



England opener Andrew Strauss sweeps his way to an unbeaten 73 on the third day of the first Test against India at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai yesterday.

'Poor quality' Ninth round from today

MOHAMMAD ISAM



The national cricketers will make their first appearance in the National Cricket League today but their absence throughout the previous eight rounds have hindered the standard.

With two international tours (New Zealand at home and away to South Africa) taking place during the course of the lone first-class tournament that began in October, the competition suffered. There was also the flight of the cricketers to the rebel Indian Cricket League that dealt a severe blow.

"Definitely the NCL missed out on the national players and some have also retired (ICL rebels)," said chief selector Rafiqul Alam who travelled across the country during the last few months to watch the first-class competition, which sees matches between Rajshahi-Sylhet, Khulna-Dhaka and Chittagong-Barisal in the ninth round from today.

Last season there was talk of poor wickets being prepared but according to former national captain Khaled Mahmud that part of the game has been taken care of but the standard hasn't gone up.

"The wickets were good, actually better than before but the standard hasn't changed that much. It is still average, maybe because of the absence of the top players," said Mahmud, who has taken over the coaching job of Sylhet this season.

Take Mahmud's side for instance. He was brought in to have a more central role in team matters after Sylhet boys Alok Kapali, Tapash Baisya and Golam Mabud left to play in the banned ICL.

The same goes for Khulna who lost influential characters like Habibul Bashar and Monjurul Islam while Dhaka lost the services of left-arm spinners Mohammad Rafique and Mosharraf Hossain.

But both the chief selector and Mahmud agreed that the youngsters taken out of the under-19 sides for NCL have done a good job.

"The youngsters from the under-19 teams have done well so far. Players like Rony Talukdar, Nasir Hossain, Raihan Anas, Imon Ahmed and Ashraf Aziz have really developed," said the former national batsman.

Mahmud echoed Rafiqul's thinking and his hands-on approach have helped him give a more specific picture.

"The youngsters are encouraging and they

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BCB takes guard

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The recent few incidents forced the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to ponder the national players' discipline.

The board high-ups met the team officials who recently toured South Africa with the national team, at the Mirpur headquarter yesterday to gather information about few occurrences.

New disciplinary committee chairman Ahmed Sajjadul Alam was not ready to disclose what actually was discussed in the

meeting but what he confirmed was that president Maj Gen Sina Ibn Jamali referred a disciplinary issue to his committee.

The board has taken the initiative as it was reported that some players were quizzed at the Zia International Airport on their return from South Africa for carrying alcohol and they were also involved in a squabble with supporters during that tour.

"President referred an issue to my committee and we are working on it. There is nothing that we can inform you and we will let the media know if we have any conclusive outcomes," said Alam.

He however admitted that there is a need for them to create awareness among the national cricketers about some disciplinary issues as well as the code of conduct.

Another board director and former national captain Gazi Ashraf Hossain, who was also present in the meeting along with Mahbubul Anam, said that previously they were not too concerned about the players' discipline, as there were hardly any problems.

But the recent actions gave them the impression that there is need to inform the players about the few issues

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Iain O'Brien

(New Zealand pace bowler)

"The late start means that breakfast is brunch and lunch is at afternoon tea time. It just doesn't feel normal, so as long as you don't look at your watch it's okay."

On the scheduled noon starts in the home Tests against West Indies feels a little odd for him.



Neo Cricket

India v England

First Test, Day 4

Live from 10:00am

ESPN

English Premiership

Portsmouth v Newcastle

Live from 7:25pm

Chelsea v West Ham

Live from 9:55pm

STAR Sports

Primera Liga

Atletico Madrid v Real Betis

Live from 2:00am (Monday)



National Cricket League

(Four-Dayer, Day 1)

Khulna v Dhaka

Venue: Khulna Divisional Stadium

Rajshahi v Sylhet

Venue: Rajshahi Divisional Stadium

Chittagong v Barisal

Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium

Strauss sets up Eng

Cricket

AFP, Chennai

Andrew Strauss was poised for a century in each innings as England took charge of the first cricket Test against India at the Chidambaram stadium here on Saturday.

The tourists, enjoying a first innings lead of 75, recovered from a shaky 43-3 to post 172-3 in their second knock by stumps on the third day, an overall lead of 247 runs with seven wickets in hand.

