

'Middle-order a worry'

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan has found ample reason to be satisfied with his team's performance and a few causes for concern from the recently concluded tour of New Zealand. And one of those concerns is the lack of form of the middle-order, especially that of talented batsman Mohammad Ashraful.

"Batsmen in the middle-order didn't get any substantial scores throughout the series which is a matter to be looked into. Especially the number 3 and 4 positions in one-dayers and number 3 to 5 in Tests is a big concern for us. It is up to them only to get themselves out of that poor form and get back amongst runs."

"Ashraful's poor run of form is a worry for us. He [Ashraful] himself has stated his willingness to take a break. He [Ashraful] wants to take part in the current national league, instead of playing the practice matches where there will be an added pressure from the media. The coach too has said that Ashraful must be reassessed though he is opposed to the idea of giving him a break."

Apart from that, the Bangladesh captain has found ample reason to be satisfied. The tigers arrived from down under in the early hours of Sunday and after their return, Shakib said that they have done better than any previous tour of New Zealand, both individually and collectively.

Bangladesh started the tour pretty badly as they were completely outplayed in the only T20 match and the first one-dayer, but showed consistent improvement since then. There were many individual achievements throughout the tour, such as Imrul Kayes's century in the third one-dayer or Mushfiqur's 86 in the second or Shafiqul Islam's seven wickets in three matches.

Tigers were most impressive in the one-off Test match in Hamilton where they got more than 400 runs in the first innings and took the game to the fifth day.

"I am satisfied with the team's performance. We scored good runs and got two centuries in both innings of the Test match. We took the game into the last [fifth] day of the Test which is not an easy thing to do in those conditions. We never played that well before in New Zealand," said the skipper who scored 187 runs in the Test match with a maiden hundred in

the second innings. He also expressed his pleasure at returning to form after a brief lean patch.

"I was not having a great time with the bat of late. But this match got me right back in the groove. When I execute my pull shot with perfection, you know I'm in form."

Mahmudullah Riyad got a hundred in the first innings and the skipper was very impressed with the way the number eight batsman has carried his good form from the last series.

"Mahmudullah is an outstanding player with a cool head on his shoulders. He is in good form and he must look to take it forward."

Another player who Shakib spoke highly of was young pacer Shafiqul Islam.

"He is a quick learner and has already shown tremendous maturity. He bowled on one channel from the very first over to the last. So, I would say he is a good find for us."

The Bangladesh captain claimed that the kind of resilience they showed in this tour was not seen before and they could have played even better had they had one or two practice matches to get used to the conditions. However, he said they have had many positives to take from the series which should come good during the series against England at home.



Star all-rounder Mahmudullah Riyad (L), opener Imrul Kayes (R) and middle-order batsman Rokibul Hasan come out of the airport after the Bangladesh cricket team arrived here from their tour of New Zealand in the early hours of Sunday.



NOT ONLY YOU, I TAKE PHOTO TOO! Superstar Paul Collingwood leads a pack of England cricketers out of the Dhaka airport following their arrival here from Dubai last night. The England team, led by Alastair Cook, came here to play three one-day internationals and two Tests.

Indo-Bangla Games add 3 new sports

SPORTS REPORTER

Organisers have decided to include three new disciplines in the third Indo-Bangladesh Bangla Games to be held in Kolkata from March 24 to 26.

The new disciplines are judo, badminton and gymnastics, informed Bangladesh Olympic Association vice-president Minzanur Rahman Manu. He also said that they were also considering including karate and it depended on the approval from the West Bengal Olympic Association.

The regular disciplines of the meet are athletics, swimming, shooting, basketball, women's football, kabaddi and kho kho.

Manu said that they had placed an approximate budget of Tk 30 lakh for preparation and participation and that they were planning to start the camp as soon as the government released the fund.

McKay out of Aussie Tests

CRICINFO, undated

New Zealand fast bowler Andy McKay has been forced out of the Tests against Australia due to a stress fracture in his foot. McKay had hoped to return for the two matches after being ruled out of the one-dayers and Twenty20s against Australia starting next week, but has been diagnosed with a fracture after bone scans in Wellington last week.

