

Tough but possible

BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong



Everyone in the Bangladesh tent believes that the job has turned into a tough one after losing a great opportunity in Dhaka to pull off their first-ever one-day series victory against any major Test-playing nation.

There is also little doubt that conditions were more suitable in Dhaka for the home side rather than in Chittagong where they are going to play the series-deciding third and final match against New Zealand at the Divisional Stadium here today.

Even the brave Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has declared: "Here it's very difficult. Because the wicket is too flat and we have to give more than hundred percent to win this match and the series," the Tigers vice-captain explained yesterday.

"Definitely the batsmen will dominate in this condition, so there is no alternative for us other than batting our best. It would not be easy for the pace bowlers like Mirpur but the spinners will get assistance in the latter stage, so

winning the toss is important," said the 'Narail Express', who claimed four wickets to lay the foundation of his side's seven-wicket victory in the series opener.

There was, however, little encouraging factor for winning the toss as the toss-winning team -- none other than the home side -- lost thrice. Interestingly, the only team winning the toss and the match were also Bangladesh against minnows Scotland.

"Hope we can capitalise on the chances against Jacob Oram who made the difference in the last match but in my opinion, we have to make sure that (Brendon) McCullum and (Scott) Styris don't appear with their usual style. These two batsmen have the ability to take away the match from anybody," observed the pace spearhead.

The equation, however, is very simple for Bangladesh skipper Mohammad Ashraful: "We bowled and fielded well in the first two games and we have to make sure that our all three departments click in tomorrow's match. The matter is very simple."

"We need to play our best to win the series and I don't think it's impossible. There is a different

wicket and the pitch will be good for batsmen. The outfield is also fast, so we can hope for a good match," said a confident Ashraful, who got back among runs after a long lean patch.

"I think it's important that three top batsmen contribute something," he added.

Coach Jamie Siddons said everybody were excited with the series-decider and confirmed that his guys were looking forward to this game.

"Little bit disappointed for the other day, I thought it was a great opportunity to win the series in Dhaka. We have got another chance now. The series is one-all which is a great feeling. Coming here the people are excited and obviously the players are also excited and looking forward to it," Siddons said.

"But look at the age of the side, they are still very vulnerable under pressure. We got long ways to go. I think we are getting better. I am excited for tomorrow. If we can bat well, we can win," the Australian added.

"The wicket will probably suit New Zealand batsmen more than Dhaka and also our batsmen



PHOTO: ZOAHER HOSSAIN SIKDER

LAST CHANCE TO CREATE HISTORY: Bangladesh cricketers sprint before a practice session at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.



Did U Know?

India pacer Zaheer Khan took five wickets in an innings for the sixth time during the first Test against Australia and first in India.



What to WATCH

BTV
Bangladesh v New Zealand
Third ODI
Live from 9:00am
TEN Sports
ICL Twenty20
Ahmedabad v Chennai
Live from 8:00pm



Citycell B. League
Rahmatganj v Khulna Abahani
Time: 5:00pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



Thierry Henry
(French soccer star)
"We played for him, for ourselves, for French football. We are with the coach."
While he conveys his support for coach Raymond Domenech.

Pragati insures nat'l booters

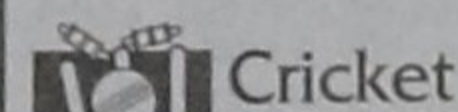
SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday struck a deal with Pragati Insurance to bring the national footballers under insurance for life and injury.

It came on the eve of the national team's trip to play the October 15-25 Merdeka Cup in Malaysia.

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McCullum licking his lips



SPORTS REPORTER From Chittagong

It was the stifling heat coupled with the sultry air from the Bay that greeted the New Zealand team as they entered the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday for their final practice ahead of the deciding one-day match against Bangladesh.

But New Zealand vice-captain Brendon McCullum took that in his stride while making a bold declaration they were going to brave the itchy weather and the nature of typical subcontinent wicket to play much better cricket in the third game to confirm another series victory against the Tigers.

"It's not too bad (a condition). This is what we try to adjust with when we come to the subcontinent," said the wicketkeeper-batsman in a pre-training press briefing.

McCullum also said this series deserves a good finish after the first two low-scoring games in Dhaka.

"I mean good cricket waits for the day. The series is one all and it's great news for fans. Now we want to put up a high scoring game what the series deserve."

The big-hitting batsman himself needs a big score after unimpressive showings in the first two games where his contribution was 14 and 12 respectively. It however hardly reflected what he is capable of. Better known as a nightmare for bowlers, McCullum struck a stunning 30-ball 80 against the Tigers to finish off the chase in just six overs, which is a one-day record.

Now the question is can Bangladesh bowlers be able to quell him for a third time? The flat pitch in Chittagong however speaks in favour of the dashing right-hander.

McCullum also warned that he was looking forward to making his presence felt in the series.

