



Bangladesh pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, set to make a long-awaited return from injury in the first ODI against New Zealand today, kicks around a football before practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Fresh faces excite McCullum



Skipper Brendon McCullum smiles during New Zealand's press conference yesterday.

SPORTS REPORTER



That New Zealand have made eight changes from their Test side for the ODI series reflects the disparity between their Test and one-day strategies.

Kiwi captain Brendon McCullum himself stated that their Test side is 'nowhere near their finished product' and that they were more confident in the ODIs; a format that they fare much better at.

"It's a new series, and we have got new players as well. It's exciting to welcome them to the tour and from our point of view, we will be looking to win the three-match series," said McCullum, at the pre-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

It will be the visitors' pace attack that will face the biggest change. With only one spinner in the side -- Nathan McCullum -- they will be fielding a three-man pace attack with the likes of Tim Southee, Kyle Mills and Mitchell McClenaghan.

While Mills and Southee have been around for a while it will be McClenaghan who Bangladesh will have to keep an eye on. In the 10 ODIs that he has played, the fast bowler has taken four four-wicket hauls and has an average of 16.51.

"He is an incredibly exciting talent for us. Since he has come into international cricket we have been able to change the way we attack with the new ball. We have been able to attack right from the beginning with his short spells. He is a strong lad who can swing the ball and reverses it as well," said McCullum.

The other new pacers include fast-bowling all-rounder Jimmy Neesham and pacer Adam Milne, both of who are who expected to get a chance as the series goes on. Among the batsmen there's Anton Dechich who is expected to open alongside Hamish Rutherford and middle-order batsman Grant Elliott.

With so many changes in the side, the Kiwis will want their newer players to adjust to the conditions as soon as possible, something that the captain was aware of.

"That's going to be one of the challenges and also with the nature of how quick those games are with just a gap of one day. That could be quite tough as well, so we need to be certain of what the best make-up is," said McCullum.

"Also some guys are making their first trip to the subcontinent as well. We have got to be aware of that and make sure that we don't expose all the guys that are here in the subcontinent for the first time, and that we can surround them with some experience as well," he added.

McCullum is also aware of the toss factor and will field first to avoid the dew in the evening.

The Kiwis beat South Africa and England in their last three series and have a far better record in the ODIs. However, does playing in Bangladesh after three years revive the ghosts of the series defeat in 2010? Not so much, according to the captain.

"It's a hard one because there is a lot of difference from back then. We have evolved a lot as a team. It would be great for us to turn the tables from what happened last time, but it's not a major motivating factor. We have got enough motivation to try and win the series in itself," said McCullum.

BISHWAJIT ROY



ahead of their three-match ODI series against New Zealand, which kicks off today with the a day-night game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Since the arrival of the Black Caps in the capital, there has been much reminiscing on the Tigers' 4-0 'Banglawash' three years back. And that was the theme when the two captains -- Mushfiqur Rahim and Brendon McCullum -- talked to the media in a pre-match press conference yesterday at Mirpur.

For their part, New Zealand have made it clear from the very beginning that the new-look side are not interested in digging up the 2010 ghost, nor in any thoughts of revenge. However, regardless of whether 2010 is on the minds of the visitors, it is the home team who will have to forget those sweet memories. The onus, in fact, is on Mushfiqur Rahim's men to keep performing consistently to prove that they are a tough one-day side at home and to cement their reputation as a fast-improving ODI side.

Despite New Zealand's good show-

It would not be wholly illogical if someone stuck the tag of favourites on the Tigers

ing in ODIs -- the young outfit won six out of eleven matches with series wins against England and South Africa -- Bangladesh have the slight edge not because of their historic result in their last meet at the very same venue and their recent impressive performance in the drawn Test series, but because of their continuing success at home since that magnificent achievement in 2010.

