

Coaching door shuts on Maradona

Diego Maradona admitted on Saturday that he is unlikely to be restored to the role of Argentina coach in the immediate future.



Tigers eye clean sweep

MOHAMMAD ISAM



Bangladesh today have the golden opportunity to complete the annihilation of New Zealand as they look forward to a 4-0 whitewash in the one-day series.

It would be another feather in the already rich cap of the Tigers in this series, as the scoreline would only be the first time they have done so in a home series against a top-flight international team.

A victory will also enable Bangladesh to go at par with the West Indies on 67 points in the ICC rankings. Bangladesh presently ranked ninth with 64 points.

Head coach Jamie Siddons certainly thinks the whitewash is possible, pointing out that the opposition may be caught on the hop again.

"We have the momentum. They are a little bit flat, waiting for the plane to go home. If we can put our foot down, we can definitely win the game. Then the whitewash is possible," said a buoyant Siddons while talking to the reporters ahead of yesterday's practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

"We have to fix our mistakes from the first game and put New Zealand under pressure and try and win the game," he added.

The feeling was evident as the Tigers looked relaxed after training was over but during the three-hour workout, there was an air of intent.

None of them looked like slacking off, something that could have easily happened with the satisfaction of winning the series.

Paceman Shafiqul Islam, not much of a talker



Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan (C) shares a light moment with young paceman Shafiqul Islam as left-arm spinner Sohrawardi Shuvo (L) looks on during a training session of the Tigers at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

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in front of the camera, said at least twice that the team is capable of pulling off a 4-0 win. "We will play for a win and I think this is our big chance. We have the self-belief and I'm sure we

will hold on it tomorrow [Sunday]," he said.

"We are confident because we are doing well in all departments of the game," added Shafiqul, who has taken 27 ODI wickets this year.

The Bogra lad said he knows how to finish off Brendon McCullum, the swashbuckling opener. "It is important to stop runs with him. Then he plays wild shots and we can get him out," he said.

But Siddons wants Shafiqul and his pace-bowling partner Rubel Hossain to improve bowling in the Powerplay but what really concerns the coach is the team's batting during that field-restriction period later in the match. "We always want to take it when we are batting well but inevitably when we take it, we lose wickets. So that is one area we can improve in the next game," he said.

"We can take it but the players need to make sure they use it," added Siddons.

The 46-year-old said he was waiting for the Tigers to play the perfect game to finish the job well.

"We made a lot of mistakes in the first three games. I want them to rectify and play a lot better."

"We should have made 270, we should have played a lot better in the final Powerplay and we should have bowled a lot better in the last 10 overs."

"Rokibul [Hasan] needs to improve and [Zunaid Siddiqui] Imrose hasn't performed yet. But he made a 100 and a ninety in the last 6-7 games. No need to panic or point fingers. The team didn't manage 270, not just one individual," said Siddons, who also told his charges not to "go flat" at any time of the match.

The coach also confirmed there won't be any change in the team, owing to continue the combination with the World Cup and even Zimbabwe one-dayers in mind.

"But most of all we want to win 4-0. We didn't play well last game, we got very lucky to get over the line," warned Siddons.

On a hiding to nothing?

SPORTS REPORTER

For the second time this series, New Zealand went silent with the media yesterday. The visitors prepared for the fifth and final one-day of the series against Bangladesh but like the eve of the fourth game, they decided against talking to the reporters.

An effort was made through the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) but that too was futile as they trained hard at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The custom has always been one player or the coach of the team to talk to the press on the day before the game but New Zealand have certainly avoided that. And even when they did talk, not many of the players had turned up. They have only kept to the protocol of doing the post-match press conference.

The Kiwis certainly have a lot on their mind, having the series and the Tickers.

Previously, they against India in South Africa in one series against in 1984-85. All three teams were on top of their game then and New Zealand the perennial underdogs but here, they face the unenviable prospect of going down to that scoreline against a team ranked three places below them.

