

'Captain has to perform'

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY in Johannesburg

It is a forty-five minutes drive from Johannesburg to Benoni where Bangladesh play their second one-day match against South Africa today at the Willowmoore Park, the home of Easterns Cricket.

Mohammad Ashraful's men however were unable to practise at the venue prior to the match and see the condition there to decide on the playing eleven because of the hectic schedule, as they have decided to stay at Potchefstroom to avoid too much journey by road.

"The schedule is very tight. We have to make at least a five-hour journey if we go to Benoni via Johannesburg and that's why we have decided to practise in Potchefstroom. I can't recall the venue though Bangladesh played a Twenty20 practice match last year and two one-day matches there," said the Bangladesh skipper yesterday.

"But I guess the condition would be more or less similar to Potchefstroom because it is summer now and the wicket should be very good," he added.

The Tigers skipper however was little bothered with the condition rather he was looking forward to keeping their spirited display in the

series as his side fought hard before conceding a 61-run defeat in the first match at Senwes Park on Friday after losing an opportunity in the Twenty20 International last Wednesday.

Bangladesh lost the match but won the hearts of the local crowd thanks to an entertaining 73 by Ashraful, which gave the captain more confidence to lead the team in the series.

"I think we have been playing good cricket since the Australia tour but my performance was not satisfactory though I scored few runs against New Zealand in the first two one-day matches.

"For a captain it is always important to perform because it makes the job easier," said Ashraful, who was criticised for his poor performance in the Test series against New Zealand.

Even then the Bangladesh captain was not a happy man despite his good knock because he believed that there was another chance for them to win a match.

"We were in a very good position before (Dale) Steyn's double strike. It was a good delivery but I have to survive against the good delivery if we want to win the match.

"We never thought that we could not win the match after South Africa took the score to 283 because the wicket was flat," said

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NASRI FIRES: Arsenal midfielder Samir Nasri scores his second goal against Manchester United during their Premier League encounter at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Tigers' opening jam persists

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER in Johannesburg

There is always the requirement of a good start to build an innings and here lies the big problem in Bangladesh's batting. The outcome from the opening pair in the last ten one-day matches was simply pathetic and the fact is that the Rafiqul Alam-led selection panel has tried as many as four opening pairs in that time.

One figure that could be good enough to understand how dismal the fact is the highest partnership being only 19 runs, made by Tamim Iqbal and Nazimuddin, now playing in the unauthorised Indian Cricket League, against India during the Asia Cup in June.

The team management made the latest experiment with Imrul Kayes who opened the innings with regular opener Tamim Iqbal against South Africa in the first match of the three-match series at the Senwes Park on Friday which Bangladesh lost by 61 runs.

It was too early to say about newcomer Imrul who was dismissed for one by giving a simple catch to Hashim Amla at mid-off off wrecker-in-chief Dale Steyn who bowled his best one-day spell with figures of 4 for 16.

But on top of all the facts is Tamim's failure to convert a good start into a big one that is the main

concern of the team. The dashing left-hander declared his arrival on the international arena by playing a match-winning half-century against India in the 2007 World Cup in West Indies and his place in the team has never been questioned. Rather there has always been a question about his suitable partner.

"I can't even understand why I failed to make a big one despite a good start. If you see my last few innings I have got starts but failed to convert it into a big one," said Tamim, who made two fifties in his last ten innings besides scoring 8, 26, 21, 0, 12, 0, 35 and 24 runs.

There was another chance for the left-hander on Friday to make a big one and thus help his side to be more competitive against South Africa in the first match but a terrible mess-up with his skipper Mohammad Ashraful put a premature end to his good innings.

"I don't want to make any comments on this run out," the Chittagonian responded.

When asked whether there was any lack of concentration behind the failure of playing big innings while there has been talk about a big offer from ICL, Tamim was very straight forward like his batting. "There is no reason to feel disturbed with the ICL offer because it is very simple to me. If I have any intention to go there, I will definitely do that. It's never on my mind."

