

No Tushar for Tests yet

Bashar retained in the team, Riyad the new face

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY

Middle-order batsman Tushar Imran was once again ignored for the sake of the so-called team combination when the national selectors yesterday announced the Sri Lanka-bound Bangladesh Test team.

Tushar was, however, included for the limited-overs series with only one new face in off-spinning all-rounder Mahmudullah Riyad making it to the one-day side.

Immediate past captain Habibul Bashar expectedly retained his place in the 15-member Test team while the selectors also kept faith in seaming all-rounder Mohammad Sharif, who was recalled after five years in an emergency situation for the second Test against India.

Surprisingly, the selection panel also decided to erase the one-day specialist tag from Abdur Razzak, who got the nod for the Test side ahead of fellow left-arm spinner Enamul Haque.

Mushfiqur Rahim was recalled as a back-up wicketkeeper and middle-order batsman, the choice that virtually cost Tushar a place.

It was also surprising, one might call the decision funny too, the way the Faruque Ahmed-led selection panel handled the 23-year-old right-

hander Tushar.

Faruque came up with a lot of explanations behind the exclusion while speaking at a press conference at Mirpur yesterday but hardly sounded convincing.

Tushar was certain to play in the Test series against India but only illness kept him in the dressing room in the first Test. It was natural the chief selector failed to give a satisfactory answer to why he was discarded without being given a chance against India in the second match.

It can be noted that the selectors had claimed earlier that Tushar, out of the ODI series against India at home, was picked for the Tests because of consistent good form in domestic circuit as well as with the A team.

It looks beyond explanation why the batsman, an 'automatic choice' for the selectors at one stage, has suddenly become the wrong one.

In reply to a volley of questions on the issue, Faruque came up with only one answer: they had to do it for the team combination.

It has been told in different forums that the stylish player from Jessore has been deprived for long because of the all-powerful former coach Dav Whatmore's personal disliking.

Faruque even had to face allegations about damaging Abahani's title charge by picking Tushar during a

crucial stage of the Premier Cricket League.

Although Faruque dismissed such claims, no one could find any solid reason behind his exclusion from the Test side when there was a scope to accommodate the batsman in the team inclusive of three openers -- veteran Javed Omar, uncapped Mehrab Hossain and out-of-form Shahriar Nafees.

"We felt a back-up wicketkeeper would be needed considering the conditions (in Sri Lanka) and length of the tour. We could even use Rahim as a specialist batsman, if the situation demands. That's why there was no scope for Tushar. And you know Rajin (Saleh) had a good

series against India," explained Faruque.

He also explained why they kept faith on Nafees, who has been going through a too long bad patch.

"We picked up Habibul because of his batting career and for the same reason we feel that Nafees deserves a place. True, he struggled in recent times but we should understand that before the last series he had a tremendous hundred and a fifty against Australia," he added.

Faruque informed that injury of Tapash Baisya forced them to continue with Sharif, the fourth seamer besides vice-captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shahadat Hossain and Syed Rasel.

"Undoubtedly Tapash would have been our first choice but he has yet to recover from his ankle injury. It would be nice if we had other pacers like Mashrafe and Shahadat but the reality is we have to do with what is available," he said.

"Razzak is basically a one-day bowler but we feel that even he can be useful in Tests after his impressive performance in the shorter-version. We considered Riyad because of his last few months' performance as an all-rounder. The young man's batting and

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TEST SQUAD

Mohammad Ashraful (captain), Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (vice-captain), Habibul Bashar, Javed Omar, Mehrab Hossain, Shahriar Nafees, Rajin Saleh, Shakib Al Hasan, Khaled Mashud, Shahadat Hossain, Syed Rasel, Mohammad Rafique, Abdur Razzak, Mohammad Sharif and Mushfiqur Rahim.

PLAYERS TO JOIN THE ODI SQUAD

Aftab Ahmed, Tamim Iqbal, Tushar Imran, Forhad Reza and Mahmudullah Riyad.



PHOTO: STAR

Tigers stars (from L-R) Abdur Razzak, Mohammed Ashraful, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mohammed Rafique and Tamim Iqbal pose at the ZIA international airport yesterday prior to their departure to participate in the Afro-Asian Cup in India this month.

5 Tigers off to Bangalore for Afro-Asia Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

With hopes to make it to the playing elevens, five Bangladeshi cricketers including newly appointed captain Mohammad Ashraful and his deputy Mashrafe Bin Mortaza left Dhaka for Bangalore yesterday to take part in the second Afro-Asia Cup in India.

"We want to play in the competition. Our main objective is to justify the inclusion of a number of Bangladeshi players for the prestigious tournament," Ashraful told reporters at the Zia International Airport.

Pace spearhead Mashrafe also echoed with his skipper's sentiment, saying that they have to prove that they are competent to represent the Asia XI in the competition.

"We should prove our worth. If I get the chance then I will definitely

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Abahani's date with Ctg MSC today

SPORTS REPORTER

The second week of the B. League's second leg begins today with Abahani looking to return to the top of the table when they meet Chittagong Mohammedan in the derby.

