



A Test of application

Robiul, Marshall left out

BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong

SAHARA CUP 2014
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A reverse scene at the nets would probably have been more appropriate for the situation. While a batsman like Kumar Sangakkara and his young Sri Lanka teammate Dinesh Chandimal concentrated on playing with the straight bat, Bangladesh's Tamim Iqbal and the likely comeback man Mahmudullah Riyad were lofting the ball high into the sky. Many of those present at the venue were confused as to which team were searching for greater resolve in their batting.

There may be no cause to take the display seriously but the home batsmen have to overcome their penchant for short-lived entertainment if they are to bounce back from a poor show in the first Test.

The reckless shots that Tamim succumbed to in that Test will be fresh in the minds of Tiger fans. Being the local hero, there is pressure on the left-hander after scores of 6 and 11 in the first match and everyone will hope that he does not bat in the manner he did in the nets yesterday.

Bangladesh will need a start and one must keep faith on the proven fighter. Young Shamsur Rahman lost his patience within ten minutes as he went for a pull in the nets even though skipper Mushfiqur Rahim warned that one

should only pull if it can be controlled.

Even if the pitch is much different from the one in Mirpur, the Tigers will have to learn from the mistakes they made in the first Test if they are to achieve anything in this series.

The management yesterday announced a 12-man team leaving out pacer Robiul Islam -- a move that surprised many as he performed better than Rubel Hossain -- and top-order batsman Marhsall Ayub, who according to chief selector Faruque Ahmed was down with a sore wrist.

Left-handed opener Imrul Kayes is all set to return to Tests after more than two years but it's not certain whether he will open the innings with Tamim. The 27-year old Imrul, who has so far played 16 Tests with a poor average of 17.15, has been batting at number three in domestic cricket.

The pitch is expected to be slow and flat, which is why the home team decided to go with their traditional policy of fielding a spin-heavy bowling attack. Riyad and veteran slow left-arm Abdur Razzaq are in the side but it may be Riyad who takes the field today as the team is looking to prolong the batting line-up.

There will be far less bounce on offer for the faster bowlers, so Sri Lanka may not come at the Tigers with the same short-ball strategy. Runs should be readily available but the home team can cash in on it only if they apply themselves.

Mathews keen on repeat of dominance
SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews exuded the confidence gleaned from a dominant performance in the first Test against Bangladesh, despite the fact that two of his key bowlers -- Rangana Herath and Shaminda Eranga -- have been effectively ruled out of the game due to injuries.

Herath is likely to be replaced by spinner Ajantha Mendis while Nuwan Pradeep is expected to play for Eranga.

Speaking to reporters at the pre-match press conference at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Mathews said, "We have got enough fast bowlers on the bench. Nuwan Pradeep got us a lot of wickets in Dubai in the one Test he played. We have got the bench strength so we are not worried."

Mendis had a bit of a rough patch in the past but he is bowling brilliantly and is in form. He is a great candidate to play tomorrow's game. We will see what it goes," he added.

The Sri Lankan expects a tougher challenge from the hosts. "They have nothing to lose and they will come hard on us and we will merely have to play our brand of cricket tomorrow," said Mathews.

"I think if we play the way we played in the first Test we are going to win. It's going to be a fresh wicket, fresh conditions and we have to try to adapt as quickly as possible," he added.

Thorpe sent to rehab

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australian swimming great Ian Thorpe has been admitted to rehab after suffering from depression, local media said on Monday.

Police were called after Thorpe was found disoriented and behaving oddly near a vehicle and the 31-year-old was later taken to Bankstown hospital on Monday.

"He is in rehab for depression," Thorpe's manager James Erskine told the Australian Associated Press.

Mushfiqur calls for responsible batting

Herath, Eranga doubtful for visitors

BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong

Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim took a deep breath before expressing his optimism over a turnaround in the second Test of the two-match series, which starts today at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. One can only hope when a team is about to enter a match after putting in a dreadful performance in the previous encounter and the little man's words at the pre-match press conference yesterday reflected his hope that things will take a turn for the better. He expected that normalcy will return to his team's performance as the Tigers' skipper asked for controlled batting, much better bowling and making the most of the chances on the field as these were the areas that contributed heavily to the innings-and-248-run loss to Sri Lanka in Mirpur. The capitulation in Dhaka was in complete contrast to their performances over the last year and a half, including their historic draw in Galle.

