

# SPORT

## Chance for grabbing middle-order spots

### *Coach likes Marshall Ayub's chances*

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong

As the first Test against New Zealand draws closer, Bangladesh will be looking for a contender to fill the crucial number three spot previously occupied by Mohammad Ashraf. The three-day practice match between a BCB XI and New Zealand, scheduled to take place today at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong, will be an opportunity for the team management to finalise the Test 11. The practice match however, is in for a delayed start due to consistent rainfall over the past week leaving wet patches on the outfield.

According to national coach Shane Jurgensen however, it's the uncapped Marshall Ayub who is the front-runner for that position.

Speaking to reporters at the Agrabad Hotel in Chittagong where both teams are put up, Jurgensen said: "I think Marshall has really put his hand up with a hundred in the practice match at Khulna a few weeks ago. He was quite impressive and batted for long periods. I would have thought at the moment he would be the frontrunner. But it's still not fixed."

Apart from Marshall, Naeem Islam and Mominul Haque are the other contenders, both of whom have been among the runs in the recent past. However, two of the three might still get into the side if Bangladesh decide



to field a team with three specialist bowlers, apart from Shakib Al Hasan.

"I think that's the main sort of angle we need to look into now and that's why the practice match is important to give an indication of who stands where. Naeem has been batting well and then we have Mominul who is a gutsy cricketer and can bat for long periods. The average balls that all those guys face per innings is impressive so let's see what happens," said Jurgensen.

Jurgensen indicated that the hosts were likely to field a traditional two-man pace attack for the Tests. In that case Rubel Hossain and Robiul Islam are likely to get picked ahead of Al Amin Hossain. The coach has been particularly impressed with Rubel, who picked 19 wickets in the first five rounds of the Dhaka Premier League.

"Any bowler, doesn't matter who the opposition is, in any level of cricket, if he is getting wickets, that gives you confidence and that is what excites me about Rubel. I think he is potentially coming back to where he was two years ago

when he was bowling fantastically against Pakistan before the shoulder injury," said Jurgensen.

The coach said that Robiul, who has been nursing a hamstring injury for the last few weeks, was 'not a concern' and that he was getting through the fitness tests. Shakib and Shohag Gazi are expected to handle the spin department.

The Australian who spent some time reminiscing on his time coaching the Kiwis stated that there were no 'clear favourites' in the series. "We have a slight home advantage and I know a thing or two about them and that might be an advantage, but it's going to be a challenging series for both teams, no doubt," said Jurgensen.

While a 14-man team for the first Test was earlier announced, Jurgensen expressed his disappointment in the manner things ran off the field over the last few days. A 28-member preliminary squad was shortened before schedule so as not to affect the clubs participating in the Dhaka Premier League.

"Off the field I think it's been a little disappointing the way things have transpired. I have had plans in place for quite a few months so it was a little disappointing that it took us a while to get things settled. It would have been good if we had more flexibility with the squad, but then again we have moved on from there," he said.



Bangladesh stars Tamim Iqbal (R) and Shakib Al Hasan arrive at the team hotel in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Rakib still leading

SPORTS REPORTER

GM Abdullah Al Rakib maintained his solo lead in the 39th National Chess Championship at close of the 11th round at the Media Centre of Bangladesh Olympic Association yesterday.

Rakib beat IM Abu Sufian Shakil to earn 9.5 points from eleven matches while GM Ziaur Rahman and IM Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar were jointly in the second position with 8.5 points each.

Zia beat Shafiq Ahmed while Sagar drew with GM Enamul Hossain Rajib. The players have been given one-day rest today. The penultimate round will be held on Saturday.

## CSA ponders revising its black quotas

AFP, Cape Town

South African cricket officials are set to consider a proposal forcing professional franchises to include at least two black Africans in every team.

Another item expected to be discussed at an October 11 Cricket South Africa (CSA) meeting will be the need for second-tier, semi-professional provincial sides to select three black Africans.

CSA have not commented officially on the proposals, but an official who attended recent transformation talks told AFP both issues would be debated.

While the six top-tier franchises have picked numerous mixed-race or Asian-origin cricketers in recent seasons, there has been a dearth of black Africans on view.

Fast bowler Makhaya Ntini carried the black African banner in the Test, one-day international (ODI) and Twenty20 (T20) teams for many seasons.

Since Ntini retired two years ago, black African fast-medium bowler Lonwabo Tsotsobe has been in and out of Proteas teams in various formats.

## Kiwis to counter spin with pace

SPORTS REPORTER

New Zealand head coach Mike Hesson said yesterday that his charges are ready to face the spin challenge awaiting them in the series against the Tigers.

