



(L) India captain Rahul Dravid (L) talks with his predecessor Sourav Ganguly while (R) leg-spinner Anil Kumble (R) checks the quality of a bat as Bangladesh paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza looks on during their training sessions at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.



PHOTOS: STAR

Sharif added as cover

SPORTS REPORTER

All-rounder Mohammad Sharif was included in the Bangladesh squad as cover for paceman Shahadat Hossain for the second and final Test against India today.

Due to Shahadat's weeklong viral fever, Sharif was called up but now it seems that the lanky paceman, who took five wickets in the first Test at Chittagong, is likely to play as he bowled in the nets at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed explained the choice of the seamer, saying, "Sharif is covering for Shahadat but he was picked because of his previous Test experience as compared to the other impressive fast bowlers of the domestic circuit."

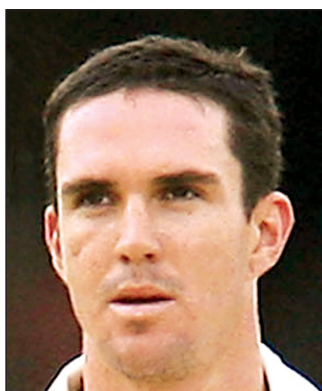
Sharif's inclusion also highlighted the fact that the

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Did U Know?

West Indies cricket legend Sir Vivian Richards, in his younger days, used to work as a waiter in his native St John's in Antigua to earn pocket money.



Kevin Pietersen

(England's star batsman)

"It's a way of keeping me tuned in and relaxing. I can't just concentrate, concentrate, concentrate. I'm no Einstein."

On his ongoing 'conversation' with Chris Gayle during his hundred in the first innings of the first Test against West Indies at Lord's last week.

What to WATCH

BTV & NEO Sports

Bangladesh v India
Second Test, Day 1
Live from 10:00 am

ESPN

England v West Indies
Second Test, Day 1
Live from 4:00 pm

Nothing less than 5 days

BISHWAJIT ROY



starts today at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium after a rain-curtailed draw in Chittagong.

It was a common feeling on the eve of the battle as half of the action in Chittagong was spoiled by rain.

But nobody can be assured of an uninterrupted Test match just like nobody is sure about how the pitch will behave in the venue, which is going to host its first Test match after holding five one-day internationals.

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar seemed to trust the ground experts as he expects bounce and pace from the surface while his Indian counterpart Rahul Dravid expects low bounce as the game gets older.

"To be honest this is the first

Test we are playing in this wicket. We played couple of ODIs. So to us it is a new wicket. Probably we will see some more pace and bounce than in Chittagong," observed Bashar.

"It is a different soil with more black soil then compared to the red content at the earlier game. We think it may keep a bit low as the game progresses. It might spin too. It looks quite firm at the moment, but it might start keeping low as what we have seen in the one-day games as well," predicted Dravid, one of the finest batsmen in the world.

Whatever the fact is, Bashar's men should have a much better batting performance in the first innings if they want to draw a series for the first time against a top-ranked side. Two lower-order batsmen -- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Shahadat Hossain -- salvaged their side in the first Test but one can't expect this kind of service every game.

Highlight of the first Test was the bowling of Bangladesh's two new-ball bowlers but the home team will need big scores at the top of the order. And the good news was that their second innings

performance in Chittagong was quite satisfactory.

"We are confident. We did not have a bad Test in Chittagong. We kept coming back when India pushed us. But it will be a different ball game here if we play all the five days. As a team we are confident that we can repeat the performance again. And let's hope that everything goes for us in this Test match," said the Bangladesh skipper.

The 34-year old Tigers' skipper however said that they were not thinking of the outcome of the Test rather playing good cricket.

"In one-day if you have a good day, you can win but it is not the case in Tests. We are not going to play a Test match thinking that we are going to play to win this game or draw this game. Our main target is to play good cricket for five days and push the opponent as much as we can," he said.

"But if anything comes to us, we will take it. I will not be surprised if we can draw this game. It's going to be tough but we remain positive. If we play five days, there is always a chance of a result," he added.

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Eng sans Freddie, again

Second Test against Windies begins today

Cricket

AFP, Leeds

England's pace bowlers will be given another chance to prove they can function without 'Freddie' after all-rounder Andrew Flintoff was ruled out of the second Test against the West Indies starting at Headingley here Friday.

Officials, doubtless conscious of the need to look after the long-term health of their star player, decided against bringing paceman Flintoff back for the second match of a four-Test series after he missed the drawn series opener at Lord's with a recurrence of his longstanding left ankle problem.