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BTv
Bangladesh v South Africa
Second ODI
Live from 2:00pm
Neo Cricket
India v Australia
Fourth Test, Day Four
Live from 10:00am
ESPN
English Premier League
Blackburn Rovers v Chelsea
Live from 7:25pm
Fulham v Newcastle United
Live from 8:55pm
STAR Sports
English Premier League
Man City v Tottenham
Live from 8:55pm
Primera Liga
Valencia v Getafe
Live from 2:00am (Monday)
TEN Sports & ZEE Sports
ICL Twenty20
Chandigarh v Ahmedabad
Live from 2:30pm
Chennai v Lahore
Live from 8:00pm



Sourav Ganguly

(Star Indian batsman)
"I am more than 36-and-a-half years old and I have played more than 100 Test matches so I find it hard to look at the newspapers to find out whether I am in the team or not."

He believes the time is right to call it a day.

Nasri Gunners' hero

AFP, London



Samir Nasri got Arsenal back in the groove as the French midfielder scored twice to give the Gunners a much-needed 2-1 win against Manchester United on Saturday.

Arsene Wenger's side started as underdogs on their home turf after a miserable run of three games without a win - including a tumultuous meltdown at Stoke - but they produced a superb performance to cast aside doubts over their title prospects this season.

Nasri opened the scoring midway through the first half in a thrilling encounter, then added his fifth goal of the campaign moments after half-time to seal the points.

A last minute goal from Rafael da Silva - his first for United - gave the champions hope, but they couldn't force an equaliser despite six minutes of injury-time.

Arsenal, who moved to within three points of leaders Chelsea ahead of their match at Blackburn on Sunday, are now firmly back in

the title race, while United are five points off top spot.

Ahead of kick-off much of the talk had been of Arsenal's injury problems, so relief swept around the Emirates Stadium once the teams were announced with Theo Walcott, William Gallas and Mikael Silvestre coming through fitness tests.

For United there was just one change from the side that beat Hull last time out in the league, Park Ji-Sung coming in to replace Nani on the left of midfield.

Arsenal started nervously and goalkeeper Manuel Almunia gave away a needless free kick within one minute as he handled a Silvestre back pass. The set-piece led to Michael Carrick firing wide for the visitors.

Arsenal had not lost back-to-back league games in 56 outings, but the signs were not looking good as that defeat at Stoke seemed to pray on their nerves early on.

United had a goal ruled out after eight minutes, Bulgarian forward Dimitar Berbatov had strayed offside before slotting home from close range after a Wayne Rooney shot was pushed away.

Wenger's men worked their way into the game and Nicklas Bendtner should have tested goalkeeper Edwin van der Sar with two headed chances before the quarter hour mark.

Arsenal took the lead in the 22nd minute. Patrice Evra fouled Bacary Sagna on the right side of the penalty area.

Cesc Fabregas's free-kick was cleared by Berbatov as far as Nasri on the edge of the box and he hit a left foot shot which deflected off Gary Neville and into the net.

The remainder of the half was tense. Walcott struck a decent opportunity over the crossbar, and Arsenal hearts were in mouths as Gael Clichy's apparent handball from a Rooney cross was not given as a penalty.

After the break Arsenal quickly slipped into gear and doubled their lead.

Fabregas produced a brilliant turn just outside the United area on 48 minutes and slipped in Nasri, who drilled a fine strike beyond the grasp of Van der Sar.

It was a desperate blow to United, the league's in-form team

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NCL 5th round starts today

SPORTS REPORTER

Table-toppers Rajshahi take on Khulna in the fifth round of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea 10th National Cricket League at the Khulna Divisional Stadium today.

The northern division have acquired 42 points with Barisal a point behind them. Rajshahi beat Sylhet by 40 runs even after conceding a first-innings lead in the fourth round match last week. Second from bottom Khulna, on 26 points, suffered a huge 176-run loss at the hands of Dhaka.

Barisal play Dhaka, in third place with 39 points, at the Fatullah Stadium. The 'home side' drew their last game with Chittagong, who take on last-placed Sylhet at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium.