"Yeah, I haven't played yet, tomorrow [Tuesday] is a great opportunity to try and get big runs. I am confident that I will be able to play my natural game and contribute some runs for my team if I get a start," he said.

The tourists' vice-captain said that they were disappointed with their batting in the first two games and also explained the reason behind the poor showings.

"We just came out from an off season. Obviously we have got to try to make some adjustments on the subcontinent wickets. Our top-order batting has been disappointing so far but hope we will try to rectify that tomorrow," he said.

He dismissed the notion that they took the Tigers lightly because of their previous record. "No, not at all. We knew that they were going to be a difficult opposition in their own condition and they bowled very well early on, did not allow us to score runs in this sort wicket."

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PHOTO: AFP

YOU'RE DUE FOR SOME RUNS: New Zealand coach John Bracewell (L) talks to wicketkeeper-batsman Brendon McCullum (C) while captain Daniel Vettori looks on during a training session at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Booters off to KL



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin has asked the national footballers to focus hundred percent on the field during the Merdeka Cup football tournament, which kicks off in Kuala Lumpur tomorrow.

The national football team, which left Dhaka in the early hours of this morning for the Malaysian capital, called on the BFF boss at the BFF Bhaban yesterday afternoon.

"You'll not have to ask for anything while playing for the national team in the future. The BFF will provide all the supports the players need," Salahuddin told the booters.

"In return, we would expect your total commitment to the task you are facing," added the former national captain, who himself played in the Merdeka Cup in the 1970s.

The federation has already introduced match fees and winning bonus to inspire the footballers, who were insured for death and injury

risks hours before their departure.

Shafiqul Islam Manik, in his first assignment as national coach, has taken charge of a team that have not won a single international since their 3-0 win over lowly Guam at home in the inaugural AFC Challenge Cup in April 2006. Even they failed to go beyond the group stage of the SAFF Championship, the regional competition where they are expected to win every time, and returned with draws against Afghanistan and Bhutan from Sri Lanka.

On the back of a barren run of two and a half years, Manik's main target in a group involving higher-ranked teams like Mozambique, Myanmar and Vietnam would be to avoid any disaster.

Bangladesh open their campaign against Mozambique on Thursday, meet Myanmar on Saturday and Vietnam, expected to bring their under-23 side, on Monday.

Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, Nepal and hosts Malaysia complete the other group.

And it was not surprising to see the coach picking up as many as eight defenders and just three

strikers in a 20-member squad, which eventually failed to show any attacking flair in their lone practice match at home on Sunday when they lost 2-0 to a local selection.

Bangladesh, who participated in the coveted tournament in 1973, 1975 and 1983 before making a return last year with a second-string side, lost all three group matches -- to Indonesia, Singapore and Zimbabwe XI.

SQUAD
Aminul Haque, Biplob Bhattacharjya, Hassan Al Mamun, Ariful Islam, Rajani Kanta Barman, Nazrul Islam, Mohammed Sujan, Mofazzel Hossain Salkat, Amit Khan Shuvra, Waly Faisal, Enamul Haque Sharif, Pranotosh Das, Arman Aziz, Zahid Hossain, Matir Munna (captain), Abul Hossain, Mamunul Islam, Zahid Hasan Emily, Enamul Haque and Hedayetullah Robin.

Officials: Badal Roy, Shawkat Ali Khan Jahangir, Mokbul Hossain, Shafiqul Islam Manik (coach), Golam Rabbani Choton (assistant coach), Mahfuzullah Chishti (physician), Mohammed Mohsin (coaching staff).

NCL matches drawn

SPORTS REPORTER

Just after two days of play, Chittagong returned with the satisfaction of winning two more points than Dhaka after their opening round first-class match of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea 10th National Cricket League ended in a draw yesterday.

After the first two days were completely washed out due to poor drainage system of the Fatullah Stadium, Chittagong snatched a two-run first innings lead over the hosts with Tariq Ahmed Ruben's inspired batting.

The visitors, in reply to Dhaka's 210-run first innings total, declared their first innings on 212-9 after their last wicket stand added just two runs. They had resumed the final day on 48 without loss.

However, Chittagong opening batsman Nafis Iqbal did little to stake claim for a place in the Test team for Bangladesh's first match against New Zealand at his hometown. Overnight 13, Nafis's two-hour vigil at the wicket saw the former Tigers opener, recalled for the Test series, scored 28 off 89 balls.

Ruben, who came at number four, made a flashy 73 with nine fours and three sixes in 142 deliveries despite Dhaka spinner Arfat Sunny's exploits at one end. Man-of-the-match Sunny finished with 5-46 from his tight 29 overs.

Dhaka, with nothing to go for in the second innings, were 64-2 after 20 when bats were drawn.

At Rajshahi, touring Barisal set an improbable target of 263 for the hosts in less than two sessions. Overnight 149-4, Barisal who had posted a first innings lead of 58 runs, batted 33 overs in the morning to add 55 runs before being booked for 204.