However, the Dhaka giants will need full three points against a side who have conceded only one home defeat and also held Abahani to a scoreless draw when they had toured the capital for the first leg match.

Abahani will have none of their three Argentine players but have included two new faces from Cameroon and Sheikh Russel's discarded Moroccan Khoubache for the second part of the league.

Chittagong Mohammedan, however, lost to Muktiuddha 2-1 in

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Iranian GM Ghaem has the last laugh

SPORTS REPORTER

Iranian Grand Master Ghaem Maghami Ehsan lifted the crown in the 8th United Insurance and United Leasing Grandmasters Chess Tournament which concluded at the NSC conference room yesterday.

Ghaem finished with eight points after ten rounds, edging Vietnam's GM Nguyen Anh Dung and local GM Reefat Bin Sattar who ended with 7.5 points each.

Reefat, however, clinched the runner-up spot after tie-breaking with Nguyen settling for third place.

Ghaem pocketed 1600 US dollars while Reefat and Nguyen 900 dollars each.

In the final round, Ghaem defeated India's PDS Girinath,

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Afro-Asia Cup loses shine

Cricket

AFP, Bangalore

The withdrawal of top cricketers like Graeme Smith and Sachin Tendulkar and an unseemly broadcasting flap have taken the gloss off the Afro-Asia Cup cricket series starting here on Wednesday.

Sri Lankans Muttiah Muralidaran, Chaminda Vaas, Kumar Sangakkara and Lasith Malinga, and Pakistan's Shoaib Akhtar are also unavailable for the three-match series due to either prior commitments or injuries.

Smith, originally named the Africa captain, was replaced with his South Africa teammate Mark Boucher after undergoing knee surgery last month.

Mahela Jayawardene, who led Sri Lanka to the World Cup final in April, is Asia captain for the one-dayers to be held in Bangalore (June 6) and Chennai (June 9 and 10).

The series, a brainchild of former world cricket chief Jagmohan Dalmiya of India, was launched in

2005 with the aim of raising funds for cricket development in both continents.

But it has yet to catch the public imagination despite being granted official one-day status by the International Cricket Council.

The series was first held in South Africa, but in the off-season due to a crammed international schedule. It was hit by a spate of withdrawals and poor attendances.

It was not played last year due to lack of suitable dates.

This time, the series comes immediately after India's tour of Bangladesh and was in danger of being scrapped after original rights holder Nimbus Sports pulled out citing lack of public interest.

It eventually got a lifeline when the pan-Asian ESPN-Star network agreed to broadcast the matches.

"The circumstances were such that the tournament could not be cancelled, considering that the matches were designated as official one-dayers," said Asian Cricket Council chief executive Ashraf Haq.

It is no surprise that fans, cricketers and sponsors have shown little interest in the series as it will be played amid a busy schedule and just before the start of a monsoon season in southern India.

Sri Lanka and India are both preparing for serious engagements later this month. Sri Lanka will host Bangladesh while India will tour Ireland and England.

But Asia coach Roger Binny believed the series would still be exciting despite the absence of top players.

"We still have got some big players in both sides," said Binny, a member of India's 1983 World Cup-winning squad.

"One cannot really blame the players as they have prior commitments. We had foreseen this problem."

The series will be preceded by a Twenty20 match between the reserve players of the two continents in Bangalore on Tuesday.

3rd pathology report sought

Jamaican police readying for climb-down

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Although Jamaican police are refusing to officially comment, it is now being widely reported that they

are set to make what will be an embarrassing climb-down later this week and admit that Bob Woolmer was not murdered but died of natural causes.

A report in the Jamaica Gleaner has quoted an unnamed senior local police officer as saying Woolmer

wasn't murdered. "Certainly, in my view it was not murder," the senior officer told the paper. It also added that Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) investigators are hoping to receive a third pathology report next week, which is expected to concur with the second report conducted by British government pathologist Dr. Nat Carey.

However, the JCF will not make an official comment until after the final toxicology results are in and, more important, the third pathology report has been received.

This adds to the spate of reports over the weekend in England claiming that Scotland Yard's review of the case had led to the same conclusion. Based on the findings of the Home Office pathologist, Scotland Yard is believed to have concluded that Woolmer died from heart failure and chronic ill health. The broken bone in his neck, which was key to suggestions that he had been strangled, is now understood to have been caused by his subsequent heavy fall.

Woolmer's widow, Gill, and their family are understood to have cautiously welcomed the news. Neil Manthorp, a South African cricket journalist and a friend of the family, told The Sunday Telegraph: "There will definitely be a great sense of relief if this is confirmed. I hope for Bob's sake and that of his family that his death was quick and painless."

An editorial in the Jamaica Gleaner yesterday said the u-turn might not be the end of the matter. "The twists and turns in the Bob Woolmer case will, we suspect, continue until all the rumours, speculation and half-blown theories regarding the cause of his death have been finally laid to rest by concrete forensic and other evidence."

