

Mashrafe optimistic

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza said that it was too early to say whether he will be available for the upcoming home series against Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe will arrive in Bangladesh on October 21 to compete in the five-match one-day series against the Tigers in Dhaka and Chittagong and Mashrafe has been retained as captain for the series despite the uncertainty over his fitness.

The 'Narail Express' joined the national camp yesterday although he is not yet fit to perform the fitness drills as the space spearhead is going through rehabilitation programme after having his both knees operated on.

"It is too early to say anything on my return for the home series against Zimbabwe. I still have more than a month to get fully fit for the series. And as per surgeon's (Dr. David Young) advice, I will be available from before the second one-day," said Mashrafe while speaking to reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The first match of the five-match series will take place at Mirpur on October 27 and the second and third game will be held at the same venue on October 29 and 31 respectively. The fourth and fifth one-dayers are scheduled to take place in Chittagong on

November 3 and 5.

"I can understand my position once I start the running in two weeks. I feel good now even though there is bit of pain at times. I may even be able to play the first one-

dayer if I feel good because the surgeon said that it would be up to me to decide," said Mashrafe, who injured his right knee during the first Test against the West Indies at St. Vincent in June and has been

out of the game since. National team physio Michael Henry too echoed Mashrafe's words as he said that it's very difficult for any surgeon to put a definite time frame on return.

It was painful for the country's leading paceman not to be part of the team's recent successes in the tours of West Indies and Zimbabwe but he was happy with the progress of the team and said it would not be easy for him to get back to rhythm after long absence from cricket.

"For any pace bowler it's not easy to get back to rhythm after recovering from injury. So, it would be a big challenge for me no matter who the opponents are. I am looking forward to returning to cricket. I may miss the T20 Premier League matches but I am hopeful about the Zimbabwe series," said a confident Mashrafe.

Bangladesh skipper also expressed his satisfaction over the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB)'s recent decision to continue with the current set up of the national team including the extension of coach Jamie Siddons's tenure to 2011 World Cup.

"It's always good not to make random changes in the team. I think it's a very good decision to continue with the same coach because every coach has his own style of coaching and you must give someone enough time to shape the team by applying his method," Mashrafe concluded.

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza checks his troublesome knee as he attends the training camp at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium yesterday for the upcoming home series against Zimbabwe.

PHOTO: STAR

Lee rattles England

Cricket

AFP, London

Brett Lee routed England as Australia won the fourth one-day international at Lord's on Saturday by seven wickets to take an unbeatable 4-0 lead in the seven-match series.

Lee took five wickets for 49 runs in nine overs of hostile fast bowling as England were dismissed for 220 with 21 balls of their innings left.

World champions Australia then made 221 for three, reaching their victory target with more than six overs remaining.

Australia captain Ricky Ponting, in his first match since his post-Ashes break, made 48 before holing out off Tim Bresnan.

But it was Ponting's heir apparent, Michael Clarke, who saw Australia home with 62 not out after opener Tim Paine made 51.

Earlier, Lee produced a trio of 93mph-plus Yorkers to clean bowl Matt Prior, Luke Wright and Stuart Broad, having previously dismissed Joe Denly.

He completed his five-wicket haul by uprooting Adil Rashid's stumps.

It was the ninth time the 32-year-old quick, out with a side injury at the start of the Ashes and unable to get back in during the remainder of England's 2-1 triumph, had taken five wickets in an innings in 179 ODIs.

He was well-supported by off-spinner Nathan Hauritz, who took two wickets for 23 runs in 10 miserly overs as England's run-rate nosedived.

England captain Andrew Strauss made 63 for the second time in as many matches but, yet again this series, saw a top order without injured star batsman Kevin Pietersen fail, with no other home batsman making more Saturday than Ovis Shah's 39.

England, who rested all-rounder Paul Collingwood and paceman James Anderson, were on course for a 7-0 whitewash in India late last year before the Mumbai terror attacks led to the suspension of their tour when they were 5-0 down.

But barely a fortnight after their Ashes success, losing this series 7-0 is now a real possibility.

Strauss, who won a fourth straight toss, struck three boundaries in four balls off-left.

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Nadal ambles into semis

AFP, New York

Spanish third seed Rafael Nadal, trying to complete a career Grand Slam, advanced to the US Open semifinals on Saturday by defeating Chilean 11th seed Fernando Gonzalez 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/2), 6-0.