Bangladesh have won 16 out of 38 matches since that whitewash, 12 of them coming at home from 28 games -- noteworthy among them being their brilliance in the Asia Cup and the 3-2 series victory over West Indies last year. These statistics reveal a formidable team in their own conditions. And the most refreshing fact was that the Tigers clinched the 4-0 victory without dashing opener Tamim Iqbal and pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza before winning the West Indies series sans inspirational all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan; results that justify the team think-tank's claim that the number of performers has increased in the side.

"In some way all the positive stats sometimes creates pressure, but this team is very confident of handling the pressure and expectations," said former national skipper turned selector Habibul Bashar.

Bearing in mind their foremen-

tioned successes without star players, skipper Mushfiqur will be buoyed by the fact that he will have the services of his three stalwarts -- Shakib (although the all-rounder, suffering from fever, is doubtful for today's game), Tamim and Mashrafe -- when he takes on the challenge to improve their home record against the Kiwis, with whom they are now locked at 5-5.

The slow bowlers have always played a big role in Bangladesh's home wins and they dictated terms in the 4-0 win against the Kiwis, but Mashrafe is always a vital force when he in the side. The return from injury of the 'Narail Express' is expected to bolster the struggling pace attack but the question of whether the paceman can bowl with his full venom on his international return after a long break remains.

History however suggests that the talismanic paceman can be trusted to deliver.

In the face of political turmoil, the national cricket team -- a symbol of unity -- can bring a smile to their millions of fans and they have the records in their favour to do it. With the weather expected to hold up, they only need to apply themselves and play to their potential, regardless of whether they are favoured by the coin toss in the day-night affair.

Where are the other tickets?

SPORTS REPORTER

The other day it was announced that the all tickets for the today's day-night one-day match between Bangladesh and New Zealand had been sold out. Yet a large number of fans queued in front of different United Commercial Bank branches yesterday from early in the morning in a hope to get a ticket, only to return with broken hearts. There were only a few fortunate ones who could get tickets from the Motijheel Principal branch only on the day.

The unavailability of tickets caused furore among some fans who ransacked the bank's Mirpur-10 branch. In the aftermath, UCBL's managing director Muhammed Ali came down heavily on the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) for what happened about the tickets.

"In total we received 11,000 tickets and most of those were sold on Sunday. There were few tickets left which were sold in Motijheel today [Monday]. It is unfortunate that fans vented their anger on one of our branches. In fact what can we do if the BCB gives so few tickets when the stadium's capacity is over 24,000?" told Ali The Daily Star over phone last night.

Now comes the question: Where have all the other tickets gone? BCB's acting CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury informed that the practice has been that the board gives 60 per cent tickets to banks for public consumption, distributes 20 per cent as complimentary tickets and holds back the remaining 20 per cent to fulfil the demands of the stakeholders.

Interestingly, the BCB this time didn't even give that 60 per cent or 14,400 tickets to the bank. Nizamuddin however said that they would give more tickets to the bank for the second match on October 31 that would go on sale today.

Tremlett targets Clarke

AFP, Perth



England paceman Chris Tremlett said Monday he aims to target Australia captain Michael Clarke if he gets the chance to bowl in the Ashes series.

Tremlett is vying for the third and final spot in England Test pace attack, along with Steven Finn and Boyd Rankin, starting in Thursday's opening tour game against a Western Australian Chairman's XI in Perth ahead of the Ashes series opener in Brisbane on November 21.

The Surrey giant terrorised Australia's batsmen on the last Ashes tour three years ago, when England retained the urn down under.

In that series, Tremlett snared 17 wickets across three Tests, including a match haul of 8-150 in Perth.

Although he failed to fire during the recent English county season, his previous hot form in Australia has him right in the mix to feature in this southern summer's return Ashes series.

And the 32-year-old knows just how crucial it will be to snare the wicket of Clarke, who remains Australia's premier batsman despite ongoing back issues.

"It's always important that you target the captain in any side and obviously he's been their form player in the last few years," said Tremlett, who dismissed Clarke twice in Perth three years ago.

"If you can get one over the captain in any side, obviously it's an advantage.

