



Wily left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique successfully appeals against skipper Habibul Bashar during their preparation match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Mashrafe raring to go

BISHWAJIT ROY



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza gave just a little indication, during the practice match at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, that he is well tuned to strike blows against the touring Indians in this month's home series.

It will be wrong to think that the 23-year-old 'Narail Express' is only getting ready for fireworks with the leather. Judging from performances in the recent past a repeat of his feat against the star-studded Indian team in the World Cup, the speedster looks set to contribute significantly with the bat as well during the course of the demandingseries.

The right-arm pace spearhead, who sunk Rahul Dravid's men in the preliminary round of the World Cup with a four-wicket burst to design his side's five-wicket victory, finished his ten-over spell without success but bowled with venom on a pitch where it was not an easy task for the pace bowlers.

Then the big-hearted cricketer played a magnificent knock of 49 from 63 balls that featured four

boundaries and a six in a surface that was also not too favourable for batting in the second session, with the ball keeping low.

His effort was however not good enough to save his side (Bangladesh Green XI) from an 11-run defeat against Habibul Bashar's Bangladesh Red XI.

"My main duty is to do the best with the ball but I am also ready to serve my team with the bat as much as possible. I am really enjoying the game in both bowling and batting," said a sweating Mashrafe.

Replying to a question of whether he would try to bowl in the series with similar pace (140kph or above) as he had against India in the World Cup, he said that his main concentration would be to bowl to a spot.

"It will be a big challenge for the pacers to bowl in this surface that's why my main aim will be to bowl in one spot. I will definitely be successful if I can bowl in one channel. I don't want to comment on speed right at the moment," he informed.

Bashar expressed his satisfaction over the preparation game as he said that their main objective was to familiarise themselves with the pitch and the immense heat as they were going to play the first one-day of the three-match series

on May 10 on the same surface.

"Our main objective was to see the pitch. I don't want to make any comments on the behaviour of the pitch but what I can only say is that it is not too different from our expectations," said Bashar adding that his boys were enjoying everything ahead of the series.

It was however evident in the match that it would be difficult for the team who will bat second.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed however looked satisfied with the pitch and he believes the conditions will suit his team to show their character against India during the three-match one-day series.

"We are not unhappy with the character of the pitch and I think the match they played here today will help them a lot in the two one-dayers," said the former Bangladesh skipper who hinted that there is still a chance to see out-of-form Shahriar Nafees opening the innings with young sensation Tamim Iqbal.

Mohammad Rafique, Abdur Razzak and Shakib Al Hasan, the left-arm trio who had a tremendous World Cup, had a combined six-wicket haul in the match but what is encouraging for the team think-tank is that the trio will get

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India turn to yoga

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

What's common between the Indian cricket team and the All Blacks, New Zealand's national rugby team? What does Sachin Tendulkar share with Ryan Giggs? Yoga, the ancient Indian art.

The All Blacks do not travel without a yoga expert; Giggs swears yoga has extended his career in its twilight by helping him get over a hamstring problem he had for years. And now yoga could be helping Tendulkar sort out his various injury problems.

It's an irony that yoga, the most

quintessential and traditional Indian exercise technique, has caught up with the Indian team after it's been around the world, as it were. There was a yoga trainer during John Wright's days as India coach and at conditioning camps in the early days of Greg Chappell's tenure but it went off the radar soon after.

The practice has now been revived but, in keeping with the enigma and intrigue surrounding Indian cricket, details are at a premium. After three days of persistent questioning by the media the credentials of Sukhdev Kumar, the yoga trainer currently working with the Indian team, were revealed by Surendra Bhave, the administrative manager. Kumar,

who has been spending about half an hour with the team after every practice session, will not travel to Bangladesh.

Kumar has been drafted in by Ravi Shastri, with whom he had worked in Singapore, where he is based. Kumar has also worked with Ernie Els and Jyoti Randhawa, the golfers, Wasim Akram and Vijay Amritraj, the former tennis player.