This hasn't been a happy tour for the Kiwis, starting with the practice matches being washed out and then the three defeats in the one-day series, one of which was interrupted by rain.

Their Achilles' heel has been Shakib Al Hasan, who has 177 runs and 9 wickets, while their own players have failed miserably.

Apart from Ross Taylor and Kane Williamson (with his century), none of the New Zealand batsmen have scored over 100 runs in the series so far. The bowlers too have fared poorly in the unfamiliar conditions but it was expected that Daniel Vettori would make the difference but he too has only taken four wickets in three games.



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Porterfield eyes Eng Test spot

CRICINFO

William Porterfield has said he will consider giving up his role as Ireland captain if handed an opportunity to play Test cricket for England.

Porterfield, who recently signed up with Warwickshire, has led Ireland in 21 ODIs since 2008 but his country is not yet a Test-playing nation. Two other Ireland cricketers, Ed Joyce and Eoin Morgan, have gone on to play cricket for England with Morgan now a part of their Test line-up.

New force v Old guard Sheikh Jamal face Abahani in opener

SPORTS REPORTER

The second round of the Grameenphone Federation Cup could not have asked for a better start as Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club, the new powerhouse of local football

boasting as many as sixteen national players, will take on three-time professional football league champions Abahani in the first match at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur on Monday.

Sheikh Russel will take on Rahmatganj in the second match of the day. All four teams were pitted in group A while defending Federation Cup champions

Mohammedan Sporting Club, a rejuvenated Muktiyoddha Sangsad, Brothers Union and Feni Soccer Club complete group B, as the draw for the final round of the season's curtain-raiser tournament was held at the Bangladesh Football Federation conference room yesterday.

The semifinals will be held on October 25 and 26 respectively, and the final on October 29.

On paper, group A seems to be much harder than the other group. The main competition is expected to be between Abahani and Sheikh Jamal with Sheikh Russel being the outside contenders, while Muktiyoddha and Mohammedan are expected to be the front-runners for the semifinal berths from group B with Feni being the dark horse.

BFF senior vice-president Salam

Murshedi hoped now that the big teams will be competing better spectators in the final round compared to the first round. The ticket price for this round have been fixed at Tk30.

Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club, Brothers Union Club, Muktiyoddha Sangsad KC and Rahmatganj MFS confirmed their final round places after the qualification round that concluded on Friday while holders Mohammedan, runners-up Abahani, Sheikh Russel and Feni Soccer Club are directly taking part in the final round.

BFF league committee chairman Murshedi, vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed and sponsors Grameenphone's head of market communications Syed Tahmid Azizul Haque were, among others, present at the draw ceremony.



PHOTO: STAR

Senior vice-president of Bangladesh Football Federation Abdus Salam Murshedy (4th from R) and Bangladesh national team coach Robert Rubcic (2nd from L) pose for photographs with others at the draw ceremony of the final round of the Grameenphone Federation Cup at the BFF House yesterday.

Rubcic dreams big

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Robert Rubcic is expecting positive results in his first test as Bangladesh's football coach in the upcoming Asian Games Football which starts in the first week of November.

Bangladesh will take on Uzbekistan on November 7 in their opening match before taking on United Arab Emirates on November 9 and Hong Kong on the November 11.

Bangladesh stand at 145th place in the latest FIFA rankings with closest in the group being Hong Kong at 136th, while the other two teams are ranked below 100. But despite this huge gulf in the rankings, Rubcic thinks that Bangladesh can do well in the tournament if they approach the game with a positive mindset.

"We have respect for the teams we will play

against, but we are not afraid of them. Anything can happen in soccer, it is not impossible for us to beat all those three teams," said the 47-year-old Croatian as he watched the draw ceremony for the final round of the Federation Cup at the BFF house yesterday with his wife, Helen, doing the job of the interpreter.

Rubcic, who had been the former assistant coach of the Croatian national team, said they could take lessons from what New Zealand had done in this year's football World Cup. Despite being a tiny nation, they drew against three big teams with defensive strategies and said he was looking to opt a similar strategy.

