

Lehmann set for shock comeback

Former German international goalkeeper Jens Lehmann could be in line for a shock short-term comeback on the bench at Arsenal, to help ease their problems in goal, it was reported Sunday.

The 41-year-old retired from football in 2010, but is back in north London to work with the Gunners' young goalkeepers, just as the Premier League title chasers have a growing problem in the Number One position. Lehmann could be a short-term option for Wenger with Szczesny expected to return in six weeks from a finger injury



Shakib calls for normalcy

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

Shakib Al Hasan has urged the fans to remain "normal" after big wins or big losses following their 6-wicket win over the Netherlands at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium here yesterday.

After his team's cruise over the ICC Associates in a one-sided encounter, the world's No 1 ranked all-rounder said that the confidence of the public is back on the team after two favourable results over the last four days.

"I think they are confident because they were supportive all the time. We played one bad game and that time they went wrong. But other than that, they were always supporting us," said Shakib during the post-match press conference.

"It is good to get the confidence from the crowd. They will understand (that) at the end of the day it's a game, some days you will win and some days you will lose and hopefully they will take it normally," he said.

Shakib had to undergo a tough week after the 58 all out debacle on March 4, but the team bounced back through a thrilling 2-wicket victory over England last Friday and this easy win. He said that he found differences between both extremes.

"We knew that a win would change everything and because we had played well previously, we knew we could repeat that and that one bad game won't matter. I never thought that we went too far back after that game.

"If you're talking about the last 10 days, of course there will be a little difference. A lot of negative talks will come as positive. I think everyone will try to talk positive. So there will be a difference," said Shakib, who counted out the run-rate factor from his team's equation, giving more importance to winning

and also banking on the result from the England-West Indies game.

If England beat West Indies, Bangladesh are definitely through to the quarterfinals. But if England win, then the Tigers have to win their last game on March 19 against South Africa. Things will also get interesting if Ireland end up surprising South Africa.

"We don't think we can cover the run-rate, because we didn't score big in this tournament. It is not depending on the run-rate, if we win the next match, we will qualify for the next round, it is as simple as that," he said.

Shakib and his opposite number Peter Borren were full of Shafiqul Islam's praises, although the paceman went wicketless in an impressive 9-over spell.

"If you take a look at it, both our first two wins were his contributions. He's doing well in the crucial moments. Today as well he bowled well with the new ball and returned to bowl a good spell. I think he learned a lot from the India game," said Shakib.

Borren said that Shafiqul was accurate, thus not helping his team's cause of attacking the seamers.

"He bowled really well. He did not bowl a bad ball the whole day and he was pretty consistent. We were looking to attack the seamers a little bit at the start because we felt that it might have been our opportunity to score with the Powerplay and the hard ball and the pace on the ball.

"But, to be honest, he really did not allow us to do anything at all," explained Borren.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh keeper Mushfiqur Rahim is lifted off the ground by a teammate after his brilliant run out of Netherlands batsman Tom Cooper during their World Cup match at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday.

To get this picture email to pics11@ovi.com

Port city enjoys WC holiday

AFP, Chittagong

People in Chittagong were given the day off on Monday to watch Bangladesh play the Netherlands in their crucial World Cup Group B clash.

Offices and schools were shut in the port city as a sell-out crowd of 18,000 jammed the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium for the game.

Three of the four previous matches held in Dhaka and Chittagong fell on Fridays, the weekly holiday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said before the tournament began that a local holiday would be declared if a World Cup match was played on a working day.

Bangladesh's last league match against South Africa is scheduled in Dhaka on Saturday, and workers and pupils are set to enjoy another day off.

Two quarterfinals will also be held in Bangladesh, on March 23 (Wednesday) and March 25 (Friday).

Bangladesh is hosting cricket's premier tournament for the first time with India and Sri Lanka. All the five matches so far have attracted full houses.

Imrul's two in two

MOHAMMAD ISAM from Chittagong

Opener Imrul Kayes fulfilled an important target in his growth as a player yesterday: he remained at the crease till the end.

For the 24-year-old who says he doesn't have special plans, the 73 not out was a significant step forward, ensuring that his side went over the line in their 6-wicket win over the Netherlands at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday.