Sylhet have so far acquired 15 points from four outings while Chittagong are in fourth place with 31 points.

BHF election disputed

SPORTS REPORTER

A High Court Bench last week issued a rule nisi on Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) asking why the October 28 elections of the federation and the subsequent executive committee would not be declared illegal.

The ruling of the Court comprising Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana and Justice Md. Rezaul Haque came on November 2 following a writ petition by Uttara Hockey Club president Sultanuddin Ahmed, who in his plea demanded fresh elections of the federation 'by publishing a fresh and flawless voter list as per the provision of the constitution of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation'.

The Court gave two weeks from the date of the verdict for the 12 respondents that included the secretary of the National Sports Council (NSC) and BHF general secretary.

"I had earlier received a legal notice on this issue but I'm yet to get a copy of the Court order," said BHF general secretary Khandaker Jamil Uddin, adding that he returned from abroad only on Friday.

Jamil however said that the NSC, the regulatory body of country's sports federations, would look into the matter since it holds the elections of the federations.

India have upper hand

Cricket

AFP, Nagpur

Australia's hopes of levelling the series suffered a setback as they failed to counter India's defensive tactics in the fourth and final Test here on Saturday.

The visitors were bowled out for 355 in reply to India's first-innings total of 441 on the third day. With just two days to go, they will need an extraordinary effort to win the match and square the series.

Australia trail 1-0 after their 320-run defeat in the second Test in Mohali. The matches in Bangalore and New Delhi were drawn.

The hosts could not open their account in the second innings after facing just one over. Virender

Sehwag and debutant Murali Vijay were at the crease.

India's new captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni succeeded in his bid to strangle Australia with a defensive approach as the visitors found runs hard to come by on a dull day.

Australia, looking to score briskly after racing to 189 off 49 overs on Friday, managed just 166 off 85.4 overs as the hosts set a defensive field in the first two sessions.

Fast bowlers Zaheer Khan and Ishant Sharma were instrumental in drying up runs as they hardly made the batsmen play by bowling outside the off-stump, especially in the morning.

Off-spinner Harbhajan Singh was the most successful bowler with 3-94. Sharma, who saw two catches dropped off his bowling,

finished with 2-64 and leg-spinner Amit Mishra ended with 2-58.

India gained the upper hand when they grabbed three big wickets in the space of 11 runs in the afternoon, dismissing well-set Michael Hussey (90), Michael Clarke (eight) and Shane Watson (two).

The visitors were comfortably placed at 229-2 following a 155-run stand for the third wicket between left-handed opener Simon Katich (102) and Hussey before losing their way.

Zaheer provided the breakthrough after Australia resumed at 189-2, trapping Katich leg-before with a swinging yorker. The Australian hit nine fours in his 189-ball knock.

Hussey looked set to complete his 10th century in 29 Tests before being run out following a smart piece of fielding by Vijay at silly point.

He pushed Harbhajan and set off for a single, but Vijay stopped the ball and flicked it to wicket-keeper Dhoni who whipped off the balls, with the batsman out of his crease. Hussey hit eight fours in his 228-ball knock.

Sharma found the edge of Clarke's bat with a gem of a delivery that moved away after pitching on the off-stump, with Dhoni taking an easy catch.

Watson fell playing a defensive shot off Harbhajan, the ball rolling back to hit the off-stump.

Cameron White made 46 and Brad Haddin 28 late in the innings, but their efforts were not good enough to help their team gain the lead.

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India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh (C) jumps for joy after taking the wicket of Shane Watson of Australia (R) on the third day of the fourth and final Test at the VCA Stadium in Nagpur yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



Nat'l Cricket League
(Four-Day, Day 1)
Khulna v Rajshahi
Venue: Khulna Divisional Stadium
Barisal v Dhaka
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Chittagong v Sylhet
Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium
Citycell B. League
Ctg Mohammedan v Arambagh
(3:00pm)
Venue: MA Aziz Stadium, Chittagong

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