After spending two quiet days, the New Zealand team spoke to local media at a Dhaka hotel where Hesson expressed his confidence in his young team.

"Every time we play in the sub-continent we have to face a lot of spin. We are looking forward to the challenge and this will be a big test for us," said a confident Hesson.

"Before coming here, we spent nine days in Sri Lanka where we faced many spinners; we are well aware of the spinners in Bangladesh. We know we have to face a couple of left-arm spinners and we have to face Gazi (Shohag) and a couple of off-spinners," he added.

Instead of being worried about Bangladesh's spinners, Hesson indi-



cated that the Kiwis' young pace attack may be a problem for the hosts.

"We have some young talented bowlers on our side with the ability to swing and reverse swing the ball. They are ready to present some tough challenges," said Hesson adding that they will miss the experience of Daniel Vettori.

24-year old left-arm paceman Trent Boult, who so far picked up 49 wickets in 15 Tests, backed his coach's views.

"It's tough for the fast bowlers to get success in these conditions but I have had a bit of success in these conditions. I will look to swing the ball up front and also to reverse swing the ball later in the innings. Hopefully conditions suit me,"

said Boult during the press conference.

Hesson dismissed notions of revenge for the Kiwis' 4-0 ODI drubbing on their last visit in 2010. Interestingly, instead of Shakib Al Hasan -- the man who engineered that series win -- it is Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim who has drawn special attention as the Kiwis believe that he is the man to watch in the series.

"Mushfiqur is a quality batsman, he has been in touch for the last 12 months, so he will be the player to watch and we have some plans for him," said Hesson.

The New Zealand coach believed that the two-match Test series will be a real challenge for them as they had to work hard to win the last Test series in Bangladesh in 2008.

"We had a tough series last time and we are expecting nothing but a tough series ahead," said Hesson.



New Zealand head coach Mike Hesson (L) talks to reporters while paceman Trent Boult looks on at a hotel in the capital yesterday. The Black Caps later reached Chittagong.

PHOTO: STAR

## Goal is playing AFC C'ship

### *U-19 team leave for Iraq tomorrow*

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh U-19 football team leaves here for Iraq tomorrow night to take part in the AFC U-19 Championship qualifiers with a hope of making it to the final round.

"Our goal is to qualify for the next round," head coach Rene Koster said at a press conference yesterday as his charges have been preparing for one-and-a-half months to face the challenges from stronger opponents in the group, which includes former champions and hosts Iraq, Kuwait and Pakistan.

"You know the progress of the youth side is a process and my main target with this side is to take these players into the national team in two years. International exposure is also an important aspect and these players will gather experience playing three international matches," said Koster, who is also the assistant coach of the national team.

Koster also believed that there were some talented individuals in the side and they would be stars of Bangladesh in future.

Nevertheless, Iraq will be tough opponents for Bangladesh, with Kuwait posing no less threat later on. They then face Pakistan in their last match. Yet Bangladesh stand good chance of qualifying for the finals as one of the six best runners-up among nine groups.

After watching video footages of Iraq and Kuwait, Koster believes both Iraq and Kuwait are stronger sides than Bangladesh. But he also has confidence in his boys, especially the way the boys played in a few practice matches against a couple of academy sides and a combined eleven has heartened him.

National coach Lodewijk de Kruijff will be touring with the U-19 squad as the technical adviser while goalkeeping coach Kees Kalk and trainer Muhammet Yamali will also be part of the 27-member contingent.

SUBROTO CUP FOOTBALL

## BKSP go to Delhi today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) will take part in the 54th Subroto Cup U-17 football tournament which has already got underway at Dr Ambedkar Stadium in Delhi, India.

The side, which is scheduled to leave here for the Indian capital today, will start their campaign taking on champions Mizoram of India on October 8. Different champion schools of Indian states and school teams from Sri Lanka, Nepal, United Kingdom, Oman, Afghanistan and Bangladesh will be competing in the tournament.

## BCB POLLS Scant interest in one-horse race

SPORTS REPORTER



The excitement surrounding the much talked about elections of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) all but evaporated as only one group is now in the race. Therefore there was hardly any interest to see who submitted their nomination papers yesterday.

Only the tug of war between former national skipper Gazi Ashraf Hossain and CWAB (Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh) secretary Debabrata Paul added spice to an otherwise dull affair. Debabrata came down heavily on Gazi Ashraf for his failure to uphold the interest of the cricketers in the past. Gazi Ashraf counterattacked by saying that 'everybody should look at his own face in the mirror'.

