

Tigers play warm-up today

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo

With hopes of getting back the confidence, Bangladesh will play their only limited-over build-up match today against a Sri Lankan selection before they begin the three-match one-day series against the formidable hosts.

But a problem with the venue has kept the Bangladesh team management in uncertainty about the possibility of a match being held.

The match was originally scheduled at the Nondescript Cricket Club (NCC) ground but Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) authority suddenly shifted it to the Colts Cricket Club ground due to security reason.

The visiting team management was not ready to play the match at the Colts ground as they found the pitch unprepared yesterday afternoon.

SLC media manager Samantha Algamal informed that they had to change the venue because the government has imposed restrictions on public transport in the NCC ground and its adjacent area from today morning because of a government programme.

Sri Lankan government will celebrate their troop's recent victory against LTTE at the Independence Square, near the venue.

In the mean time, the team think-tank announced a 12-member squad for the match without any room for veteran opener Javed Omar, Mehrab Hossain and fast bowler Shahadat Hossain.

The team sources said that it is more or less the same team which will play the first one-dayer at the P Sara on July 20. They are in confusion with the choice of all-rounders Forhad Reza and uncapped Mahmudullah Riyad, the latter being the spin option while Reza is a medium-pacer.

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PHOTO: AFP

ABOUT TIME HE STOOD UP: Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful honing his batting in the nets during a practice session at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

Mashrafe vows improvement

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY from Colombo

It is believed that Mashrafe Bin Mortaza appears as a completely different character once he enters inside the ropes. The 23-year old leading Bangladesh paceman always tries to give more than hundred percent on the field and that is the reason he is known as a 'brave-heart' cricketer.

His presence in the team has always made a big difference but unfortunately for the first time in his career there has been whispering over his keenness and involvement in the ongoing series although he is vice-captain of the team.

It was not because that he disappointed everybody with his performance both with the bat and ball but rather his uncaring attitude in the series. Many were surprised because it is something that has been hardly experienced before.

Many believe that Mashrafe has to come out with his best if Bangladesh wants to do something

special in the three-match one-day series to put aside their heartbreaking Test performance.

The Bangladesh vice-captain however himself was aware of the fact that the question was raised about his effort levels in the disastrous Test series but had his own explanations.

"This kind of question arises only when you don't perform well. But what I must agree with is that I have suffered from a lack of confidence in the series and what I felt is that I was a little bit tired because of too much cricket for the last two years," defended the "Narail Express", who even played the Afro-Asia Cup in India before the series.

The pace spearhead bowled 73 overs to take three wickets in the Test series and scored only 23 runs in six innings although he made many believe that he has got the ability to contribute with the bat especially after two half centuries against India in the last series at home.

"I know my performance was not up to the mark. I am also frustrated

with my performance because I had a lot of expectation after I missed the last series in Sri Lanka due to injury. But it was not so easy to bowl well against this kind of batting line-up and the conditions were also not in favour of bowlers in the first two games," he said.

"And it always puts pressure on the bowlers when their side is bowled out cheaply in the first innings. But what I realized after the series is that I have to develop the reverse swing in my bowling otherwise it will be impossible to get success with the old ball and I have already talked with Malinga (Lasith) about the matter," he added.

Many criticized Mashrafe after he declared that it is impossible for him to handle bowlers like Muttiah Muralidaran, who will not available for the one-day series for the home side.

"I still believe that I lack the necessary skill in my batting to handle this kind of bowler. You must understand that there is a big difference in the bowling strength of India and Sri Lanka. And most importantly I don't want to give too much emphasis on my batting because I still have to work hard on my bowling. Just think that I have yet to get five wickets in the Test," he replied.

Mashrafe, who played 25 Tests and 68 one-day matches, however was not ready to rank their just concluded Test performance as the worst one.

"I don't think so because our performance in New Zealand and England tours were worse. We actually need some time to emerge as a competitive side in Test cricket," he observed.

Mashrafe promised that he will come up with a much better performance in the one-day series to silence the critics.

