

Stroke-filled opening day

SPORTS REPORTER



That majority of Bangladesh's national batsmen are going through a transition process from their T20 mode to adjusting to longer version was evident on the first day of the Bangladesh Cricket League at the BKSP yesterday.

The first day of the opening round matches saw Mushfiqur Rahim's North Zone collect 331 for 8 against Abdur Razzak's South Zone, while at a different playground at the same venue saw Tamim Iqbal's East Zone reach 301 for 9 at stumps against Mahmudullah Riyad's West Zone. Aggressive stroke-play was a common feature in both the matches. While the batsmen got starts, they failed to build on those.

NORTH V SOUTH

North Zone's innings was based on three half-centuries at different points of the game. After being put into bat, they struggled against the opponents' opening pacers -- Robiul Islam and Al Amin Hossain -- and slumped to 42 for 2 by the 17th over. A 78-run stand for the third wicket between Forhad Hossain (76 not out) and Naeem Islam (24) began their recovery. Forhad played a patient knock which still saw him hit 13 fours. Naeem played a characteristically slow innings, taking 101 balls for his 24. However, both the batsmen were removed by Robiul after lunch and suddenly North seemed vulnerable.

Their captain Mushfiqur Rahim scored a rare duck. He was dismissed by Shohag Gazi while attempting to play his favourite slog sweep shot in the 52nd over. By the 62nd over they were struggling at 168 for 6. That was when Nasir Hossain and Forhad stepped in.

The pair shared an aggressive 141-run stand off 133 balls. Nasir smacked 99 off 93 balls before a mix-up led to his run-out, one short of a century, at the end of the day. He whacked 14 fours and two sixes. Forhad, who was given an early let-off, remained unbeaten after an 88-ball innings. He hit 11 fours and two sixes.

Robiul was the most impressive bowler for South and finished with figures of 3 for 35. He bowled with good pace and induced plenty of edges.

EAST V WEST

East Zone's star batsmen -- Tamim Iqbal (37) and Mominul Haque (32) -- failed to fire with the bat and at the end of the day it was the talented Liton Kumar who carried the innings forward.

Tamim skied one in the 22nd over whereas Mominul, who hit seven fours in his 32, was trapped in front by Mahmudullah after lunch.

Liton, who came in at number five, shared two half-century partnerships with Alok Kapali and Jubair Ahmed for the sixth and seventh wickets to help his side get past the 300-run mark. He hit 12 boundaries. Mahmudullah was the pick of the bowlers taking four scalps.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NORTH ZONE: 331 for 8 (Nasir Hossain 99, Forhad Hossain 76, Forhad Reza 76; Robiul 3-35, Razzak 2-86)
EAST ZONE: 301 for 9 (Liton 79, Nazimuddin 57; Riyad 4-



BCB North Zone batsman Nasir Hossain attempts a drive during his 93-ball 99 against Prime Bank South Zone on the opening day of the Bangladesh Cricket League match at BKSP yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Coach planning Brisbane camp

SPORTS REPORTER



The 50-over cricket World Cup, due to take place in Australia and New Zealand, is still a year away, but Bangladesh national coach Shane Jurgensen has already submitted his first phase of preparatory plans -- a camp in Brisbane -- to the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

The reason behind is quite simple. Facing the likes of New Zealand and Australia in their own den next year, according to Shane, is probably going to be his toughest assignment.

"The wickets over there are really fast. I have been to one of the games of the Big Bash League and I could easily tell the difference. We

really need to adjust to the conditions there before the World Cup," said Jurgensen, who returned to the country on Saturday night, after a break.

"I have been in talks with the board for the last three or four months about organising a camp in Brisbane and I have received a positive response.

"It would be great if we could host it in September, right after our tour of the West Indies, because the Australian first-class teams will go through their pre-season camps at that time. If we can organise a few matches with them, it will help us a lot," said Jurgensen, adding that he had also been in touch with Cricket Australia regarding the matter.

As per the current plans it's supposed to be a 13-day camp.