Many were looking forward to an interesting contest for the director's post from category three as former national skipper and current ad-hoc committee member Gazi Ashraf Hossain, former national captain Khaled Mahmud and Jahangirnagar University councillor Debabrata Paul submitted their nomination papers.

But whether there will be any contest on October 10, the date of the election, will only be confirmed on October 7, the date of withdrawal of nominations.

21 papers were submitted from category two for 12 posts, 14 from category one for ten posts and three from category three for one post -- a total of 38 nomination papers were submitted from 43 collected papers and all well-known Nazmul Hassan Papon loyalists were present.

Many however quipped that an 'arranged' contest may be held for some posts to give the elections flavour but it has all but been confirmed that everything is now under control of Papon's men.

Gazi Tank owner Lutfur Rahman Badal's eleventh-hour submission also created some interest.

## It depends on Sachin: BCCI Board refuses sending proposal

PTI, Mumbai



Rubbishing reports that Sachin Tendulkar has been asked by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to retire after his 200th Test, the board's secretary Sanjay Patel on Thursday said it was the senior batsman's prerogative to decide on his future.

"That is absolutely absurd and rubbish. Let me tell you, it will be the prerogative of Mr. Sachin Tendulkar. Board has not talked or asked him to resign [retire] and the Board is never going to do it because he is such a great player," Patel told reporters here on Thursday.

Patel was reacting to media reports that quite a few board members were of the opinion that the record-setting batsman was past his prime and could be told to call it a day after he completes his landmark 200th Test appearance, against the visiting West Indies next month.

The Windies are to play two Tests and three ODIs during their visit and the 40-year-old Tendulkar has played 198 Tests.

"We appreciate the concern [from media] about this. But I ask my good media friends, please refrain [from speculating] and from going [ahead reporting] with such wrong details," Patel said.

The BCCI secretary put the onus entirely on Tendulkar and the five-man selection panel about his cricketing future.

"It is entirely upon Sachin Tendulkar and selectors. The selectors should [choose to] pick him and Sachin Tendulkar should be ready to play. Board is very happy with whatever [decision] Sachin Tendulkar is taking of his own free will," Patel elaborated.

## Aussie Hall to coach Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani is set to appoint Australian Nathan Hall as its coach for the upcoming football season which is likely to get underway through the Federation Cup later this month.

"Nathan will start his job from October 20 and we will finalise the deal after his arrival," said Abahani director Kazi Nabil Ahmed yesterday.

The Sky Blues are roping in an Australian coach for the first time following two Iranians Ali Akbar and Ardeshir Purnamate, who guided Abahani in the last three seasons.

Hall has experience of coaching club teams in Thailand, Indonesia and India. He was appointed by Indian side Sikkim United but was terminated halfway through the season.

"We are looking for such a coach who is interested to enrich his bio-data rather than his salary and we can hope that he will be able to fulfil our expectation," Nabil told reporters.

Abahani players have already started their pre-season training under the guidance of long-serving coach Amalesh Sen. Two Moroccan footballers joined the camp for trial.

## ASIAN U-14 TENNIS Boys' last four field finalised

SPORTS REPORTER

Rubel, Kawsar, Naimul and Pakistani Shahibjada moved into the semifinals of the boys' singles in the Asian U-14 Tennis Series after beating their respective rivals at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan yesterday.

Rubel beat Hridoy 6-3, 6-4, Kawsar beat Istiaq 6-4, 6-3, Naimul beat Sadman and Shahibjada beat Faruque 7-5 and 6-2.

## Clarke doubtful for first Ashes Test

AFP, Sydney

Australian captain Michael Clarke on Thursday admitted he may not be fit for the first Ashes Test against England next month, with his long-standing back problem needing extended treatment and rest.

Clarke was ruled out of Australia's one-day tour of India this month and while desperate to be ready for the first Ashes Test in Brisbane on November 21, the star batsman is pragmatic.

"Where I sit right now is I don't know when I'll be back playing cricket," he said. "We have no idea how long it's going to take.

"There's certainly no guarantee [for the first Test] at this stage. It's hard for me to say that because I'm trying my best not to look at it like that.

"I'm always positive and if they ask me, I'll say I'll be fit in a week's time. But you ask Alex [Kountouris, team physio] who knows me very well, and he'd say there'd be doubt I won't be right."

Clarke has been plagued by back problems for years and they flared up again before Australia's final ODI in Southampton last month at the end of a gruelling five-Test Ashes tour to England, which Australia lost 3-0.

## DRU cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

ATN News, Massranga TV, Independent TV, NTV, GTV, Alokito Bangladesh, Bartaman and Naya Diganto notched up victories in the Walton-DRU cricket tournament at the Mulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.