



Time to shine for WC spots

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong

With Bangladesh's 15-member T20 World Cup squad due to be submitted by February 15, the two-match series against Sri Lanka, which begins tomorrow, will be more than just about winning the series for the hosts. This is also the last opportunity for players, especially the new ones who joined the squad, to make a mark and impress the national selectors.

The main challenge for the hosts in this series will be to play without two of their key players -- Mushfiqur Rahim and Abdur Razzak -- both of whom played key roles in this format in the past and have been rested due to injuries.

The absence however means that some of the uncapped players might get opportunities to prove their worth.

With Mithun Ali and Anamul Haque, there are two wicketkeeper-batsmen in the side who could possibly replace Mushfiqur. The uncapped Mithun is a talented middle-order batsman who has been among the runs this year. However, with Anamul having top-scored in the recently concluded Victory Day T20 cup, where he even scored a century, it is likely for him to get the nod.

Bangladesh have generally gone into T20 games with seven batsmen and four bowlers other than Shakib Al Hasan. However, with Razzak not in the team, the combination might change and they could bring in an extra batsman, in which case the duties of a fifth bowler would be handled by the likes of Nasir Hossain and Mahmudullah Riyad. The extra batsman could well be Sabbir Rahman, who also impressed in the V-Day

T20 cup, scoring 268 runs at a 50-plus average. They do however have Arafat Sunny, a talented slow-left armer, in the side who can be a good replacement for Razzak.

Also with medium-pace-bowling allrounder Forhad Reza in the side, the combination and permutations can further intensify.

With so much food for thought, the team management have a little over a day to take the final call.

As of now though, apart from the team selection there are a few other minor issues that have to be dealt with.

Both the expected openers of the match, Tamim Iqbal and Shamsur Rahman, did not train at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday. Tamim, who had hurt his neck during an optional training session the day before, left after a warm-up session. He was seen with a strap-on supporting his neck. Shamsur, on the other hand, reportedly came down with a fever and was asked to rest. The players are however expected to recover in time for the series.

The other unique feature going into the T20 series is the rare barrier set between the team and the media till yesterday, with the players instructed not to speak to the media by the management.

The bar was placed after Tamim's sudden resignation as vice-captain, which he had announced through a social networking website.

While this did not ostensibly affect team spirit, it did however create a rather different



Stand-in Bangladesh T20 captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is in his delivery stride during practice at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'A good mixture of age and youth'

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong



That the Sri Lankans were all set for the two-match T20 series was understood from the fact that a number of their 'specialists' in the shorter format joined their training camp yesterday.

The likes of Tillakaratne Dilshan, pacer Lasith Malinga and Sachithra Senanayake joined the top-ranked T20 team at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday.

The secret behind Sri Lanka's good run in the T20s, according to Dilshan, has been the right mix of experience and youth.

"Every member of our team is important. There is Kusal Perera,

who is a fine batsman and can put pressure on the opening bowlers with his batting. Sachitra is a great spinner that we found. It forms a good combination (Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene). It's a good mix of youngsters and experienced players," said Dilshan, who retired from Test cricket last year.

The visitors who will be playing their group stage matches of the ICC World Twenty20 at the same venue will look to gain as much experience in these conditions as possible.

"Every single game we play now will be important for the World Cup. We also have the Asia Cup (also in Bangladesh) coming up. We need to get accustomed to the conditions. So everyone needs to grab this opportunity and make the

most of it," said Dilshan.

While the hosts did not stand a chance to win the Test series, which the visitors won 1-0, Dilshan expects a completely different ball game in the shorter formats.

"I think they have been playing good cricket in the last few years, especially in the one-dayers and T20s. They are a better side in these two formats. We know that we have to play our best cricket to beat them on their soil," he said.

"Also T20 is such a format that one can't make any mistakes. We have to play well on the given day to win," he added.

Against Bangladesh, the Sri Lankans played just two T20 games, both of which were won by the latter. Their last series against Pakistan in the UAE was drawn 1-1.

IPL MATCH-FIXING

Gurunath proven guilty

AFP, New Delhi

A Supreme Court panel probing a match-fixing scandal in the Indian Premier League said Monday the son-in-law of Indian cricket chief N Srinivasan was guilty of illegal betting on games, the Press Trust of India reported. The three-member panel, headed by retired judge Mukul Mudgal, said the allegations of fixing against Gurunath Meiyappan required further investigation, the news agency reported.

The court had appointed the panel on October 8 to investigate the scandal that rocked the popular Twenty20 tournament run by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) last year.

The panel spent four months interacting with players, IPL team owners, the police, journalists, anti-corruption unit personnel and various other stakeholders.

The report, running into 170 pages and more than 4,000 pages of annexes, was handed to Supreme Court judges Ananga Kumar Patnaik and Jagdish Singh Khehar on Monday.

