

The keeper conundrum

Habibul happy with performance

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar categorically mentioned that the performance of his boys in their 3-1 first-ever series victory in Zimbabwe has made the job easy for the selectors before picking the World Cup squad.

The 34-year old most successful Tigers skipper also assured, while talking with the reporters at the Zia International Airport yesterday, that no one would be selected for experience alone when the selectors meet today to name the 15-member squad for next month's showpiece in West Indies.

The Faruque Ahmed-led panel including captain and coach Dav Whatmore were scheduled to meet yesterday after the team's arrival in the morning but the flight was delayed for almost four hours which compelled them to reschedule the meeting for today morning. The same day the board will also officially announce the team.

The big question in the selection process is whether fit-again wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud will be in the side to make his third successive appearance in cricket's

biggest show. It is now an open secret that selectors have no faith on the long-serving stumper's batting ability and if he ultimately gets the nod, then it would be only for his experience.

If anybody was hoping to get any message regarding Bashar's intention about the team selection then there was hardly anything optimistic for his long associate in the side.

"Experience is important but performance is the first priority for selection. I can assure you nobody will go with the team who has the experience but lack in performance. Anyone who is performing will be selected for the team," said a confident Bashar.

The selection of former skipper Mashud took a turn for the worse when young Mashfiqur Rahim showed his mettle during the four-match series by playing two valuable knocks in crisis moments.

Back to the series outcome, the Bangladesh skipper said their success in Zimbabwe had given them the much-needed confidence they needed ahead of the World Cup in the Caribbean.

"I was a member of the World Cup team four years back and then we had hardly any ambition rather than playing good cricket. The scenario is totally changed now

after we have already won a number of matches in the recent past."

"We are going to the World Cup with lot of confidence this time, especially after the away series victory and definitely our target is to make a second round berth. We know it will not be an easy task to beat at least one team like India and Sri Lanka to make our dream come true. But I think there is hardly any meaning to our trip if we have no target. I will not be surprised if my team beat any big fish in the competition," he said.

Although his side survived scares especially after the ignominious eight-wicket defeat in the second game before clinching the series, Bashar was exuberant with his team's success in Harare.

"Our first target was to win the series against a full Test playing nation in their own den and when we had frustratingly failed last time. I think it was a good tour and I am happy with the overall performance. It was a total team effort to win the series," he said.

"If we won all the matches then we have played a series without any

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Mashrafee exorcises his ghosts

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

If asked who was the most relieved man to return home after Bangladesh's 3-1 series victory in Zimbabwe Mashrafee-bin-Mortuza will surely be the first to raise his hand.

It was not because the leading Tigers paceman was adjudged man of the series with a match haul of eight wickets and an important 29-runnings in the third game but the fact that the series success finally quietened the bitter memory of his suffering during the last trip in July-August last year.

His 17-runs last over in the third game in that series had played an ultimately decisive role in the Tigers' 3-2 series defeat.

"I don't want to compare one

series with another but I definitely say that (the 17 run over) was a great lesson in my career," responded the 'Narail Express' when he was asked at the Zia International Airport whether he was now a relieved man after the series victory.

"After that particular match I realised that many things can happen in cricket. In one sense I was benefited by the incident as from then I have strived to improve a lot," said Mashrafee.

The 23-year old right-arm pacer also explained the reasons behind his team's 3-1 series success this time.

"Last time the team completely lost the confidence after losing one game but this was not case on this occasion. We have had the self-confidence this time which helped us to win last two games from tight

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ICC probing Samuels's bookie link

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday launched an investigation into Indian police claims that West Indian cricketer Marlon Samuels had links with an illegal bookmaker.

Police in the central Indian city of Nagpur said last week they had taped conversations in which Samuels had passed on team information to a man suspected of being a bookie during last month's one-day series.

ICC spokesman Brian Murgatroyd said the governing body's anti-corruption unit was speaking to the police and cricket officials in Nagpur after being given the details by the Indian cricket board.

"The unit will extract more details and all possible angles from the police," Murgatroyd said in

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India gamble on Sehwag

Cricket

AFP, Mumbai

India's cricket selectors on Monday picked Virender Sehwag in India's World Cup squad despite the aggressive batsman being woefully out of touch in the run-up to the showpiece event.

The selectors also included the injured duo of seamer Irfan Pathan and batsman Yuvraj Singh in the 15-man squad, confident they will recover in time for the World Cup opening in the Caribbean on March 13.