"As a team we are a thousand times better in one-day cricket than the Test cricket. So you will see a different Bangladesh in the series although it will not be so easy because Sri Lanka is very strong opponents," he said.

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New coach 'baffles' greats

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Former Pakistan cricket greats Tuesday criticised the choice of Geoff Lawson as national coach, saying that if a foreigner had to take the job it should have been veteran Dav Whatmore.

Ex-captains and coaches Javed Miandad and Intikhab Alam, and fast bowler Sarfraz Nawaz, said Lawson, 49, was too inexperienced for the job. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) announced the appointment of the Australian on Monday.

"I am baffled," said Miandad, a master batsman who coached Pakistan three times in the last decade before Bob Woolmer replaced him in 2004. Woolmer died at the World Cup in the Caribbean in March.

"Even if you want to hire a for-

igner, then why not do it on merit? If merit is the benchmark then Whatmore knows subcontinental teams better than Lawson," said Miandad.

Lawson was on a short-list of three comprising Whatmore and another Australian, Richard Done.

Whatmore coached Sri Lanka to World Cup glory in 1996 and guided Bangladesh to the Super Eights stages of the World Cup this year. But Lawson has no international exposure, having only coached a state side in Australia.

"Even in his playing days Lawson was not one of the best and now he has been preferred over the established candidate, so I think merit was overlooked," said Miandad, a vocal opponent of foreign coaches.

He said Pakistani ex-players such as Intikhab, Wasim Akram and Waqar Younis would have been better.

"Why bring a foreigner when you

have your own former players?" Miandad added. "Our coming generations will now know only about Lawsons and Woolmers and will forget their own players."

"Teams like Zimbabwe, Bangladesh and Canada need a foreign coach because they don't have their own former players, not India and Pakistan who have many great players."

Nawaz, nicknamed the "Sultan of Swing" during the 1980s for pioneering reverse swing, blamed player power for Lawson's appointment.

"The PCB is promoting players' power because players wanted Lawson instead of Whatmore," said Nawaz.

"Why do we have a fast bowler as a coach when we lose matches due to our batting flops? I can't understand the logic. Next they will bring a foreign batting coach," predicted Nawaz.

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India ponder options

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

India's cricketers enjoyed a "rest" day today, warming down after their second tour game at Chelmsford, but one or two minds might have been working overtime. Rahul Dravid and Co. would have wished for the two practice games to provide a few answers; instead there seem to be more questions on hand with three days to go until the first Test at Lord's.

Wasim Jaffer or Gautam Gambhir? VVS Laxman or Yuvraj Singh? Mahendra Singh Dhoni as wicketkeeper? The first two aren't new instances - Jaffer is prone to a string of failures while Laxman's spot is never certain. But what of

reappeared recently. He has struggled so far in the tour games, often parrying the ball rather than waiting for it, and his grassed chances of Andy Hodd and Robin Martin-Jenkins at Hove and Stuart Broad at Chelmsford, all straightforward ones at international level, would definitely get the team management thinking.

Making his job harder is Dinesh Karthik's presence in the team as a specialist batsman. Karthik is the more agile wicketkeeper and is better standing up to Anil Kumble's bouncy offerings. There will surely be a temptation to ask him to keep as well as bat. It would no doubt add to his burden - squatting all day before opening the batting

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PHOTO: AFP
TAKING INDIA TO ENGLAND: A smiling India cricket captain Rahul Dravid poses beside a miniature of Taj Mahal as it floats down the River Thames in London yesterday.

Russel crush hapless Reds

B LEAGUE

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheikh Russel scored thrice inside last 16 minutes to crush coach-less Muktijoddha 3-0 in the B. League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Moroccan midfielder Saad Abdul Fetai was inspirational behind all the goals, for fellow countryman Touati Younes and substitutes Kaiser and Nayan, as Russel reached within one point of Muktijoddha to brighten their chances to finish among the top three in the inaugural professional football league.

Struggling giants Muktijoddha had Abu Yusuf at the bench but the coach was a showpiece with team non-technical officials taking over.

Yusuf had a row with senior players - ignored by the coach due to lack of fitness - who had arguments with him a couple of days ago and reportedly humiliated the ex-national player.