Yoga isn't new to cricket; the Australian team that toured India in 2004-05 came with a yoga instructor on their support staff. That's when Justin Langer got hooked to the art. On the same tour, Langer took time out to visit

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PHOTO: STAR



India cricket captain Rahul Dravid (R) and new manager Ravi Shastri are in conversation as they take part in the team's photoshoot at a Kolkata hotel yesterday. India arrive in Dhaka today to play three one-day internationals and two Tests.

'Just be patient'

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India's cricket manager Ravi Shastri on Sunday went to the defence of the country's star veterans, saying they are not finished yet and are raring to go big after their World Cup disappointment.

Shastri also said the fans should give the seniors some time to see for themselves what they were capable of.

"Sachin (Tendulkar) is hungry for runs. Just be patient with Sachin and Virender Sehwag and (see) what they are capable of," he told a news conference on the eve of the team's departure to Bangladesh, where they will play three one-dayers and two Tests.

The performance of the senior players came under scrutiny after India bowed out of the World Cup in the first round, but the national selectors persisted with them while announcing the squad for the Bangladesh tour.

While Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly were dropped from the one-day side for the upcoming Bangladesh tour, they were picked for the Tests. Virender

PHOTO: AFP

Sehwag was retained only in the one-day side.

Shastri said the seniors deserved respect from the fans.

"Show respect for what they have done. They have played for 15 years. Just be patient, give them some time and you will see what they are capable of."

"Please respect the guys for what they have done, they are not finished yet," Shastri pleaded.

Shastri, appointed on an interim basis after Australian Greg Chappell quit as coach last month, said he had been advising the players to enjoy their game.

"What I did not like in the last six months was that the cricketers were going through the motions like they were doing a sort of a nine-to-five desk job."

"If you don't enjoy what you are doing, forget about winning."

Shastri, a former Indian captain, also said the players had left behind the World Cup disappointment and were focused on the Bangladesh tour.

Shastri said: "He is hungry for runs and he will prove his worth."

India suffered a shock defeat to Bangladesh in the World Cup and were knocked out of the tournament at the first round stage.

Shastri urged fans to "be patient, give them a little bit of time."

Akram's new innings

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Akram will join the committee, headed by Faruque Ahmed, from June 1 after completing his domestic duty with the DOHS Club while Prince's resignation has been accepted with effect from May 31.

The second-term two-year contract of the current selection panel will expire at the end of July this year and it is unlikely that Faruque and former national opener Athar Ali Khan will welcome the appointment of Akram, yesterday.

It was learnt that Faruque and Athar will convey a decision about whether they will renew their contract to the board within a week.

"The fact is that the team is shaping up but still I am personally thinking about whether it would be good to quit the job at the top. But we have still more than two months in our hand," said Faruque, who welcomed the appointment of Akram, yesterday.

"It is not only a matter whether board will renew our contract rather it's also a subject of whether we will be interested to continue the job," he added.

On the other hand Prince explained his reasons behind the

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BCB shortlists Whatmore successors

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has short-listed the names of Dav Whatmore's successor.

It was learnt that former India coach John Wright and former Bangladesh under-19 coach Richard McInnes are also in the four-member shortlist.

"We started with ten names but now we reduced the list twice and hopefully within a short time we can reach a conclusion," said a BCB high-up on condition of anonymity.

"What I can assure you is that all are from Australia and New Zealand and there is also a big name in the list," he added.

BCB is also searching for specialist batting and bowling coaches for the national team.

Tickets on sale from today

SPORTS REPORTER

The tickets for the upcoming home series against India will go on sale today from different branches of the AB Bank Limited.

The bank will selling tickets through its following Dhaka city branches: Motijheel, New Elephant Road, Kakrail, North South Road (Bongshali), Nawabur Road, Dhamondi, Rokeya Sarani, Mirpur, Gulshan, Uttara.

In Chittagong, the tickets will be available at Agrabad, Station Road, CDA Avenue, Jubilee Road and port connecting branches.

Cruciani sacked or relieved?

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani parted with Argentine coach Diego Cruciani after 11 weeks as both parties felt it was the right thing to do.

Cruciani, who coached the Bangladesh national team for just over one year, took charge on February 15 and led Abahani in eight matches in the ongoing professional football league.

However, his name was erased from the starting list of the sky-blues yesterday's B. League game

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