"This is a special innings simply because I remained not out," said Imrul at the end of yesterday's game.

The number of hugs for the well-built Imrul was on the rise as he made his way back to the dressing room after speaking to the media in the post-match press conference, but for the Meherpur lad, it seems nothing much has changed.

"I really liked this innings you know. I think it was not the easiest wicket to bat on. After [Shahriar] Nafees came to the crease, I realised that it wasn't going to be easy to play the big shots so I changed gear. I just focused on staying firm and remain till the end," explained Imrul, who also goes by the nickname Sagar.

"After Tamim [Iqbal] got out, Junaed [Siddiqui] came in and when he played shots off good balls, I knew that if I wanted to stay at the crease, I would be successful," he added.

Skipper Shakib Al Hasan was pleased with Imrul's display of patience. "He batted very well. I thought it was a wicket where he had to struggle so I thought he did the right thing. Since we didn't have any tensions, I think he did the right job," said Shakib.

The unbeaten 113-ball innings that had six boundaries also brought him a second successive man-of-the-match award, but this time Imrul thinks he deserved it.

"Of course I'm having a good time. I said last time that Shafiqul deserved it but I think I played well, stayed till the end. I always thought about when I would get the man-of-the-match award as

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AFC CHALLENGE CUP

Enamul, Wali dropped

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Striker Enamul Haque and defender Wali Faisal have been excluded from the 20-member national team picked by coach Robert Rubcic yesterday for the AFC Challenge Cup Qualifiers in Myanmar scheduled for March 21-25.

The Croatian chose half of the players from the Under-23 side that played two pre-Olympic Qualifying matches against Kuwait recently while the rest have been picked from among the seniors, most of whom Rubcic had earlier criticised for their performances in the Asian Games.

Like off-form Enamul and Wali; striker Zahid Hasan Emily, winger Zahid Hossain, defender Nasirul Islam and some of the others picked have also been performing poorly in the ongoing professional league yet retained their places in the side for the AFC Challenge Cup squad.

"Enamul does not run as much as a striker should do. Furthermore, he is not in form. Wali has also been kept out due to his poor form," explained assistant coach Shafiqul Bari Titu quoting head coach Rubcic for axing Enamul and Wali.

However, Tito defended the inclusion of Emily by saying: "Emily has been kept in the side as an experienced striker along with upcoming Mithun Chowdhury and Shakawat Hossain Rony."

Last year, Bangladesh qualified for the AFC

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SQUAD

Aminul Islam, Mamun Khan, Mohammad Nehal, Ashraf Mahmud Linkon, Rezaul Karim, Mintu Sheikh, Uttam Kumar Banik, Atiqur Rahman Mishu, Yeamin Munna, Nasirul Islam Nasir, Mamunul Islam, Monaem Khan Raju, Zahid Hossain, Shakil Ahmed, Abdul Baten Komol, Mehdi Hasan Ujjal, Shahedul Islam, Mithun Chowdhury, Shakawat

GROUP B STANDINGS							
Country	P	W	L	T	NR	PTS	NRR
India	5	3	1	1	0	7	+0.768
West Indies	4	3	1	0	0	6	+2.206
South Africa	4	3	1	0	0	6	+1.352
Bangladesh	5	3	2	0	0	6	-0.765
England	5	2	2	1	0	5	+0.013
Ireland	4	1	3	0	0	2	-0.444

Today's Match

Match: South Africa v Ireland

Time: 3:00pm

Venue: Kolkata

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South Africa v Ireland

India's future, at least to an extent, depends largely on South Africa's fate. The two teams are virtually tied, with India maintaining only a slight point's lead. A loss to Ireland, besides being a wonderful upset for India fans to watch, would put India that much further along. And it looks like South Africa has a big problem with batsman AB de Villiers as the doubtful for the Group B match tomorrow. The doubtful for the Group B match tomorrow shows "head to head" on South Africa and Ireland shows that South Africa has won the only World Cup that meeting between the two. As for Ireland, this team has not made it easy for any of their opponents. A victory against South Africa would settle many scores, the biggest being the pride of a team quickly outliving their "minnow" status. This should be a good one.

Joy Mahmud Mithu

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