"It turns out I've got a stress fracture in my foot. It's not good," he told Sunday Star-News. "I then went back and saw the sports physician on Thursday and the injury had actually settled down quite a bit in a matter of days."

"That was fairly encouraging and the doctor thinks my recovery will be a matter of weeks, rather than the usual two to three months that an injury like this normally takes to heal."

McKay, 29, made an impressive start to his ODI career, taking five wickets against Bangladesh at an average of 21 but it was his pace which stood out. He reportedly clocked 147 kmph in the Napier ODI and captain Daniel Vettori said he was one of the quickest bowlers he had faced in the Twenty20 HRV Cup, even comparing him to Shane Bond. McKay was eager to translate his form into the five-day format but his career has been put on hold for the moment.

"It's bittersweet," he said. "I was obviously very happy with how things went in the one-dayers against Bangladesh and then I was over the moon about being selected in the Test side. Obviously the priority now is about getting things right."

The series gets underway on February 26 with the first of two Twenty20s, followed by five ODIs and two Tests.

England in city

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

A 28-member England cricket team, with 16 players, arrived in Dhaka last night. The Lions will play three one-day internationals and two Tests on their month-long tour with two limited-overs and a three-day practice matches.

Left-hand opening batsman Alastair Cook is leading the team in both one-dayers and Tests in absence of regular skipper Andrew Strauss who opted to take a break in order to concentrate on the upcoming tours.

On their arrival, the English team left the airport straight for the hotel and refused to speak to the media. However, it was learnt that they would hold an official media briefing on the 27th, the day before the first one-day international. They have also called off today's scheduled practice session.

The tour will kick off with a limited-overs warm-up game against the Bangladesh Cricket Board XI on February 23 at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium where the second one-day warm-up game will also be held on February 25.

The first two one-day internationals, both day-nighters, will be held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. The teams will then travel to Chittagong to play the third one-day international and the first Test beside a three-day warm-up game. The second Test will be held at Mirpur.

England arrived here from the United Arab Emirates where they played two Twenty20 internationals against current world champions Pakistan, winning the first one and losing the last. On the other hand, hosts Bangladesh also arrived yesterday from a month-long tour of New Zealand where they played one T20, three one-dayers and one Test and lost all of them.

Sabrina too frustrates

SPORTS REPORTER

After finishing bottom in the women's 50m rifle 3 position pair event on the opening day of the Commonwealth Shooting Championship, Bangladesh's veteran shooter Sabrina Sultana finished eighth in the individual 50m rifle 3 position at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range in New Delhi in India yesterday.

Sabrina scored a total of 659.4 while Tripti Datta was eliminated from the qualification round after scoring a poor 557.

Indian Meena Kumari clinched gold with a score of 671.9 while her compatriot Lajja Goswami settled for the silver with a score of 670.7. The bronze medal went to England's Sharon Lee, who made 666.8.

Hosts India lead the overall tally with nine gold, five silver and three bronze medals. England are second with two gold, three silver and as many bronze medals.

Butcher new Zim coach

AFP, Harare

England-born Alan Butcher was named Zimbabwe cricket coach on Saturday after the contract of Walter Chawaguta was not renewed.

Zimbabwe Cricket managing director Ozias Bvute made the announcement here, saying Butcher will lead a four-man technical committee including former Zimbabwe stars Grant Flower and Heath Streak.

"In the past we have relied on one coach, but this time we have four individuals and are confident they will deliver," Bvute told a media conference.

Convener of selectors Alistair Campbell said one of Butcher's mandates was to get Zimbabwe playing Test cricket again after a self-imposed exile from the five-day game since 2006 because of poor national team standards.

Bvute added that Steven Mangongo, coach of provincial side Mountaineers, will assist Butcher.

"We have asked them to get us back into Test cricket in 18 months or so," he said.

Butcher, 56, a former Surrey coach who played one Test for England in 1979, takes control on April 1.

Tait-Warner show

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Shaun Tait and David Warner, two of Australia's Twenty20 specialists, continued the team's unbeaten summer by setting up a 38-run thrashing of West Indies in the first Twenty20 international in Hobart on Sunday.

Warner provided the early thrills with a brutal batting display before man-of-the-match Tait destroyed West Indies' top-order as Australia's plans for the ICC World Twenty20 took a step in the right direction.

