

Shakib stays calm

BISHWAJIT ROY



Young all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan made it clear yesterday that what Bangladesh did in World Cup against India is now history and the team are looking forward to the coming series that starts tomorrow with the first one-day international.

While talking to the reporters after the day's training session at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, the 20-year-old cricketer gave the same impression of patience as he shows when he's in action.

"What we did in West Indies is now a thing of past for us and we are now thinking what can we do against India in this series. I think there will be a good contest and I also believe, as my captain earlier said, that a good result for us is not impossible," said the lad who hails from Magura.

One example was good enough to understand what an important role he has been playing in his team's recent success as an all-rounder. The left-handed batsman has held a very good average of 45.52 in 29 ODIs, a stark contrast from his teammates, and took 29 wickets with his left-arm spin.

The solid young cricketer made many believe that he has the potential to have a permanent solution to the Bangladesh middle-order and that was the reason he faced a question whether he has any personal plan in connection with the series.

"There is no special plan because I always try to fulfil my team's expectation whether there is need for a dot ball or score a run," he came with a simple answer adding that he himself is his inspiration.

Shakib was also not ready to give too much emphasis on their five-wicket victory against India in the World Cup.

"I don't think we have an extra inspiration in the series only because we beat them in the World Cup, rather every win is always important. There were lot of expectation after the success and it might put some pressure on us but we are very confident," he said adding that they are also used to the media hype.

Responding to a question of whether the omission of Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly are an advantage for his side, he said that they are not focusing on their opponents.

"We are simply concentrating on ourselves. We don't think much about our opponents because we know if we can play to our potential, we can do anything in the series. I believe that the better team on the day will win," he replied.

Shakib expressed his satisfaction over the preparation. "We played enough matches in World Cup so normal practice is good enough for us. The short camp also was a good one," he informed.

He also promised to do something special for outgoing coach Dav Whatmore, who quit the Bangladesh job after this series. "I will definitely try to do something big for my coach in his last series with us."



PHOTO: STAR

TERRIFIC TRIO: Left-arm spinner Abdur Razzaq (L) prepares to bowl as veteran Mohammad Rafique looks on while Shakib Al Hasan (R) awaits his turn to bat during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday



Sir Alex Ferguson
(Manchester United manager)
"It's a terrific achievement to win the Premiership because it has taken 90 points to do that over the last two or three seasons. That is a

Dravid wants Tigers in India

SPORTS REPORTER



India is still the only country who has yet to host Bangladesh in a full series but their captain Rahul Dravid believes that the Tigers deserve to play all over the world including in his country.

"I haven't had a look at the schedule but I think Bangladesh deserve to play outside the country, all over the world including in India," said the 34-year skipper while talking at an official press conference at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

India not only played the inaugural Test match against Bangladesh in 2000 but also have visited twice to be involved in full series but unfortunately the Bangladeshi team are yet to make a full appearance in India.

Indian cricket authorities have always produced a cold shoulder on the topic of hosting the Tigers by citing that the tour would not be commercially viable for them.

But now they can change their attitude from taking words from their captain.

"Bangladesh have improved a lot in international cricket since 2004. Their team has changed a lot. We expect stiffer challenge than the one that we had last time," was the observation of the Indian skipper.

"They are a young side which is a positive. And for them to have done well in the World Cup is something that the young boys will benefit from a lot. It is good for Bangladesh cricket that a lot of young guys are coming through," he also added.

Immediately after reaching Mirpur yesterday cricket manager Ravi Shastri and bowling coach Venkatesh Prasad first visited the pitch before Dravid went to look at it. It was learnt that the India team were trying to get information about the practice match played on the surface on Sunday.

It is expected that the surface may suit Bangladesh's left-arm spin trio who showed brilliant performances

in the just concluded World Cup.

"I had a quick look at the wicket but I think it's better to have an assessment tomorrow, as it is still 24-48 hours before we can have an idea. We'll look at it tomorrow and it looks a hard one with a lot of grass on it and I think it will keep low as the game goes on," said Dravid.

"I think it's same for both sides and I never had an issue with wickets and as an international team we have to play in different condition and that is one of the challenges of being an international cricketer and we'll be looking forward to it," he also explained.

The Indian skipper however issued a warning that they were not thinking about what happened in

the past.

"Any international series against international team is significant, irrespective of what happened in the past. I think any series is significant and irrespective of what happened, we expect to do well. Obviously Bangladesh did well in the World Cup and played very well against us in Trinidad. We have come here to try and play some good, tough cricket and do well," he said.

Dravid said that the series gave them the opportunity to bounce back from the disappointing World Cup.

"Any assignment is as difficult or as easy as you make it out to be. Every time I have played for India (as player or captain) it has been a great chal-

lenge. I don't view this as more or less difficult. I think it's a great opportunity for us to bounce back after a disappointing World Cup," he said.

Uncapped middle order Bengal batsman Manoj Tiwary, who has good chance to make his debut, sustained an injury during the practice session but Dravid said it was nothing serious.

"He's just had a fall while fielding and he's monitored by doctors so no real concerns at the moment. He's fine. He went out and fielded again.

"He seems to be okay. No real causes for concern there," Dravid informed adding that he is also recovering from his nose injury.



PHOTO: STAR
HEAT GETTING ON HIM: India captain Rahul Dravid wipes sweat off his face after a batting stint during a nets session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Smart bat for big-hitters

PTI, Melbourne

Australia's World Cup-winning team may not be in need of it but a hi-tech Smart Cricket Bat to help big hitters like Adam Gilchrist smash the ball even further could be on the market within 18 months.