Six-time Grand Slam champion Nadal, who led when rain stopped play Thursday, will play for a berth in Monday's final against Argentine sixth seed Juan Martin Del Potro, who ousted Croatian 16th seed Marin Cilic 4-6, 6-3, 6-2, 6-1.

Five-time defending champion Roger Federer, the Swiss world number one seeking to stretch his record total of Grand Slam titles to 16, will play Serbian fourth seed Novak Djokovic in Sunday's other semifinal.

Nadal, who beat Gonzalez in last year's Beijing Olympic final, matched his best US Open run from last year by taking a sixth consecutive victory over Gonzalez in a rivalry he leads 7-3.

"I'm in the semifinals for the second time in my life at the US Open," Nadal said. "It was a very important result for me."

Nadal was bothered by a nagging abdominal muscle strain Thursday but seized a 7-6 (7/4), 6-3 (2/2) lead when rain halted the match. Showers washed out all play on Friday, giving Nadal extra time to recover.

"Yeah, lucky for me," Nadal said. "It was important to have one day off for me to be well."

The waiting set up a dramatic Saturday return to Arthur Ashe Stadium, but the tension faded fast.

Gonzalez dropped the second set by losing the first four points after the resumption, sending one forehand wide, two more long and netting a backhand to give the Spanish left-hander command of the match.

"It was difficult. To start in a tie-break is a lottery. Anything can happen," Nadal said. "Lucky for me I won the first four points. That was decisive in the match."

The South American swatted 21 unforced errors in the third set to lose it in just 31 minutes. Gonzalez had a trainer cut tape and extra padding off his feet after falling 3-0 down, then lost the next seven points, eventually giving up another break and later the match by netting a forehand.

"Fernando had more mistakes than the last day," Nadal said. "That was important for me."

Nadal owns a 4-2 career edge on Del Potro, but the Argentine star has won their two most recent meetings, in Montreal and Miami hardcourt quarterfinals earlier this year.

"He's very solid from the baseline," Nadal said. "It's important for me to play well if I'm going to have a chance to win."

Nadal is trying to become just the seventh man to complete the career Grand Slam, joining Federer, Andre Agassi, Fred Perry, Don Budge, Rod Laver and Roy Emerson as the only men to win each of the four major titles.

If the Spaniard does it this week, he will be at

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CCDM reveals T20 groupings

SPORTS REPORTER

Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM) yesterday announced the groupings of the Premier Division Twenty20 Cricket League that starts from October 10.

Defending champions Mohammmedan have been slated in Group A along with Bangladeshi Biman, Khelaghar, Partex, BKSP and Victoria while Group B comprises runners-up Gazi Tank, Abahani, DOHS, Kalabagan, Surjo Torun and Cricket Coaching School.

The inter-club players' transfer will start from September 29 but the members of Bangladesh A team will be allowed to have their transfers on September 16 from 12 noon to 5pm at the CCDM office at Bangabandhu National Stadium. This special arrangement has been made to accommodate the players of the second-string Bangladesh team who will be touring Indian state of Maharashtra from September 26 to October 17.

The one-day competition of the most coveted league is scheduled for October 23 to December 15.

Asia Cup in June

INTERNET, undated

The 10th edition of the Asia Cup will be played from June 15-25 next year, the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) has announced.

Defending champions Sri Lanka will be joined by India, Pakistan and Bangladesh in the tournament comprising seven matches at a venue that was yet to be decided, the ACC said on its website.

Sri Lanka beat India in the final of the last edition held in Pakistan a year ago.

Afridi may retire

ANI, Lahore

Flamboyant Pakistani all-rounder Shahid Afridi has said he may consider quitting cricket if he does not perform according to his potential in the Champions Trophy beginning September 22 in South Africa.

Ashes-winning captain Strauss completed a 48-ball fifth with eight fours.

After also making 63 in England's six-wicket loss at the Rose Bowl on Wednesday, Strauss said: "When you are batting well you have to make hay and I haven't done that."

So it was not hard to imagine his feelings when, on England's unlucky number 11, Strauss, trying to slog-sweep Hauritz, got a gentle top-edge to Bracken at short third man on a day when he needed to score a hundred to give England's attack a target they could defend.