Warner and Shane Watson lit up Bellerive Oval, which was hosting its first night international, by taking Australia to 83 without loss in the eighth over and some late fireworks from Brad Haddin pushed them to 179 for eight. It was a good but gettable total, until two wickets in Tait's first over knocked the life out of the chase. They were eventually restricted to 141 for eight.

Chris Gayle has failed to spark during the limited-overs portion of the summer and that trend continued when he swung wildly at Tait's fourth delivery and saw his stumps splayed. The next ball was angled across Narsinghi Deonarine, caught the edge and was sharply

taken by Watson at first slip.

Kieron Pollard survived the hattrick ball and blasted a couple of boundaries before he became the third of Tait's victims with an edge behind to a wonderful fast delivery that moved away off the seam. In between, Tait had been part of another breakthrough when Lendl Simmons slashed to him at third man off Dirk Nannes and after four overs, West Indies were 26 for four.

Tait and Nannes proved a difficult combination for Pakistan in the Twenty20 earlier this month and if they remain fit could be a lethal new-ball duo at the world tournament. Mitchell Johnson becomes a backup bowler in their presence and he chipped in with two wickets including Dwayne Smith, superbly caught on the boundary by a jumping Steven Smith.

Smith repeated it with another on-the-move boundary catch to give Nannes his third wicket after Runako Morton (40) and Denesh Ramdin (44) added some respectability to West Indies' scorecard. They were composed in a 73-run stand but never got West Indies back in the match.

It was a disappointing result after they showed imagination, by opening with two spin bowlers, and fight, as they dragged the run-rate back following the quick start from Warner and Watson.

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Pakistan draw series

Cricket

AFP, Dubai

Abdul Razzaq single-handedly changed the course of the match with a brilliant innings as Pakistan beat England by four wickets to level their two-match Twenty20 series 1-1 here on Saturday.

At the Dubai Sports City Stadium, England scored 148-6 from their 20 overs after being put in by Pakistan captain Shoaib Malik, who was second time lucky with the toss.

In reply, Pakistan looked down and out after being reduced to 78-5 in 13 overs, mainly due to a superb bowling effort from Graeme Swann.

The spinner took 3-14 in his four overs, a haul which included the wickets of Umar Akmal (36), Shoaib Malik (13) and Shahid Afridi (8).

However, Razzaq smashed five sixes in his 46 not out in 18 balls, as Pakistan reached the target with one over to spare.

He first added 48 important runs for the sixth wicket with Fawad Alam, and then hit two sixes in the penultimate over of the match from debutant Ajmal Shahzad to seal the issue in favour of his team.

After being hit for a boundary off the very

first ball in his international career, Shahzad picked up both the openers in his first over.

Imran Nazir was the first to go, trying to heave him over mid-wicket, but the top-edge flew to Tim Bresnan at third-man. Two balls later, Imran Farhat tried to pull a fullish length delivery, but only succeeded in giving a catch to Stuart Broad at mid-on. Pakistan were 4-2 at that stage.

Earlier, in England's innings, Joe Denly failed once again and was the first batsman to be dismissed when he was clean bowled by Yasir Arafat in the fourth over after making just five.

But Denley's fall brought Kevin Pietersen to the wicket. Along with Jonathan Trott, Pietersen added 98 runs for the second wicket, before Trott was unfortunately run out in the 16th over for 39.

Pietersen batted well on a pitch that was playing slow. He smashed three huge sixes and four boundaries in his 40-ball stay at the crease. He also got a life when Shahid Afridi put down a tough chance off Umar Gul in the 13th over. Pietersen was on 45 then.

After both Trott and Pietersen were dismissed in successive overs, England promoted Friday's hero Euan Morgan and the hard-hitting Luke Wright, but a flurry of wickets saw them fall two runs short of 150.

Arafat was the most successful bowler for

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What to WATCH

ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

DAY'S EVENT

National Cricket League
(Four-Day Match, Day One)
Rajshahi v Khulna
Venue: BKSP-2
Dhaka v Chittagong
Venue: Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium, Khulna



India's top-scorer Suresh Raina sweeps one on the on-slide as South Africa wicketkeeper Mark Boucher watches during the first one-day international at the Savai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur yesterday.