A few overs in the nets at Headingley on Wednesday were all it needed for the England management to pull the plug on thoughts of Lancashire's Flintoff appearing at arch-rivals Yorkshire's headquarters, even though they'd originally planned on giving him a two-day trial.

"It was deemed that Andrew's ankle did not demonstrate sufficient improvement after his first bowling session today (Wednesday)," said an England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) statement, "and in order to allow the ankle to rehabilitate effectively and continue to improve it was felt the best decision was to rule him out now without a further assessment tomorrow (Thursday)."

The statement added: "Andrew will leave the England squad tonight (Wednesday) and return to Lancashire where he will continue to undergo rehabilitation and revive."

"He will only begin to bowl at an appropriate stage and any participation in Lancashire's forthcoming county matches will be made in due course."

Without Flintoff, England opted for a four-man as opposed to their favoured five-man, attack at Lord's and then found themselves a

bowler light when Matthew Hoggard went off injured in his 11th over with a thigh problem and didn't return.

However, Flintoff's absence means England have been spared

the potentially awkward problem of dropping either Paul Collingwood or Ian Bell, both of whom scored hundreds at Lord's, in order to fit in the same team both returning

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PHOTO: AFP

England captain Michael Vaughan hones his batting skills in the nets during a practice session at Headingley in Leeds yesterday. Vaughan is set to play his first Test in two years when he takes to the field against the West Indies in the second match from today.

Mashrafe replaces Shoaib

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has replaced Pakistan superstar Shoaib Akhtar in the Asian squad for the Afro-Asia Cup beginning next month in India.

Shoaib had pulled out two days earlier as he failed to recover sufficiently from a knee injury.

But the question is whether it will be a risk for Bangladesh to allow this inspirational cricketer to play the tournament considering that he has been complaining of back pain frequently. Adding to the injury, there is another tough tour in Sri Lanka ahead.

Bangladesh cricket team is scheduled to fly to Colombo on June 17 to play three Tests and as many one-day internationals.

"Injury is a big concern for Mashrafe but what we believe is that it is an honour to represent a country in such a competition. We will talk with physio before releasing him for the tournament," said chief selector Faruque Ahmed.

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar was also in favour of Mashrafe playing in the tournament.

"If the physio gives him the green signal, he should play. I think he did not have enough cricket in his career due to injury and should take every opportunity," opined Bashar.

Mortaza is the second Bangladesh player to make it to the one-day international squad after the inclusion of veteran left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique. Mortaza is also a part of the Asian Twenty20 international squad for the one-off match on June 5 in Bangalore.

He was the man-of-the-match in the first Test against India in Chittagong for his first-innings 79 and four-wicket haul.

The three-match ODI series gets underway on June 6 in Bangalore, followed by the next two games in Chennai on June 9 and 10 respectively.

Road named after Rana in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Mujgunni main road under Khalishpur thana of Khulna city was named after late national cricket Manzarul Islam Rana, who died in a road accident here last March.

The local hero, who met the fatal accident at Chuknagar under Dumuria upazila, was honoured by the Khulna City Corporation, which took the decision at a meeting yesterday.

Satkhira make it to the last four

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Satkhira blanked Rajshahi 2-0 to book a semifinal berth in the Western Union National Youth (U-18) Football Championship on the final day of the final round yesterday.

Both teams ended on seven points but Satkhira, who lost their opening match to eventual Group A winners Noakhali, finished runners-up by virtue of a better goal difference.

Man-of-the-match Mehedi

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Abahani champions

Trophy dedicated to Rana

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani regained the Premier Cricket League title after seven years when they brushed aside Victoria Sporting Club by seven wickets in the penultimate match of the competition yesterday.

Abahani, who play Mohammedan in the final round of Kai-Altech Premier Super League on May 27, took an unassailable lead with 25 points.

Mohammedan Sporting Club and Sonargaon Cricketers also won their respective matches on the day to stay in contention for a second-place finish. Mohammedan have 22 points, one point ahead of last year's runners-up Sonargaon.

Playing the Super League with half the strength with their leading players missing through injury and national duty, Abahani dedicated their 14th league triumph to their

national all-rounder Manzarul Islam Rana who died in a road accident last March.

"Rana played his role in the first leg and we missed him badly. As soon as the match finished, we announced that this victory is for Rana," told Abahani cricket secretary GS Hassan Tamim.