Rahul Dravid will captain India with senior pro Sachin Tendulkar, set for his fifth World Cup, appointed the deputy, ahead of former skipper Sourav Ganguly.

"I am quite excited about the team," said Dravid, himself a veteran of two World Cups.

"But we are aware and believe that it is not about the team, but how it performs. How six or seven key players perform supported by the others in the team, that will be the focus."

Sehwag, 28, was selected despite scoring just 273 in his last 15 one-dayers, including an unimpressive 19 off 23 balls in the five-run

defeat against Sri Lanka on Sunday.

Sehwag, the only Indian to compile a triple-century in Test cricket, was favoured for his career record of 4,775 runs from 165 one-dayers, with seven centuries.

Sehwag is also a useful off-spin bowler, with 71 one-day wickets, giving Dravid an option of an additional spinner.

"It is a show of faith by the selectors in Sehwag, the ball is in his court now," the captain said. "He has to prove the faith the selectors have shown in him is justified."

"It is a challenge for him to go

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SL announce WC squad

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka on Monday named middle-order batsmen Russell Arnold and Chamara Silva along with paceman Nuwan Kulasekara in a proven squad for the World Cup in the Caribbean.

"We feel this is the right combination for the World Cup," chairman of selectors Asantha de Mel told this news agency soon after the 15-man squad was approved by the sports ministry.

"The team has got a nice blend of youth and experience. We are well prepared and we feel this team can go all the way to win the World

Cup."

Mahela Jayawardene will lead the squad which includes veteran opener Sanath Jayasuriya and spin wizard Muttiah Muralidaran.

The selectors decided on the World Cup squad soon after Sri Lanka recorded a thrilling five-run win over India in the second one-dayer in Rajkot on Sunday.

Sri Lanka lead the four-match series 1-0 after the opening game in Kolkata was abandoned due to rain after 18.2 overs.

Arnold and Silva took the last two batting spots and Kulasekara was included as the fifth member of the pace attack led by the seasoned Chaminda Vaas.

Silva earned a place due to his excellent form in New Zealand in

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Bangladesh under-23 footballers pose for a photograph at the ZIA yesterday before their departure for Hong Kong to play the Olympic pre-qualifier against the hosts on Wednesday.

LOCAL SNIPS

SPORTS REPORTER

Half-centuries by Riaz and Sharif spearheaded Alhaj Abbasuddin High School (326) to a massive 201-run win over Government Laboratory High School (125) in the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School Cricket Tournament yesterday at the Kalindi Club ground.

In other matches across Dhaka, Rakib and Muntakim shared nine wickets between them to give Lalmatia Housing Society School an eight-wicket win over Tejgaon Government School. Gulshan Model School defeated BLS School by 57 runs. Badda High School recorded a four-wicket win over Ahmadbagh Adarsha School by four wickets while DR Mohammed Shahidullah School beat Sher-e-Bangla School by seven wickets.

JUNIOR CHESS
The 28th National Junior Chess

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Bashar vows to clear the air

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar said yesterday that he will give a statement to clear his position about the comment made by Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) vice-president Shah Nurul Kabir Shaheen.

"Definitely I will clear my position by giving a statement but before that I have to talk with the board officials," said Bashar.

Shaheen, the former BNP lawmaker, had recently stunned reporters by proclaiming that the media manager for the recently concluded Zimbabwe trip was not taken because the captain did not want it.

"Team captain (Habibul Bashar) made a recommendation to not send any media manager for trips outside India or Pakistan," was what Shaheen told the reporters at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on February 5.

Where's the trophy!

SPORTS REPORTER

The photojournalists were frequently pressing the shutters once the Tigers appeared at the Zia International Airport yesterday. But when they had almost completed their duty it was suddenly noticed that there was no picture with the trophy that they received after their 3-1 series victory against Zimbabwe.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials however came to know that it was in the luggage of team operations manager Ali Asif Khan.

Thankfully the players were sporting about the issue to pose with the trophy once it had been recovered despite making a 36-hour journey from Harare to Doha via stopovers in Kenya and Doha.

Though the players were kind enough to fulfil the demand despite the jet-leg it was BCB vice-president Shah Nurul Kabir Shaheen who made the job difficult for the photojournalists with an ultra-active effort, wanting to feature prominently into every frame!

Meanwhile, the flight was delayed by almost four hours as all flight operations resumed at the Zia International Airport after a 16-hour suspension.

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