

FIRST ODI AGAINST ENGLAND TOMORROW

Tigers look to spin trap

SPORTS REPORTER

Can Shakib Al Hasan's men prove, while launching their campaign against England tomorrow, that they are the better team than the one that played at home more than six years back?

One should get a positive answer if he or she takes the words from the young Bangladesh skipper who made a bold statement ahead of the first one-day of the three match series to be held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur tomorrow.

There was no shortage of confidence while captain Shakib and coach Jamie Siddons spoke about their chances against a new-look England side during a pre-match press conference at Mirpur yesterday. Both have considered the favourable home conditions and their recent graph of improvement to think big about the series. Shakib was very much confident that it is not unlikely for them to win their first international match against England, the only major force they have yet to conquer.

"Yes, we are still winless in this year after two series' but

it's possible to win matches against England if we can play as per our ability. Realistically at least we can win one game; hopefully even two," said a confident Shakib, whose side

lost all the matches this year but played some decent cricket against formidable opponents like India, Sri Lanka and New Zealand. "It's a better team than the

one which played the home series back in 2003. And in home conditions we are a very good side and as always we have the opportunity to win the match," he added.

Shakib also said that they have a good chance to win the first match against England as the visitors are missing some of their key players in the series. "It's an inexperienced side but definitely the new players will also try their best to cement their position in the team but what I believe is that the conditions may favour us".

The Bangladesh captain informed that the wicket will be different from the tri-nation tournament.

"In the tri-nation the ball was coming on to the bat nicely but hopefully this time the pitch will offer low bounce and the ball will come to the bat late as we desire. We have a decent spin attack which I believe can play a big role in the series while as far as I know they (England) have only one good spinner in their arsenal," Shakib said explaining the advantage they can enjoy during the series.

Coach Jamie Siddons also echoed his captain's sentiment. "We are hoping that the conditions out here will undo them."

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Bangladesh cricket team captain Shakib Al Hasan (R) addresses a press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Visitors' school sojourn

Cricket

ANISUR RAHMAN

Only in their wildest dreams would the children from the Sher-e-Bangla Government Primary School have thought of the events that transpired yesterday afternoon.

Some may not even have had that luxury.

But spending an hour in the company of the England national cricket team made the day for the children of the school based about a quarter mile away from the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur.

After being welcomed by the students, who spread flowers on the arrival of the guests at their rural-looking school pre-

mises, cricketers Stuart Broad, Ryan Sidebottom, Matt Prior, Luke Wright, Ahmed Shahzad, Liam Denly and others first met with the teachers and then spent some time with students of class III and class V while distributing WFP (World Food Programme) fortified biscuits -- a nutritious snack which helps hungry children concentrate and learn in the classroom.

They chatted with the students and took photographs with them while the students entertained the players with renditions of popular English rhymes.

The children, who came to the school at about 12:30pm on the holiday, were very delighted and looked excited upon meeting with the English cricketers.

"I am very much pleased to have met the players though I don't know their names and it is no matter whether it is a holiday," said Dulal, a student of Class III.

All of the students informed that they came to know from their teachers that the cricketers of the England national team would visit their school and play with them.

As a part of the England and the Wales Cricket Board's commitment with the United Nations World Food Programme, WFP's school feeding scheme in Bangladesh arranged the programme in a bid to increase awareness of better health and nutrition among the school children as well as boost mentality through the cricketers.

The WFP-ECB partnership with a slogan of 'cricket against hunger', which was launched in 2006, uses the fact that the England squad is in a unique position to raise awareness about global hunger among their fans -- particularly when they tour countries where hunger is prevalent. The WFP in Bangladesh had

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

A young girl tries her hand in cricket, under the watchful eye of England player Luke Wright at the Sher-e-Bangla Government Primary School in Mirpur yesterday. Few members of the England squad were on a WFP related visit to the local school and enjoyed a few games with the students.

FIRST T20 AGAINST NEW ZEALAND

Aus seal opening match

Cricket

CRICINFO undated

It was a different country but the same result for Australia as they breezed to a six-wicket win over an out-classed New Zealand in the first Twenty20 in Wellington. After an unbeaten home summer the visitors started their tour with another convincing display built on very fast bowling and powerful opening batting.

New Zealand were knocked over for 118 by the speed of Shaun Tait, Dirk

Nannes and Mitchell Johnson and their chances of defending the small total were basically extinguished as soon as David Warner and Shane Watson blasted 28 from the first two overs. The openers were dismissed quickly and Johnson's promotion to No. 4 failed, dropping the visitors to 39 for 3, but the small target allowed them to take their time and the win came with 24 balls to spare.

David Hussey, who hit Nathan McCullum for three fours in a row, was the aggressor in the 67-run partnership with Michael Clarke, who accumulated calmly for 18 off 26. Hussey finished with 46 from

36 balls and left shortly before the end when he drove McCullum to cover. Cameron White ended the game with a four and a straight six off Martin Guptill in a strong sign-off.

Warner didn't have a chance to try batting right handed, but he made an impact with his usual stance by introducing himself to Shane Bond with a lofted straight four and a six to square leg in the first six balls. The situation was worse in the next over for Daryl Tuffey, who was taken for 18 by Watson's four fours and a two.

They both left with 19 -- and strike-rates

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Bangladesh fast bowler Mashrafe Bin Mortaza brushes up on his batting as he pads up for a go in the nets during training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Beximco bails out BCB

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has finally managed to find a sponsor for the Bangladesh-England series as Beximco came forward to save the country's most affluent sports federation from an embarrassment.