Left-handed Strauss, who made 123 in the first innings, was unbeaten on 73 at close and looking to become only the second Englishman after Graham Gooch to score two centuries in a Test against India.

Gooch made 333 and 123 against Mohammad Azharuddin's men at Lord's in 1990, a match England won by 247 runs.

Paul Collingwood kept Strauss company at close on a polished 60, the pair having put on 129 for the unbroken fourth wicket after India, dismissed for 241 soon after lunch, grabbed three quick wickets before tea.

"It was a pressure innings and when you get in, you have to make it count," Collingwood said of his effort.

"The wicket has started to crumble a bit, but it will be good to get another 100 or 150 runs more."

"In India, the fourth and fifth days count the most because of the reverse swing the wicket is able to generate."

Collingwood heaped praise on Strauss, saying the Middlesex opener had "set an exam-

ple for the rest of us."

"He is playing the ball very late," he said of Strauss. "It is reverse swinging, so you have to do that."

"He looks relaxed at the crease and is looking pretty good. You can take a lesson from the way he played in the first innings."

India's South African coach Gary Kirsten praised England, but said the home team had not given up hope yet.

"There is still a long way to go in the match and anything can happen," said Kirsten.

"England have played very well to get into the position they are in, they have played some very good cricket in this match."

"We have done everything we set out to do in our bowling, but we did not bat well enough in the first innings."

"But I am not worried because this Indian team is capable of doing anything. It has players who have the special ability to come up with special stuff."

When England batted a second time, seamer Ishant Sharma had opener Alastair Cook caught behind for nine, before Ian Bell and skipper Kevin Pietersen fell in successive overs.

Leg-spinner Amit Mishra used the bounce in the wicket to have Bell fending a catch to Gautam Gambhir at short-leg after the batsman had made seven.

Next over, Pietersen was trapped leg-before off the first delivery by part-timer Yuvraj Singh, who came on ahead of frontline spinner Harbhajan Singh.

But Strauss and Collingwood ensured England will begin the last two days well-placed to force victory in the first match of the two-Test series.

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Day Three Windies'

Cricket

AFP, Dunedin

The West Indies won third day honours in the rain-hit first cricket Test here Saturday, taking New Zealand's last six wickets for 139 runs to dismiss the hosts for 365.

In reply the West Indies reached 39 without loss by stumps, with captain Chris Gayle on 29 and Seunarine Chattergoon on nine.

With two days remaining, the chances of a result were fast receding after Friday was rained out and play was unable to start until mid-afternoon Saturday.

New Zealand were 226 for four when play got underway in cold conditions at University Oval with Jesse Ryder's 89 providing the highlight in the middle order after number three Daniel Flynn's 95 on Thursday.

After reaching 54 on the first day, the usually aggressive

Ryder struggled at times on the slow-paced wicket.

But he still hit 12 fours in his four-and-a-quarter hours at the crease before falling 11 runs short of his first Test hundred by pulling Daren Powell to Shivnarine Chanderpaul at midwicket.

With Brendon McCullum, who was the day's first wicket to fall after scoring an unusually subdued 25 off 120 balls, Ryder put on 89 runs for the fifth wicket.

The West Indies' decision to take the new ball after 85 overs injected fresh life into a pace attack struggling on the placid low-bouncing wicket.

After McCullum's dismissal, the West Indies maintained their momentum, preventing the home side from establishing any major partnerships.

Powell was the pick of the West Indies speedsters, finishing with three for 68, while the relatively expensive Fidel Edwards took three for 91 after taking toll of New Zealand's

lower order.

Gayle did the damage to the top of the New Zealand batting lineup on Thursday, finishing with three for 42 from 21 economical overs.

Ryder had some luck on 80 when he was dropped by Seunarine Chattergoon at second slip off Edwards but the bowler's fortunes soon improved at the expense of new batsman James Franklin.

The all-rounder fell for seven when his back foot slipped into the stumps after fending a short ball.

New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori scored a useful 30, before cutting the ball to Xavier Marshall at deep point, apparently unaware the fielder had moved position after the previous ball.

Kyle Mills became the second New Zealand batsman to be given out on a video review, which Gayle requested after umpire Mark Benson ruled against an lbw appeal where the ball hit both the pad

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