With the club officials taking sides with players, Yusuf decided not to continue with Muktijoddha further.

"I have cut ties with this team. The officials requested me to stay at the bench in Muktijoddha's last two matches and that is why I am here," Yusuf told after the match.

Muktijoddha, who remained on 33 points after their fourth defeat and second to Russel this season following a 2-1 loss in the first leg, have one match to go against current leaders Abahani in the final round.

Russel, on the other hand, reached 32 points from 18 outings. Wajed Gazi's boys have a six-point deficit with Abahani and need to win their remaining two matches to go atop the table, provided the leaders and second-placed Muktijoddha lose all their games.

Muktijoddha had Arman in the

starting line-up after being sidelined by Yusuf throughout the second leg and the veteran midfielder hardly made any difference.

Russel took early control with Younes threatening to score after ten minutes but the striker's first volley on Bulbul's centre went just wide.

Fetai, who had a very good match, twice tested rival keeper Titumir with long-range freekicks

while Muktijoddha's only chance before the break was provided by Alfaz, but his chip from right was headed wide by Kanchan under pressure from a Russel defender.

Titumir pulled off a fine save five minutes after resumption when the Muktijoddha keeper came out of his line to palm away Bulbul's powerful drive outside from the box.

An otherwise dull Brahim then created the best chance for the

Reds when he released a low drive from 40 yards on the hour. The ball took a wicked drop to unsettle Russel shotstopper Zia who lost it but a lurking Kanchan failed to keep his shot on the rebound under the bar from ten yards.

Fetai wasted a chance ten minutes later but he initiated a move for Younes's seventh league goal in the 74th minute.

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PHOTO: STAR

Muktijoddha striker Alfaz Ahmed (in the foreground) tries to avoid a tackle from Sheikh Russel's Moroccan recruit Rida Saadane during their B.League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

No Fed Cup, second B.League next Feb

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) in an emergency meeting on Monday night set a tentative date for the start of the second B. League in February 2008.

The transfers for the second edition of the professional football league will be held throughout January next year instead of a two-month period allotted for the inaugural version.

The BFF also decided to participate in the Merdeka football tournament in Malaysia in August. The federation, which named a squad for next month's Nehru Cup in India under new coach Syed Naseemuddin, will soon call a different squad.

It was learned that the BFF will send the senior team to the more competitive meet after evaluating standards of the two tournaments. Bangladesh will also take part in Assam's Bordoloi Trophy.

There was frustrating news for the domestic scene, however, as the BFF decided to shelve the Federation Cup and the National Football League for fund crisis and the so-called international commitment of the national teams this season.

It might cost one of the two places for Bangladeshi clubs in the AFC Cup but a federation source said that it would apply for entries of the top two teams of the ongoing B.

League to the prestigious continental event.

The Senior Division Football League or the good old Dhaka League, however, will begin on August 20 after the August 7-10 transfers.

The National Football Championship is likely to begin in November.

Dravid opens India Now

PTI, London

A replica of Taj Mahal sailed down the river Thames here today in a rousing start to the three-month long festivities focussing on India's rich art, culture and lifestyle and aimed at cementing the British capital's age-old ties with the "emerging economic superpower".

The India Festival launched by Bollywood actor Shilpa Shetty, London Mayor Ken Livingstone and Indian cricket captain Rahul Dravid will feature over 1,500 events dedicated to Indian art, film, theatre, music, fashion, food and business.

The replica of the white marble monument of love was created by Bollywood film-set designer BD Gupta and was launched on a barge from Vauxhall to London Bridge, passing through many of London's

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Peter Chingoka

(Chairman of Zimbabwe Cricket)
"They were trying to be mischievous.

They know very well it was our prerogative to pull out of Test cricket for a while and so the decision to resume similarly rests with us. But they wanted to take it out of our hands, and then it into the ICC's."

While hitting out at certain International Cricket Council Full Member countries who, he claimed, tried to block Zimbabwe's return to Test cricket.



DAY'S EVENT

B.League

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Time: 4:30 pm