It's not just the players of the

national team that Jurgensen wants to include in this camp but also some of the other pacers, who he believes will greatly benefit.

"There are a lot of promising pacers in the domestic circuit that I have my eyes on. If we can take them to Australia, let them have an extended stay and make them play a few matches over there, it will be great for them," said Jurgensen.

"They will be bowling on wickets that'll have swing and pace and will learn to bowl in these conditions," he added. Mohammad Shahid, Rabiul Islam Robi, Dewan Sabbir and Taskin Ahmed are some of the bowlers outside the national circuit that the coach has been impressed with.

While organising a camp such as this would no doubt require a huge budget, a dip in the Australian

dollar's value has decreased the cost by one-third of the amount, according to the coach.

With regards to preparations for the series against Sri Lanka, which begins later this month, Jurgensen stated that participating in the Bangladesh Cricket League, the four-day tournament, was the best possible way for his players to prepare for the Test series.

"It's really good that the BCL is taking place. If this tournament would not have happened, then I would have just chosen 24 players and had a camp, which would not have matched the competition that they are facing here," said Jurgensen.

"The BCL suddenly came up on the fixture. It would have been good had these players been given some time to prepare for it, but at least it's happening and that's

SLC security team in town

SPORTS REPORTER

A two-member security committee of Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) has arrived in Dhaka yesterday to inspect the venues for the upcoming series in Bangladesh. The delegation comprises Sri Lankan Premier League director Ajit Jayasekara and vice-president Mohan de Silva.

According to their schedule, they will be visiting the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong today. They will then inspect the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in the capital tomorrow.

Apart from Chittagong and Dhaka, the series is also scheduled to witness an ODI in Sylhet, on February 17. However, whether the two-member team will visit Sylhet will be decided only after they return to Dhaka.

The inspection is the only obstacle that remains in the way of the series between the two teams. A green signal from here would confirm the tour.

Dhoni & Co off to NZ

PTI, Mumbai

The Indian squad led by Mahendra Singh Dhoni departed for New Zealand from Mumbai on Sunday for a five-match ODI series followed by a best-of-two Test rubber against the hosts.

Joy Sports' first player minister

SPORTS REPORTER

Arif Khan Joy, the former national football captain and current vice-president of the Bangladesh Football Federation, has been made a deputy minister and given the portfolio of the ministry of youth and sports at Bangabhaban yesterday.

Joy became the first former sports person to be appointed as a minister in sports ministry. He will work under Biren Shikder, who has been appointed as the state minister.

The shaven-headed booter represented the national team from 2003 to 2008 and was a vital member of the country's SAFF Championship winning squad. He captained the national team over 2005-06.

ITF U-14 tennis

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Naimul Islam Amiyo and Hridoy Hasan of Bangladesh finished 19th and 20th respectively out of 31 competitors in the boys' group of the ITF U-14 Asian Tennis Championship which is being held in Bangkok, Thailand. Amiyo beat Hridoy in 6-0, 6-2 sets in the last match. Another Bangladeshi boy, Zubin Omar, finished 23rd after beating Kuang Htet San of Myanmar 6-3, 6-1 in his last match.



Brothers Union winger Rubel Mia (R) is ecstatic after scoring the decisive goal against Sheikh Russel KC during their Bangladesh Premier League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Brothers stun Sk Russel

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions Sheikh Russel KC tasted their first defeat of the league when their injury-ravaged side were beaten 1-0 by Brothers Union in their Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Winger Rubel Mia, a member of the U-19 national team, scored the decisive goal in the 73rd minute with a fierce curving shot from outside the box to give the All Oranges their first win after two successive defeats.

Despite the defeat, Sheikh Russel still shared the lead along with Sheikh Jamal DC with six points, but have every possibility of being toppled when Sheik Jamal take on minnows Feni Soccer Club in today's fixture.

Sheikh Russel were forced to drop four players -- defender Rajani Kanta Barman, Uruguayan midfielder Francisco Oscar, French midfielder Maxim Roger and winger Imrul Hasan

-- from their previous match, together with the absence of defender Mamun Mia and winger Shakil Ahmed -- who have missed their second successive matches due to injury.