The Australian-developed, Smart Cricket Bat, has been patented as the world's first bat with active vibration control, a system already in use in baseball bats and tennis racquets, reports 'The Australian'.

The Smart Cricket Bat's key to reducing the "zinging effect" felt by big-hitting batsmen is in its innovative handle. It can reduce vibration by up to 42 per cent.

Melbourne's RMIT University has developed the bat in conjunction with the Australian Research

ESPN

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Live at 2:30 pm
Australia v China
Live at 4:00 pm
India v Argentina
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Lara digs at WICB

PTI, Port of Spain

Batting great Brian Lara, who has often been on a collision course with the Caribbean cricket establishment, has taken another shot at the West Indies Board by questioning their integrity and efficiency.

Lara made the remarks against the WICB at a function to inaugurate a cancer treatment centre

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Fans missing 'Dada'

AFP, Dhaka

The mystery of the missing Sourav Ganguly has baffled not only Indian fans but also millions of his supporters across the border in Bangladesh.

The former India captain and senior pro Sachin Tendulkar were left out of the one-day series starting here on Thursday, with the selectors insisting the duo had been rested. Legendary all-rounder Kapil Dev was convinced the two had been dropped after the World Cup debacle where India were knocked out in the first round after losing to Bangladesh and eventual finalists Sri Lanka.

Both Ganguly and Tendulkar have been picked for the two Test matches to follow, but the omission of two of the most successful batsmen in one-day history hasirked Bangladeshi fans.

"India just refuses to take Bangladesh seriously and they will pay for it like they did in the World Cup," said a young fan Ashraful Momin.

"Sourav 'dada' (elder brother) is very popular here, and not getting a chance to see him and Sachin is very disappointing."

Added another fan Mohammad

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Mashrafe scare for Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are set for a blow before the start of the demanding series against India as pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has been complaining of back pain since yesterday.

Team management sources said that the leading paceman Mashrafe, who shone India in the World Cup with a four-wicket burst, is unlikely to play the first ODI on May 10 at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

The braveheart cricketer looked uncomfortable in the middle after bowling for twenty minutes during Tigers' practice session under immense heat in Mirpur yesterday and immediately complained of back pain, an injury which creeps up on him from time to time.

The Narail quick, who has both his knees operated on, left the field with his hands on his back and a concerned look on his face.

"Right at the moment his condition is not good because he can't stand easily," a team sources said.

The team-management, which was supposed to pick the final eleven for the first one-day yesterday, however delayed the selection following Mashrafe's injury complaint. The selection panel headed by Faruque Ahmed is expected to get the final report from team physio Paul Close today.

If the 23-year-old fails to get the green signal from the physio then the selectors might turn to right-arm paceman Shahadat Hossain to share the final wicket with Syed Rasel.

However, the encouraging factor is that the paceman had earlier complained several times of the back pain but dramatically recovered the following day only to show his true character as born fighter.

"In West Indies he complained of back pain several times but ultimately completed the tour without any interruption. That's why we are hopeful that something like that can happen also this time," said a cricketer without disclosing his identity.

Uncertain future for Dav

Cricket

AFP, Dhaka

Bangladesh's outgoing coach Dav Whatmore hopes to impress his potential Indian employers by plotting India's downfall in the one-day and Test series starting on Thursday.

Whatmore, who finishes his four-year tenure with Bangladesh after the India tour ends on May 29, is seen as a strong contender, if not the frontrunner, to replace Greg Chappell as India's coach.

"I don't know what the future holds," the 53-year-old said ahead of the much-anticipated series of three one-dayers and two Tests.

"All I know is I will be without a job after May 29. I also know I can't afford to stay unemployed for too long."

"But as of now, I am totally focussed and committed to ensuring that Bangladesh do well in this series."

Whatmore, a former Australian Test batsman, has been regarded as one of the best in the business ever since he masterminded Sri Lanka's triumphant World Cup campaign in 1996.

He returned from the recent

World Cup in the Caribbean with his reputation enhanced after Bangladesh qualified for the second round for the first time and secured wins over India and formidable South Africa.

Whatmore declined an offer by the Bangladesh Cricket Board to remain with the team, saying he was looking for "new challenges" and even publicly declared his intention to coach India.

The Australian, however, insisted he was not in talks with either India or Pakistan, who too have advertised for a new coach following Bob Woolmer's tragic death at the World Cup.

"I have not been lobbying," he said. "I don't go promoting myself. I have not sent my application to the Indian board as has been said."

"I have also not been formally approached by the Pakistani Cricket Board. Somebody spoke to me on their behalf during the World Cup asking for my contact details but I have not heard from them since."

When Chappell quit India after the disastrous World Cup campaign, the Indian board appointed former captain-turned-commentator Ravi Shastri as interim coach for the Bangladesh tour.

Shastri is also on the seven-man panel of the Indian board that will pick Chappell's long-term successor in time for the tour of England and Ireland starting in June.

Shastri is expected to gather feedback on Whatmore, or speak to him directly, during the tour to gauge whether he fits India's requirements.

All four Asian Test teams could be looking for a new coach if Tom Moody decides to quit World Cup finalists Sri Lanka.

Moody will discuss his future with Sri Lankan officials in mid-May after a brief holiday in Britain amid speculation he may return home as coach of Western Australia.

Sri Lanka-born Whatmore played seven Tests for Australia in 1979 as a top order batsman before taking up coaching, making his mark with Sri Lanka's World Cup win. He also coached English county Lancashire and had another stint with Sri Lanka, before taking up the challenge to transform Bangladesh cricket in 2003.

Under Whatmore, Bangladesh secured their lone Test win over Zimbabwe and won five one-dayers against established teams, including world champions Australia, South Africa, India (twice) and Sri Lanka.