It went on to say that pressure was now growing on Dr Ere

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India withdrew from the 1950 World Cup because FIFA refused to let their team play barefoot.

What to WATCH

ESPN

Afro-Asia Cup

Twenty20 Match

Asia XI v Africa XI

Live from 7:55 pm

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 11:00 pm

STAR Sports

French Open

Men's & Women's Singles

Quarterfinals

Live from 4:00 pm



Wasim Akram

(Pakistan cricket legend)

"I think the culture in Pakistan and India is such where the players feel at ease with a foreign coach, so I feel that a foreigner can help in a better way."

DAY'S EVENT

B. League

Ctg Mohammedan v Abahani (4:00 pm)
Venue: M A Aziz Stadium, Chittagong

Farashganj v Khulna Abahani (4:30 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



PHOTO: STAR

AXING TUSHAR: Bangladeshi selectors (from L-R) Akram Khan, Faruque Ahmed and Athar Ali Khan announce the team for the Test and ODI series against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

India close to naming coach

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

Dav Whatmore remains the leading contender to take over as India's next cricket coach but is not a certainty for the job as officials prepare to make their choice on Monday night.

The former Sri Lanka and Bangladesh coach is regarded as the frontrunner to succeed Greg Chappell, who quit after India's first-round exit from the World Cup.

Whatmore, 53, publicly expressed his interest in coaching Rahul Dravid's men even before he ended his four-year tenure with Bangladesh a week ago.

But Whatmore's appointment is not a foregone conclusion as a seven-man selection panel from the Board of

Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) prepares to meet over dinner on Monday in the southern city of Bangalore.

"Whatmore stands a very good chance to become coach but I won't say it is certain," said Niranjan Shah, the BCCI secretary. "It all depends on what transpires at the meeting."

Sharad Pawar, the board's president, heads the panel, which also includes three former captains in Sunil Gavaskar, Srinivas Venkataraghavan and Ravi Shastri.

The panel's recommendation will have to be approved by the BCCI's working committee on June 12.

A member of the panel, who did not want to be identified, told AFP that Whatmore's chances were "60-40".

"We will have an open mind at the meeting and do what we think is best for Indian cricket," he said. "I can't say

now if someone is sure to get the job."

Former South Africa coach Graham Ford, who is now working with English county team Kent, and his Ashes-winning England counterpart Duncan Fletcher have emerged as last-minute contenders for the job.

A BCCI source said that although Whatmore was the only person to have formally applied for the job, the seven-member committee appointed to find a successor to Chappell might look beyond.

India have had a foreign coach since 2000 with New Zealander John Wright serving until 2005 before Chappell, the former Australian captain, took over for a two-year period.

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Aussies star for counties

Cricket

AFP, London

Australia duo Justin Langer and Stuart Clark both turned in standout performances during the latest round of English county Friends Provident Trophy one-day matches on Sunday.

Langer -- not included in champions Australia's World Cup squad -- made 145 from 149 balls, with three sixes and 15 fours, as Somerset piled up 332 for five in their 50 overs against Middlesex at Lord's.

Middlesex were bowled out for 245 as Somerset won by 87 runs.

Elsewhere in the South Conference, current Australia pace bowler Clark took four for 25 for Hampshire as Glamorgan were bowled out for 146 at Swansea. Hampshire, having scored 283 for six, won by 137 runs.

South Africa all-rounder Andrew Hall starred with bat and ball as Kent

thrashed Sussex by 112 runs at Hove. Hall's 123 took Kent to 264 for nine and he then dismissed both Sussex openers as the hosts were bowled out for 152.

England opening batsman Alastair Cook warmed up for Thursday's third Test against the West Indies with 125 as Essex beat Surrey by eight runs at Whitgift School.

Cook struck 12 fours before being run out as Essex made 248, with Pakistan's Azhar Mahmood taking four for 29.

Surrey were looking good while ex-England batsmen Mark Ramprakash (77) and Mark Butcher (53) were at the crease but Danish Kaneria took four wickets as the hosts were beaten in the competition for the first time this season to open up the semifinal race.

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming made 107 as Nottinghamshire beat Midlands rivals Leicestershire by 24 runs.

Fleming's New Zealand teammate Scott Styris fell two short of a

hundred but his innings played a key role in Durham's 53-run win away to Yorkshire at Headingley, where Anthony McGrath hit an even hundred for the hosts.

Sri Lanka wicketkeeper Kumar Sangakkara scored 115 and Darren Maddy 106 for Warwickshire against neighbours Worcestershire at New Road.

But the duo still finished on the losing side as Worcestershire finished on 307 for two with 102 from Australia's Phil Jacques eclipsed by former England batsman and Worcestershire captain Vikram Solanki's 144 not out.

Graham Wagg took four for 36 as Derbyshire bowled out hosts Scotland for 102. Derbyshire lost four wickets on the way to their modest victory target but still won with plenty in hand.