Bangladesh's batsmen succumbed to short bowling in the first Test and there may well be a different plan from the Lankans in different

conditions at the port city.

"It is not that easy to turn around. But any team would have had such a bad Test. We don't have much to change other than the mental attitude. We have to focus on our basic work, and not fall in their trap. We know what they'll do against us and definitely they have different plans for different conditions. If our batsmen can play with a little more responsibility, then maybe it will be a better game for us. This is how one can turn around. It is a new game, so an opportunity for us to take it with both hands," hoped Mushfiqur, who had a terrible first Test, especially behind the stumps.

"On wickets that don't have sideways movement, bowlers will try to bowl at a shorter length. Our batsmen made some silly mistakes by trying to take them on. Maybe this wicket won't have that much bounce like Dhaka. It might be more difficult to duck. They can play their pull shots, but (have to) make sure they play with control. This is our message to the batsmen. If we can avoid giving them a breakthrough, then later on we can create pressure on their spinners," he continued.

Sri Lanka left-arm spinner Rangana Herath's problematic knee has flared up,

and he was a serious doubt for the match, as was pacer Shaminda Eranga, who has a thigh strain after a month of heavy work, and when asked about whether their absence would be an advantage for his side, Mushfiqur said: "It might not be their disadvantage because their other bowlers are quite capable and of quality."

Despite the below par bowling in the first Test, Mushfiqur kept faith in his bowling unit but hoped that catches will not be dropped as was the case in Mirpur. "I know we are still capable of taking 20 wickets but first we have to take the catches. They have some great players and I hope we will take advantage of the opportunities presented. Wickets are spin-friendly so Shakib (Shakib Al Hasan) and Gazi (Shohag Gazi) will have some help. We have Razzaq (Abdur Razzaq) and Riyad (Mahmudullah Riyad) in our squad, so we will make a decision on them. I hope they deliver in these conditions," said Mushfiqur.

The Bangladesh captain interestingly believed that there was not much difference between the two sides but the way they played in the last Test, there now seems to be a huge gulf, so his side must prove his words in Chittagong.

ODI SERIES
Jayawardene, Herath rested
CRICINFO, Dhaka

Sri Lanka have rested Mahela Jayawardene and Rangana Herath from the ODI series, which follows the two Twenty20 Internationals, against Bangladesh later this month. They also left out batsmen Dimuth Karunaratne and Lahiru Thirimanne from the one-day squad and brought in Angelo Perera.

SQUADS

ODI: Angelo Mathews (captain), Dinesh Chandimal (vice-captain), Tillakaratne Dilshan, Kusal Perera, Kumar Sangakkara, Ashan Priyanjan, Kithurawana, Angelo Perera, Lasith Malinga, Thisara Perera, Nuwan Kulasekara, Suranga Lakmal, Sachithra Senanayake, Ajantha Mendis, Seekuge Prasanna.

T20: D Chandimal (captain), L Malinga (vice-captain), T Dilshan, K Perera, K Sangakkara, M Jayawardene, A Mathews, T Perera, A Perera, N Kulasekara, S Lakmal, S Senanayake, A Mendis, R

Hoping for port city 'X-factor'

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong

As Mominul Haque walked towards the dressing room after his batting session ahead of the second Test at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday, a cheeky reporter asked him if he needed any practice at all, considering that he boasts an average of 203 on this ground, courtesy of the flamboyant 181 that he scored against New Zealand here last year.

The 22-year-old's reply was as calm as his batting stance. "That was the past. Tomorrow will be a new game. The wicket seems a bit different from last time," said Mominul and walked past.

After walking a few steps, the diminutive batsman stopped, turned around and with a child-like smile on his face said, "I know my reply was probably not as exciting. You'll probably enjoy my batting more tomorrow."

The confidence exuded by Mominul was a refreshing change from the general pall of negativity that hung over the players following the thumping innings-and-248-run defeat in the first Test. While a turnaround will no doubt be challenging, the hosts can perhaps take encouragement from the fact that Chittagong has comparatively been a happier hunting ground for the hosts.