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Ctg MSC hold Farashganj

SPORTS REPORTER

Farashganj remained winless at their new home when the old-Dhaka outfit drew goalless with visiting Chittagong Mohammedan at the Narshingdi Stadium in yesterday's Citycell B. League match.

Farashganj, who lost their first home match to Abahani, pushed their collection to four points from as many games while Chittagong Mohammedan are on six points from five outings after their third draw.

YOUTH C'WEALTH GAMES Tripte fifth in shooting

SPORTS REPORTER

Tripte Datta of BKSP finished fifth in the 10m air rifle on the second day of the 3rd Commonwealth Youth Games at Pune, India yesterday. She scored 384.

Sudhir Binte Aqilah of Singapore won gold in this event with 398 points and she was followed by Monica Fyfe of Canada with 394. The bronze went to Farhana Binti Abdul Halil Nur Ayuni of Malaysia.

Bangladesh are taking part in four disciplines -- swimming, weightlifting, shooting and boxing.

Ctg waits for Tamim

NUR UDDIN ALAMGIR, Chittagong



Cricket fans in the port city are eagerly waiting to see their homeboy Tamim Iqbal make a cracking return to form in the third one-day international against New Zealand here today after no shows in the first two matches of the Brac Bank series.

The flamboyant opener scored only 12 runs off 12 balls in the first match and was out for a duck in the second at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka.

They hope Tamim, who had earlier showed his class at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium, would repeat his fantastic 82 off 89 balls that he scored against South Africa on this very ground in March this year.

Tamim's mother Nusrat Iqbal was quite confident about her son's ability and termed his (Tamim) failure in last two matches as mere bad luck.

"Tamim has a good batting record here and I wish him to rise to the occasion at the right time and make all of us proud tomorrow (Tuesday) with a good score," she said.

"He had his dinner with us last night and he was confident to overcome the lean patches in the third ODI," she hoped.

Meanwhile, curator Shafiqul Alam Belal said the wicket is relatively better than Dhaka and hoped it would suite the stroke-makers like Tamim.

"The batsmen may expect more runs from this wicket," he said informing that the match will be held on the second wicket.

He also said that the wicket at

the Chittagong Divisional Stadium (CDS) is more batting friendly than the one at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium because of the colour of the clay.

"The wicket of Dhaka is made of black clay while the Chittagong wicket is made of red clay," the curator added.

Venue In-charge Fazle Bari Khan Rubel informed that the CDS is all set to hold the all-important match including the first Test that starts from October 17.

"If the weather remains as it is now there is no problem," he said.

Asked about the drainage system at the stadium, which caused some problems in a previous match here against India, Rubel said: "It would depend on the amount and duration of the rainfall. We now have the facilities to cover whole the field with plastic."

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Tendulkar misses record but saves Test for India



AFP, Bangalore

Sachin Tendulkar scored a match-saving 49 to help India avert defeat in the first Test against Australia on Monday but fell short of a world record.

India were set a victory target of 299 runs in 83 overs but finished with 177-4 before bad light forced the match to be abandoned as a draw after tea on the fifth day at the Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Tendulkar was caught in the covers off debutant spinner Cameron White just 15 short of surpassing retired West Indian Brian Lara's tally of 11,953 runs as Test cricket's leading run-getter.

Even as he neared the record, the 35-year-old vehemently pro-

tested to the umpires about allowing play to continue in fading light and walked away in disgust after becoming White's first Test victim.

Umpires Rudi Koertzen of South Africa and Asad Rauf of Pakistan suspended play six overs after Tendulkar's dismissal, only to return 40 minutes later when the light improved marginally.

Tendulkar ended the game with a career tally of 11,939 runs and is expected to overtake Lara when the second of four Tests opens in Mohali on Friday.

Tendulkar, who walked in to bat with India struggling at 24-2 before lunch, put on 53 for the third wicket with Gautam Gambhir and 61 for the fourth with Venkatesai Laxman.

Some 15,000 home fans cheered every run by the 151-Test veteran, who defied the 'Australians for three hours to take India to safety.

Laxman (42 not out) and Sourav Ganguly (26 not out) saw out the remaining session, which was marked by frequent interruptions for poor light before the match was called off with 10 overs remaining.

Australian captain Ricky Ponting conceded India did well to save the game, but was satisfied the way his team played the Test.

"It is always difficult to start a series in India, so I am happy the way we played this one," said Ponting, who scored his first century on Indian soil in the game.

"I thought we had a good chance to force a win today but full credit to India who batted very well."

"This was a good wicket to play on because there was some bounce till the end. I think we need to improve in a few areas and now

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PHOTO: AFP

THE SAVIOUR: India maestro Sachin Tendulkar flicks one towards fine leg during his match-saving 49 in the second innings on the fifth and final day of the first Test against Australia at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore yesterday.