There had been a possibility that the series would start without any sponsor but Beximco brought the sponsorship rights in the last moment by providing one lakh dollars.

"I think the amount is quite satisfactory," said BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus.

There was a floor-price of one lakh twenty five thousand dollars and only one company had showed their interest with an offer of 72 thousand dollar initially.

The series will kick off with the first one-day of the three-match series tomorrow at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The second ODI and the second Test will also take place at the same venue while the third ODI and first Test will be held at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong.

Tickets for the first and second one-day (March 2) matches are available at Grameenphone Centers in and around Dhaka.

The ticket rates are: Gallery - Tk 50.00, Special Enclosure - Tk 100.00, Club House - Tk 200.00 and VIP Grand Stand - Tk 1000.00



Neo Cricket & SuperSport2

India v South Africa
Third ODI
Live from 3:00pm
ESPN

English Premier League
Chelsea v Man City
Live from 6:40pm
Bolton v Wolves
Live from 8:55pm
STAR Sports

English Premier League
Birmingham v Wigan
Live from 8:55pm
Stoke City v Arsenal
Live from 11:25pm
SuperSport7

Primera Liga
Tenerife v Real Madrid
Live from 1:00am (Sunday)

SuperSport3
Primera Liga
Barcelona v Malaga
Live from 3:00am (Sunday)

SUNDAY

BTV & SuperSport5

Bangladesh v England
First ODI
Live from 2:00pm
ESPN

English Premier League
Tottenham v Everton
Live from 6:55pm
Liverpool v Blackburn
Live from 9:00pm

Board, selectors in spotlight

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Serious questions have been raised regarding selection procedures after the board allegedly interfered and later overruled the team list of the selection committee while choosing the Bangladesh side for the ODI series at home against England.

There is severe doubt about the relevance of the Rafiqul Alam led selection panel after this episode where their original 14-member team list was disregarded by the board members, who later released a 13 man list, which notably omitted batsman Rokibul Hasan from the team. The issue of the culling of Mohammad Ashraful from the team has also stirred controversy, as it was unclear whether

the ex-national captain was dropped due to his own wishes or by the selection panel.

While the board members hold the right to dissolve the selection committee, team selection has long been mutually exclusive to the selection committee and interfering with the process is generally viewed as highly unprofessional. If the board are to overrule the decisions of the committee what is the use of having it in the first place, much less pay a healthy salary to its members?

This incident, while hopefully sporadic, might signal the return to a time when board members could pick the team. This led to favouritism and famously created a lot of controversy in the team selection history of the country. However, the last few years had seen a refreshing change as selectors enjoyed the freedom

of choice and dealings were generally administrated in a professional way.

But this incident has disheartened some with one high-up commenting on the condition of anonymity that this practice could set bad precedents and that he was unhappy at the events.

The non-selection of Ashraful has also raised many questions, not for why he was dropped but how and by whom. The common consensus is that Ashraful was discarded only because the player himself desired to take a break after a poor run of form. The chief selector didn't make it clear what their opinion about the fate of out-of-form Ashraful was. The right-hander has been going through an elongated lean patch and there have been plenty of calls for him to be dropped.

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THIRD AND FINAL ODI AGAINST SA TODAY

India rest Sachin

Cricket

AGENCIES, undated

India have made the challenge of accomplishing their first clean sweep against South Africa much harder by resting regular openers Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag. Their absence means India will line up at the Sardar Patel Stadium at Motera on Saturday without seven of their first-choice XI.

South Africa will be relieved to not have to deal with the openers but they still have puzzles in their own game to solve. They were soundly beaten in Gwalior and got close in the first ODI only because of Dale Steyn and Wayne Parnell's performances --

with the bat. Their batting order, apart from AB de Villiers and Jacques Kallis, hasn't pulled its weight. They will hope Hashim Amla can build on the momentum he showed in a cameo in the second ODI but, in the absence of Graeme Smith, much depends on Herschelle Gibbs.

It's not just their batting, though, that has been a cause of worry. The bowlers have been a let down as well. The fast bowlers have gone for pace and erred in line and length and have leaked runs on flat pitches. Surprisingly, for a team that prides itself on preparation, South Africa haven't bowled many cutters or slower ones to make batsmen fight that little extra bit to find their timing.

The Indian seamers have had their problems too but have been shored up by slower

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Beach football gets underway

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Cox's Bazar

Beach football got underway in Cox's Bazar yesterday with former star booters taking part in the two-day meet.

Six teams, split into two groups, are taking part in the beach football, first of its kind in Bangladesh.

Zakaria Pintu, the captain of the Swadhin Bangla Football Team, declared the tournament open while Tourism Corporation chairman Hemayetuddin Ahmed, Bangladesh Football Federation vice presidents Badal Roy and Shawkat Ali Khan Jahangir, Cox's Bazar's deputy commissioner Giasuddin Ahmed and former national footballer Sunil Krishna Dey were among others present.

On the opening day, Mohammedan Masters handed a 4-3 defeat to Cox's Bazar Beach Football Club, who also went 5-3 down to Brothers Masters.

Abahani Masters suffered a 3-2 defeat to Rahmatganj Masters, who, however, lost to Victoria Masters 5-2.



India players Murali Vijay (R) and Ravindra Jadeja inspect a bat as coach Gary Kirsten (L) looks on during a training session in Ahmedabad yesterday. They will take on South Africa in the third and final one-day international today.

PHOTO: AFP