"We struggled not only for absence of players but some quarters tried to make sure we do not get those players during our super league campaign. We even had to make a great effort to field 11 players at one stage," said the former national cricketer who heaves his praises on former Bangladesh

cricket captain Aminul Islam Bulbul.

"In his first season as a coach, Bulbul has proved that he has one of the best minds. He worked hard, he is very calculating and my heartiest congratulations to him."

"He has done an excellent job for us and behaved as a true professional. I think he will go far as a coach," he headed.

Abahani, who suffered a defeat to Biman after their Super League opener against outgoing two-time champions Old DOHS was washed out, came to the crucial game on the back of a win against Sonargaon and stand-in captain Nazimuddin did not hesitate to elect to field at the Fatullah Stadium.

A fiery spell by Talha Jubair broke a good opening stand between Imrul Kayes and Nasiruddin Faruque, who added 46 runs in nine overs on way to 172 all out.

Former national paceman

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POINTS TABLE

Teams	M	W	L	T	A	Pts
Abahani	15	12	2	-	1	25
Mohammedan	15	10	3	1	1	22
Sonargaon	15	10	4	1	-	21
Victoria	15	9	6	-	-	18
Biman	15	8	6	-	1	17
Old DOHS	15	6	8	-	1	13



PHOTO: STAR

Abahani players and officials celebrate clinching the KAI-Altech Premier Cricket League title with a match in hand after their seven-wicket win over Victoria Sporting Club at the Fatullah Stadium yesterday.

Day's swansong

SPORTS REPORTER



It's hard not to be emotional before saying goodbye. Outgoing Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore may not be an exception, but

as a professional he is rational enough to give a reality check before his last match with the Tigers.

"It's pretty much the same (feeling) as any other game at the moment," was the reaction of the 53-year old Sri Lankan-born Australian, who parts his four-year association with the Bangladesh cricket after Bangladesh's second Test match against India, which starts today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

"I tried hard not to be too emotional. I mean this is still a serious game of cricket. And we just need to be very careful that we don't repeat certain mistakes we have done in the past. I am not too focused on anything else than these boys doing well tomorrow,

start the game as well as they can," he added.

Since his taking over the realm of the Tigers in June 2003, Bangladesh played 26 Tests with only one victory against Zimbabwe at Chittagong. Four years in charge,

to wins also against teams like

Australia, India (twice), Sri Lanka and South Africa.

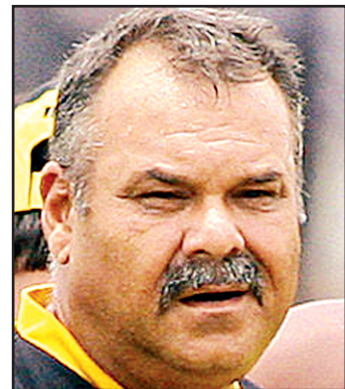
With the above fact Whatmore now expects from his charges some good and sensible cricket in the last game against India.

"We will try to do the best, as much as we can individually and just see whether we will take our chances. We are playing against a good side. No question about that. However, if we start focusing on result oriented issues or result orientated statement then I feel it's taking us away from reality, what we need to be thinking about. We have got to put our best foot forward," he said.

Is he satisfied with his stint with the Tigers?

The reply: "It's never really a job that you can say it's finished. At any point you can stop and asses that you are, but look months after, it all changes. I don't think you can ever say that it is complete, or finished, particularly in our case. It is very much ongoing effort to get the team to play as competitively as possible against all oppositions and in as many different conditions as possible."

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DAV WHATMORE

he has also had four draws and experienced 12 innings defeats. On the other hand, the one-day record looks much better with 33 wins in 89 matches, though 18 came last year mostly against the minnows of world cricket. But he led the team

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Shamima Akhtar Liza lifted the Prime Bank 2nd Women's International Rating chess tournament crown with a match in hand even after a draw in the sixth round yesterday.

After five straight wins, Liza shared points with Zakia Sultana to collect 5.5 points.

Her nearest contender IWM Rani Hamid was on 4.5 points, closely followed by Zakia, Masuda Begum, Shamiha Sharmin Shimmi, Kishwara Shajrin Eva and Mimi Arjunam all on four points.

GM CHESS

The 8th United Insurance and United Leasing Grandmasters chess tournament will begin on May 27 at the Chess Federation hall-room. All Bangladeshi players above 2200 rating have been asked to send their entries for the competition, which is expected to be graced by GMs and IMs from India,

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