The series continues on Tuesday with the first of two day/night clashes at Trent Bridge.

SCOREBOARD
Final scoreboard of the fourth one-day international

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City gun down Gunners

AFP, Manchester

Emmanuel Adebayor secured his revenge over Arsenal as Manchester City delivered a statement of intent with a 4-2 win over the striker's former club here on Saturday.

The 25-million-pound striker headed the crucial third goal for City ten minutes from time and then sprinted the entire length of the field to celebrate provocatively in front of the Arsenal supporters.

City had led from a lucky first half own-goal from Gunners keeper Manuel Almunia but Arsenal drew level just after the hour when Tomas Rosicky, playing for the first time in over 18 months, slipped the ball to van Persie who hit a magnificent equaliser from the edge of the area.

But in the 74th minute, Craig Bellamy swept in a superb shot from 15 yards after a neat build-up which saw Shaun Wright-Phillips send Mikel Arteta on his way into the Arsenal penalty area for the telling assist.

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Sheikh Russel striker Mohammad Rony (L) celebrates one of his four goals against Bangladesh Army in their Federation Cup match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. This was the first hattrick of the season.

Rony disbands Army

SPORTS REPORTER

Citycell FEDERATION CUP '09

Mohammad Rony slammed the season's first hattrick to get title contenders Sheikh Russel KC off to a sparkling start in the Federation Cup with a massive 8-1 win over Bangladesh Army in their opening game at Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Rank-outsiders Beanbazar, one of three newcomers of the season, upset last year's semifinalists Farashganj SC 1-0 at the same venue.

Sheikh Russel, who last season failed to qualify for the last four of the season's curtain-raising tournament, enjoyed superior ball possession throughout the game against an amateur side comprising of professional soldiers.

Apart from Rony, who in total struck four times, Ghanaian striker Mohammed Abdulai scored twice while Nurul Afsar and Rajon Miah netted one goal apiece for the winners.

There was virtually no sign of organised play in the Army game compared to Sheikh Russel's, who did not hesitate to take advantage of the

ineffective Army backline as well as inexperienced goalkeeper Ashraful Islam, who only came under the post after regular keeper Sarwar Jahan was forced to leave the field after dislocating his collarbone.

Rony, who mostly sat out last season on the Mohammmedan bench, along with Abdulai produced a lethal combination up front with Mobarak Hossain and media Maruf creating attacks from the midfield relentlessly.

The second B. League's third-paced side were, however, parried off the first 15 minutes before Abdulai, cashing in on Sarwar Jahan's mistake, opened the floodgate before substitute Nurul Afsar, who replaced national midfielder Emon Mahmud Babu, doubled the margin on the half hour and Rony found his first goal in the stoppage time of the first-half.

After resumption, it seemed that Army had regrouped as they pulled back a goal eight minutes into the second half with substitute Rasid Hasan Sunny heading the ball home after his first effort was cleared from the goalline by defender Zahirul Islam.

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SL crush India

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Veteran Sanath Jayasuriya and Thilina Kandamby hammered India's morale-boosting 29 runs in the tri-series on Saturday.

The teams will clash again in Monday's final, having won their league games against New Zealand, the third team in the week-long series.

The defeat ruined India's hopes of going into the Champions Trophy in South Africa from September 22 as the world's number one side in the 50-over format.

The Indians needed to win

all their three matches in the tri-series to oust South Africa from the top spot.

Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men, who beat the Kiwis by six wickets on Friday, failed miserably with both bat and ball after taking the field for the second successive day in oppressive hot and humid weather.

Jayasuriya, who had failed to score a half-century in eight previous matches, smashed 13 boundaries to silence critics who wanted the 40-year-old to be sidelined.

The left-hander put on 57 for the first wicket with Tillakaratne Dilshan by the ninth over and 70 for the fourth with Mathews.

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Sri Lanka batsman Thilina Kandamby plays a stroke during the third one-day international of the tri-nation championship between India and Sri Lanka at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday. Sri Lanka captain Kumar Sangakkara won the toss and elected to bat as they piled up a huge 307 for six in their 50 overs.

Sachin Tendulkar
(Indian cricket superstar)
"I have sometimes worn a baseball cap, a beard, and a wig not to be noticed."
Who also takes the film star's favourite route to dodge fans in India.