Ryder back with a bang

AFP, Wellington



Troubled New Zealand cricketer Jesse Ryder on Monday completed a remarkable comeback from a serious assault by posting a century in his first game for more than seven months.

He scored 117 off 164 balls playing for Otago away to his former side Wellington in a provincial championship match.

It was Ryder's first appearance with the bat since being seriously assaulted outside a bar in the South Island city of Christchurch last March.

He was later suspended for six months after testing positive to a banned substance contained in weight loss pills.

Ailing Shakib could hurt hosts' plans



Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim talks at the pre-match press conference yesterday.

PHOTO : STAR

NAIMUL KARIM



Bangladesh's preparations for their first ODI against New Zealand suffered a huge blow as Shakib Al Hasan, who was suffering from fever yesterday, remains uncertain for today's game.

Shakib, who visited a hospital last night, was reportedly running a temperature of 103 degrees Fahrenheit. If Shakib does not play today, then he is likely to be replaced by either Naeem Islam or Ziaur Rahman, provided the selectors do not bring in a player from outside the squad.

There will be a number of other vital subplots when Bangladesh begin the ODI series. The four-nil win over New Zealand in 2010 is one such that has dominated the headlines in the recent past and according to Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim it will be at k of the visitors' minds.

"It [4-0 defeat] will definitely have an influence. For instance, South Africa are such a big team, but they still choke. We are playing against New Zealand after three years, but the 4-0 defeat will be there at the back of their minds," said Mushfiqur.

"But a lot has changed for them and us in the last three years. They have a number of young players against whom we have to plan our strategies and that will be challenging. So there's no point in looking at the past or even [at the recently concluded] Tests. It all depends on this series," he added.

Bangladesh's pace bowling will receive a boost with the return of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who was out of the game for nearly ten months.

With a spinner expected to accompany the duo of Shohag Gazi and Abdur Razzak, Bangladesh will now have to decide on their all-rounders.

Mahmudullah Riyad, who was dropped for the Tests, is likely to return.

"It's a challenge when you don't have your vice-captain on the field, although I was helped by other senior players during the Tests. If Riyad Bhai is there in the one-day team it will be easier for me. Both he and Naeem [Islam] have worked hard. Hope they make the most of it," said Mushfiqur.

Mushfiqur and co are likely to go ahead with a spin-based attack despite the dew factor in the evening, which is at its most influential after 7pm. As a result the toss is bound to be crucial.

With regards to the batting department, the only quandary that the hosts are in surrounds the vital number three position. While Mominul Haque played in that position the last time, Mushfiqur stated that there are a number of options this time.

While the captain did not pay heed to questions about attempts at yet another 'Banglawash', he did emphasise on making a good start to the series today. "We will be happy if we can win the series 3-0 but what's more important is to win tomorrow (today) and start the series well. That's going to make the difference," said Mushfiqur.

Abahani fly in two Nigerians

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani flew in two Nigerian midfielders -- Steve Obi and Ikuachu Kingsley -- for trial ahead of the Federation Cup, which will get underway on November 4.

Both the Nigerians had their first practice session yesterday with the team, which has already included two Moroccan booters while two more foreign recruits -- Moroccan-born Dutch midfielder Jamal Dibi and Englishman Jeremiah Anny -- are supposed to join the trial within a few days.

"Both Obi and Kingsley have experience of playing in the Nigerian Premier League while Jamal will arrive here by the next available flight," said Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu adding that Anny was supposed to come to Dhaka soon.

However, the four-time professional football league champions seem to pin their hopes on the old guard such as Ghanaian defender Samad Yussif, attacking midfielder Awudu Ibrahim, Nigerian midfielder Yoko Samnick who played for the Sky Blues for the last season as they have already completed the visa procedure for these players.

The Sky Blues are also set to rope in Nigerian striker Osei Morison, who played for Abahani's archrivals Mohammedan SC and was the top scorer in the last edition of the league.

Former national footballer, Rupu, informed that they would fulfil their quota of foreign players from amongst players within November 15, the last date of registration of foreign players.