the-

match, finished ten overs with 5-17 to fold the Biman innings for 134. In reply, Partex reached 138-5 with more than seven overs to spare.

Partex also lost four players below the double-figure but captain Rajin Saleh, who opened the innings, held the fort with a sedate 51 off 123 balls before Pakistani all-rounder Rashed Hanif gave finishing touch with a brisk 48 not out off just 50 deliveries.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MOHAMMEDAN: 215 all out in 47.2 overs (Imtiaz 17, Junaid 33, Aftab 4, Sakib 29, Bashar 37, Faisal 47, Sahagir 21, Tapash 4, Arafat 9 n.o., Hasibul 1, Manjurul 0, extras 13, Delwar 1-50, Saif 2-47, Maruf 1-32, Sharif 1-32, Lal Mohon 5-33).

PEGASUS: 199 all out in 47.4 overs (Rabiul 3, Jubair 10, Lal Mohon 27, Maruf 14, Itekhhar 12, Sharif 27, Saif 29, Raisul 41, Moniruzzaman 1, Delwar 17, Mortuza 3 n.o., extras 15, Manjurul 2-39, Tapash 4-44, Sakib 1-31, Hasibul 1-37, Arafat 1-35).

Result: Mohammedan won by 16 runs.

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WI sweat over Lara

Second ODI against India today



CRICINFO, undated

Off-spinner Ramesh Powar has been included instead of Suresh Raina for India's second one-dayer against West Indies at Cuttack. Joginder Sharma, the medium-pace all-rounder, is also likely to get a chance ahead of Sreesanth.

West Indies had some injury worries -- Brian Lara was suffering from knee pain and could miss the game. Dwayne Bravo, who collided with umpire Suresh Shastri while fielding at square leg, hasn't fully recovered and is doubtful as well.

Rahul Dravid spoke to the press after the nets session this morning and said that the changes were dictated by the conditions they expected -- slow, low and a spin-friendly track. "We think that Powar could be useful on this track which looks like it will be slow and also take spin," Dravid said.

Rudra Pratap Singh and Robin Uthappa have been left out as well and Dravid hinted that Sreesanth could be given a break. "Joginder is more of an all-rounder option in this scenario at number seven so that's something we are keen to explore and to give him an opportunity. Sreesanth has been playing a lot of cricket... so in this kind of scenario, this kind of wicket we might think of actually giving him a break as it gives us the all-rounder option to play two spinners and five bowlers that we would like to play."

The final decision between the two will be made on Wednesday after another look at the pitch.

Raina didn't get to bat in the first game but Powar and Joginder offer the bowling option that the team needs. "It is all about striking a right balance,"

Dravid said. "Raina is a very talented player and is very important for the future of Indian cricket."

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PHOTO: AFP

THE SMILE IS BACK: Sourav Ganguly (L) reacts to a joke from other teammates during a training session at the Barabati Stadium in Cuttack on Tuesday.

Victoria stop Sonargaon

Mirpur pitch under question

SPORTS REPORTER



Sonargaon Cricketers tasted their first defeat in the Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League when they crashed to Victoria Sporting Club by six wickets in a low-scoring match at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

The match lasted one session with last year's runners-up Sonargaon, after four wins in a row, were shot out for 83 in 24.5 overs. Victoria overhauled the target in 26.2 overs losing four wickets, the win paving Abahani's way to enjoy solo lead in the table with an all-win record after five rounds.

Pacemen Waskuruni Ahmed and Nazmul Hossain Milon exploited the condition most by sharing six wickets between them to tear apart the star-studded Sonargaon batting line-up that included the likes of Al-Shahriar, Alok Kapali and Mohammad Ashraf.

Left-handed opener Imrul Kayes then smashed a 50-ball 43 with help of five boundaries and two sixes to take Victoria safely to 85-4 for their third victory.

The outcome of the match, however, raised questions whether the newly prepared pitch is the reason behind several low-scoring affairs at cricket's new home or

should the batsmen be blamed for failing to adapt to the situation. "I think it is unfair to arrange domestic matches on this kind of wicket when the clubs are spending a lot of money. I am not ready to blame my batsmen for the batting debacle," said Sonargaon captain and ace Bangladesh batsman Mohammad Ashraf.

who was dismissed for a golden duck. He, however, did not justify his decision to bat first on a foggy morning. Chief selector Faruque Ahmed, who watched the match his colleagues of the selection panel including coach Dav Whatmore, also believes that there is 'food for thought' for the organisers about the behaviour of the wicket.

"I think the pitch should be a concern when all the matches played here have been low-scoring. I think the authority can offer a delayed start to avoid the early morning fog, which actually played a big part in the game," Faruque observed. "It is not easy to bat on such kind of low-bounce pitch, especially early in the morning but the basic thing is that it's a newly laid pitch and it will take some time to get better."