"We are not like Brazil or Barcelona, so we cannot play attacking football and still win against good teams. We will be having a well-guarded defence and put few men up front to counter these teams in the Asian Games," he said.

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Setback for Pietersen

AFP, Durban

Kevin Pietersen's bid to find form ahead of England's Ashes tour of Australia suffered a setback on Friday when he was out second ball without scoring in a South African first-class match.

In his second and final match for the Dolphins franchise before joining the England squad, Pietersen prodded half-forward and was leg before wicket to Titans seam bowler Ehy Mbhalali on the second day of a four-day SuperSport Series match at Kingsmead.

Pietersen was the third man out in a Dolphins top order collapse in which they crashed to 25 for four in reply to the Titans' 242 all out.

In his first match for the Dolphins a week earlier, Pietersen missed out on a run feast by the Dolphins, scoring 36 in a total of 500-6 declared against the Warriors in Pietermaritzburg.



PHOTO: STAR

New Zealand coach Mark Greatbatch (L) pats Kane Williamson as they set off for the final training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Williamson scored a fantastic 108 in the fourth one-day against Bangladesh on Thursday.

Clarke's time to prove First ODI against India today

Cricket

CRICINFO, Kochi

Michael Clarke will lead Australia in the ODIs, and he'll feel the pressure. There has been an intense debate in Australia about the future, including captaincy. There appear to be three camps: Ponting loyalists, Clarke aficionados and the anyone-but-Clarke club.

The third should worry Clarke. His poor performance in the Tests this tour has added more fuel to critics who believe Clarke rarely performs when the team needs it. Australian captains have been tough; Clarke is seen as a bit of a show pony by his critics. This three-match series, which starts today in Kochi, will give him another opportunity to silence them.

In India, there is no such debate. There are those who put Mahendra Singh Dhoni's success down to luck but they haven't reached a critical mass. And even they can't put forward an alternative name for captain. Former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar put it thus: "Dhoni is a guy who does things that are supposed to be done and leaves the rest to fate. He doesn't try to control everything. That is his greatest strength."

The series will be a contest between two men -- one itching to prove that he is the man for the future, and one whose future in the

pantheon of successful Indian captains is already secure. If only the weather allows them. Australia haven't been able to practice in Kochi, the venue of the first ODI. Their players, during this time, have been tweeting about spending their time in the gym and wishing the rain would stop.

Just when Callum Ferguson was establishing himself in the ODI line-up and looking ahead to securing a place in the Tests, he twisted his knee in the Champions Trophy final and had to sit out for a while. The Twenty20 tournament in South Africa, was his comeback and he starred with two half-centuries, finishing fifth on the tournament run tally. The best thing going for him is that there seems to be almost no one in Australia who doesn't rate him highly. This ODI series should help him kick-start his ambitions and others' hopes.

Ravichandran Ashwin's time has surely come. A stable head, calm temperament and rapidly developing skill-set puts him right up there in the reckoning for a spot in the playing XI. The all-round development has been visible: He developed a carrom ball and has now honed it to perfection, he uses the crease more intelligently and has already developed a reputation of bowling in the Powerplays. His development hasn't gone unnoticed. "He is used to bowling in the Powerplays. He is an aggressive bowler, he has the variety and he is always ready

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SPORTS POLL TODAY'S QUESTION Do you think Real Madrid has improved under Jose Mourinho? Visit the sports page of www.thedailystar.net to cast your vote

What to WATCH

BTB Bangladesh v New Zealand Fifth ODI Live from 9:00am NEO Cricket India v Australia First ODI Live from 9:30am STAR Sports MotoGP World Championship Australian Grand Prix Live from 7:57am TEN Cricket Int'l South Africa v Zimbabwe Second ODI Live from 2:00pm ESPN English Premier League Everton v Liverpool Live from 6:25pm Blackpool v Man City Live from 8:55pm TEN Sports Serie A Bari v Lazio Live from 12:40am (Monday)