The absence of Maxim and Francisco allowed a spirited Brothers Union establish control in the midfield before coming close to taking a lead in the 19th minute when Ghanaian defender Issah Yousuf, being set by Jewel Rana, stepped up but struck straight to goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharjee.

Sheikh Russel also went close in the 39th minute when Moroccan forward Youness Roux released Mithun Chowdhury inside the box but the diminutive striker saw his low drive to the far post go wide, with goalkeeper Sabuj Das beaten.

After an equal first half, Sheikh Russel launched several attacks, especially from the right flank but those efforts could barely split the backline of Brothers Union, who however could have conceded a lead

six minutes into the break, thanks to an unbelievable miss from Sheikh Russel striker Mohammad Robin.

Brothers kept Sheikh Russel at bay from before Rubel gave the All Oranges the decisive goal in the 73rd minute.

Brothers initiated the attack from a set-piece as Nigerian Kester Akon brilliantly received the long free-kick on the edge of box to set up Rubel, who curved the ball on the air to find the near post and give Brothers their third victory over Sheikh Russel in 13 professional league matches so far.

"Despite missing six regular players due to injury, we created a few chances but could not capitalise on them," said Sheikh Russel coach Maruful Haque, who however complained of poor refereeing and physical play Brothers Union.

"You can say we were lucky as the first half was equal while our goalkeeper (Roghu) played brilliantly in the second half before Rubel struck a brilliant goal," said Brothers coach Syed Naeemuddin.

Heat to heat up

First Open starts today

REUTERS, Melbourne



Melbourne Park gets its first glimpse of title favourites Novak Djokovic and Serena Williams in action on Monday's opening day but it is not just the heat of the on-court action that is exercising minds at the year's first Grand Slam.

While the world's best players seem pretty much unanimous in their enjoyment of the trip Down Under to start the season, the prospect of temperatures regularly exceeding 40 degrees Celsius this week is a less enticing prospect.

Doubles specialist Nenad Zimonjic was blunt when asked in Sydney on Saturday what was the biggest threat to his bid for a fourth Grand Slam title with Daniel Nestor over the next two weeks.

His fellow Serbian Djokovic opens his campaign for a fifth Australian Open title against Slovakia's Lukas Lacko in the first evening match on Rod Laver Arena before Williams, seeking her sixth, tackles local hope Ash Barty in her first round tie.

Finch powers Aussies

AFP, Melbourne



A superb century from opener Aaron Finch helped Australia to a comprehensive six-wicket win over England in the first one-day international at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday.

After being dropped by Gary Ballance when he was on just eight, Finch continued to blast 121 runs from 128 balls as Australia reached their target of 270 with 4.2 overs to spare.

Finch rode his luck early in his innings but quickly seized control, racing to 50 from just 47 balls and outpacing opening partner David Warner.

Finch and Warner put on 163 for the opening wicket but not without some controversy.

Warner was given a reprieve by the television umpire when he was on 22 despite the opener accepting that a low catch claimed by wicketkeeper Jos Buttler had carried.

Warner, who had walked to the boundary, was recalled to the middle and went on

to make 65.

He was eventually dismissed holing out to Ed Stokes on the boundary off part-time spinner Joe Root, and when Chris Jordan bowled Shane Watson for a duck two runs later England had a slim hope of pegging Australia back.

But Finch and captain Michael Clarke (43) quickly took the game away from England with a 72-run partnership, which ended when Finch sliced a Stokes delivery to Ballance at third man.

Earlier, a patient 79 from Ballance and a whirlwind 50 from Eoin Morgan helped England to post 269 for 7 what had looked like a competitive total.

Ballance, who came to the crease when England were struggling at 22-2, held the innings together before accelerating towards the end when quick runs were needed.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: 269 for 7 in 50 overs (Bell 41, Ballance 79, Morgan 50, Buttler 34 not out; McKay 3-44)

AUSTRALIA: 270 for 4 in 45.4 overs (Finch 121, Warner 65, Clarke 43; Root 1-11)