The venue has already hosted international matches but the authority has been using new pitches for the Premiership matches with 177 being the highest score so far, made by

Mohammedan against Victoria.

Curator Badiul Alam was not ready to accept that the pitches are to blame.

"It was just the second match played at this pitch. I agree that there was low bounce but no way unplayable. The batsmen should adopt. Most of them were caught behind while chasing deliveries outside the off-stump," Alam commented.

"We have to arrange matches on new pitches if we want to fully develop one. I think it would be ultimately helpful for the batsmen if they consistently played here."

But the big question is whether it would be wise to arrange a big match like Abahani-Mohammedan here and risk another frustrating show whatever explanation the experts offer. The traditional foes are set to clash on January 28.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SONARGAON: 83 all out in 24.5 overs (Al-Shahriar 20, Mehrab 3, Kapali 2, Jayantha 15, Ashraf 0, Ayub 0, Ashiqur 13, Dhiman 0, Sharif 1, Rafique 2, Mahbul 8 not out, extras 19, Shuvro 2-29, Waskumi 3-33, Milon 3-12, Jaffar 1-2).

VICTORIA: 85-4 in 26.2 overs (Imrul 43, Faruque 21, Mustakim 5, Riyad 0, Mushfiqur 2 n.o., Hasanuzzaman 6 n.o., extras 8, Rafique 1-23, Jayantha 3-3).

Result: Victoria won by six wickets.

Venues must be ready by Feb 5

B. League committee when?



SPORTS REPORTER

After a positive session with Muktiyoddha Sangsad footballers, the B. League officials will visit the other professional clubs to enlighten the players about the pros and cons of the new competition.

It was not in the plan originally but two BFF officials had a session with Muktiyoddha players on request of the club yesterday.

Professional League manager Abu Nayeem Shohag and Communications manager Sayeed Al Fatah answered to players' queries about their contracts, duties and responsibilities, code of con-

duct and other related subjects ahead of the B. League which is due to start on February 15.

"We had a two-hour session and it looked helpful for the players because they were not aware of many things. Although they had been given the copies of code of conducts and contracts before signing, face-to-face contact seemed to be more useful," opined Shohag.

"After this successful effort, we are looking forward to visit the other clubs if they want such sessions. We have already got positive response from the clubs outside the capital and soon chalk out a plan to meet them as well as the Dhaka teams."

Shohag informed that the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) will

conduct a daylong seminar on event management on February 7.

Meanwhile, the BFF has also asked the venues to complete the necessary renovation works by February 5.

"We have recommended areas of work on the reports submitted by our committee. We will have another visit on February 6 or 7 to see the progress," the Pro League manager added.

Out of four venues, only the Bangabandhu National Stadium seems to be in playable condition and Khulna at its worst.

The Khulna Stadium, home of local Abahani, has the entire southern section of its gallery abandoned for a long time. It also needs

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PHOTO: AFP

Left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori (L) of New Zealand is pleased after dismissing England batsman Paul Collingwood in their Commonwealth Bank series game against England in Adelaide on Tuesday.

Kiwis off the mark



AFP, Adelaide

Pace bowler James Franklin went from villain to hero as New Zealand kept their triangular series hopes alive with a 90-run win over England at the Adelaide Oval here on Tuesday.

Black Caps did not look to have enough on the board when dismissed for 210 after winning the toss and electing to bat, but bowled and fielded exceptionally well to restrict England to an embarrassing 120 in reply.

Importantly, the Kiwis claimed a bonus point for their first win of the series and moved ahead of England on the tri-series table.

New Zealand were inspired by an incisive opening spell by

Franklin (3-17), and some typically clever bowling by cagey spinner Daniel Vettori (4-24) later in the England innings.

Black Caps captain Stephen Fleming was confident of defending the total, but conceded the bonus point was unexpected.

"It was totally unexpected really, it wasn't until about seven or eight down we realised we had a chance for that," he said.

"It was touch and go half way through, but we were always confident."

"It is nice to put something in the cupboard."

England captain Andrew Flintoff was understandably disappointed with his side's batting.

"We bowled well and we didn't do ourselves justice in our innings," he said.

"We are not quite firing with the

bat. "New Zealand bowled well, but we can play a hell of a lot better."

Franklin arguably cost his side an upset win over Australia on Sunday when he dropped a simple catch, but put his side on the path to victory with a three-wicket opening spell.

After Kiwi all-rounder Jacob Oram celebrated his return from a hamstring injury by making a bold 86 to enable his side to recover from 5-67 and make a competitive total, Franklin struck three key blows to remove England's top three.

With Shane Bond (2-32) bowling at high pace at the other end, the left-arm overcame the disappointment of having a caught behind appeal incorrectly turned down to remove openers Mal Loye (8) and Andrew Strauss (19), along with Ian Bell (2).

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