One does not need to look too far back. Apart from Mominul's brilliant knock, there was Shohag Gazi's hat-trick and century in the same game. Another player who has had a good run at the ZACS is Mushfiqur Rahim. The Bangladesh captain has scored 703 runs in eight matches at this venue at an average of 50.21. It's something that will boost his bid to bounce back after an ordinary performance with the gloves in the first Test, which saw him give away quite a few opportunities.

Speaking to reporters in the pre-match press conference, Mushfiqur said that he considered the venue to be 'lucky' for him.

"I don't feel the ground makes much of a difference. But an X-factor does work. Gazi would now think that he took a hat-trick and six wickets here, so it might play in the mind."

"It is a lucky ground for me too, I average 45-plus here. So I want to perform at that level. It is important for me as one of the senior batsmen to lead from the front," said Mushfiqur.

While not extremely different from Bangladesh's dismal Test record, Chittagong does seem to have witnessed a slightly happier phase of it. Shakib Al Hasan will remember this ground for his lethal bowling spell against New Zealand in 2008, which saw him take career-best bowling figures of 7 for 36 - the best by a Bangladeshi till date.

The port-city's MA Aziz Stadium is the only venue at home where the hosts have won a Test, having beaten Zimbabwe by 226 runs in 2005.

In ODIs the ZACS has a rare positive winning graph for the hosts with the Tigers winning seven out of the 13 games here, including the incredible win against England in the World Cup in 2011.

The two lowest scores made against Bangladesh in ODIs -- 44 by Zimbabwe and 61 by the West Indies -- have also been at this venue.

In the past however, the wicket at the ZACS used to be more spin-friendly. Ever the square was re-laid the wicket has seemed a lot more flat, as seen in the recently concluded New Zealand series.

There has been plenty of talk in the last few days about whether the hosts overcome the gloom and come back into the series after the resounding loss. Recent history suggests that they can, all they merely need to do is look back and get ready for that final push.



Haitian international Pascal Millien was impressive in his first match for Sheikh Russel KC, yet failed to make the difference during their Bangladesh Premier League encounter against Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Sk Russel hold Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER



Holders Sheikh Russel KC drafted in highly-regarded Haitian international Pascal Millien in their eighth match of the Nitol Tata Bangladesh Premier League yesterday, yet had to be content with a goalless draw against league leaders Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The 27-year-old Millien, who made his debut yesterday after returning to the Sheikh Russel fold having dramatically left over payment disagreement earlier, wore the number 12 jersey that his compatriot Sony Norde wore last season. Millien impressed somewhat with his dribbling skills and dangerous corner kicks, but was at fault of squandering the easiest chance of the day when he failed to beat the opposition goalkeeper from a one-on-one situation after being set up by fellow striker Ricardo Cousins in the 55th minute.

"I will be trying to give my best for the team and I am focused on training and playing the next match," said Millien after the match. "It was my first match and the finishing was not good but I think I won't miss such an opportunity another day."

Ruling out disagreement over payment terms with the club, Millien claimed that he went to Thailand to undergo treatment as he fell in sick

after coming to Bangladesh earlier last month.

Sheikh Russel coach Maruful Haque also saw a new light of hope in title race after the inclusion of Millien and fit-again Mithun Mia and Youness Roux, even though the treble-winning coach had earlier said they were out of reckoning after their 1-1 draw against Team BJMC last week.

However, it was the league leaders Abahani who played comparatively better and created a couple of good chances in the first half but debutant Cameroonian striker Ekele Patrick and winger Towhidul Alam squandered those opportunities.

Patrick, who was playing in place of injured striker Osei Morison, shrugged off his marker and unleashed a powerful shot, but his shot was parried away by Sheikh Russel's keeper Biplob Bhattacharjee. The veteran goalie however had little trouble the second time when Towhidul drove wide off the target from inside the box.

"It was a difficult match for us but we built up the game and created a good number of chances but the finishing was not good as we played with one striker," said Abahani's Iranian coach Ali Akbar.

The draw broke Abahani's string of four wins but kept them at the top of the ten-team table with 17 points from seven matches while a third successive draw left Sheikh Russel in third position with 12 points from eight matches.