Meiyappan was the team principal of the Chennai Super Kings, the IPL franchise owned by Srinivasan's India Cements company and captained by national skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

The panel dismissed Srinivasan's claim that Meiyappan was merely a cricket enthusiast, saying he was the face of the franchise.

Allegations of betting and spot-fixing against another IPL franchise owner, Rajasthan Royals' Raj Kundra, needed to be further investigated, PTI quoted the report as saying.

The probe was separate from investigations by police, who have filed charges in court against a string of officials, players and bookmakers for illegal betting during the sixth



Sri Lanka's short-form specialists Tillakaratne Dilshan and Lasith Malinga, who joined the squad for the limited-overs leg of the tour starting on Wednesday with the first T20, play a game of football to warm up before practice in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'ICC revamp good for game'

AFP, New Delhi

A controversial shake-up of the governance and structure of cricket's world body will benefit the game and ensure its financial health, India's powerful boss N Srinivasan said on Monday.

"I think it's good for cricket overall, good for the financial health of all full, associate and affiliate members. There is meritocracy," Srinivasan told The Hindu newspaper.

The reforms, which will give more power and money to India, Australia and England, were passed by the International Cricket Council's (ICC) Executive Board in Singapore on Saturday.

Eight of the 10 Test nations approved the proposals -- which also make Srinivasan the first incumbent of the newly-created post of ICC chairman -- while Pakistan and Sri Lanka abstained.

Srinivasan, asked if he will try to convince Pakistan and Sri Lanka to come on board, said it was for the entire ICC, and not him alone, to work on it.

"It's an ICC resolution and eight members have approved it. It (reaching out to Sri Lanka and Pakistan) is not just my responsibility. It's for everybody to work on."

Muktis maul Baridhara

SPORTS REPORTER



Two goals each from Mohammad Biplob and Nigerian Nkowcha Kingsley powered Muktijoddha Sangsad to an emphatic 5-0 win over Uttar Baridhara Club after Team BJMC and Brothers Union played out a goalless draw in the two matches of the Mitol Tata Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The fourth win in nine matches lifted Muktijoddha Sangsad to the second position from with 15 points, three less than leaders Abahani, who played a match less than the All Reds. Team BJMC and Brothers Union are stuck at the sixth and seventh positions with 11 and 10 points respectively.

BJMC could have left the field with a victory had the woodwork not denied them twice. Guinean striker Ismael Bangoura failed to beat the opposition goalkeeper in a one-on-one situation to deny his side from posting their fourth win.

Though Brothers chased shadows for most part of the match, they too came close to sealing the victory but were denied by the woodwork once.

Under the floodlight, Muktijoddha Sangsad came into the match on the back of two successive draws against Feni Soccer and Brothers Union but they shrugged off their poor performance to notch up their season's biggest win over promoted Uttar Baridhara, who were also humiliated 0-7 at the hands of Team BJMC earlier.

The freedom fighters' side took the lead in the 21st minute when Biplob fired home from close range after availing a back-pass from Eleta Kingsley, who was also the provider in the second goal for Nkowcha, who tapped in from close range minutes later.

Then Nkowcha raced past two defenders to find the back of the net with an angular shot from inside the box to join the top scorer's chart with six goals, along with Sheikh Jamal's Emeka Darlington.

Eleta Kingsley then widened the margin with a nice header off a Maruf Ahmed corner in the 66th minute before Biplob bagged his second in the 78th minute by placing the ball past the goalie.

NZ's party men out of 2nd Test

AFP, Auckland

Troublesome New Zealand cricketers Jesse Ryder and Doug Bracewell are out of the second Test against India, coach Mike Hesson said Monday, as details emerged of a late-night drinking spree.

The pair have admitted drinking in a bar just hours before the start of the first Test last week, amid reports they were also involved in a scuffle, with Bracewell now nursing an injured hand and broken foot.

CCTV footage has also been released showing Ryder, who has a history of alcohol-fuelled incidents, needing assistance to get into a taxi at 3:00am after the one-day match against India in Auckland last month.

The drinking sessions have infuriated the rest of the New Zealand team as they overshadow media coverage of their dramatic 40-run win in the first Test with a day to spare.

"The fact that we won a Test match yesterday and the fact that the first few questions are based around off-field incidents is clearly an extreme disappointment for the team," Hesson told a press conference.

Sk Jamal take on East Bengal

SPORTS REPORTER



Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club will have an eye on the final of the 118th IFA Shield tournament as they take on Kolkata giants East Bengal in the first semifinal at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata today.

The match gets underway at 3:15pm (BST) and will be telecast live on Star Jalsha Movies.

The starting eleven for Sheikh Jamal is likely to remain the same as it was in the match against Mohun Bagan, although first-choice goalkeeper Ziaur Rahman may miss the match due to an injury. The three-pronged attacking line of Sony Norde, Wedson Anselme and Emeka Darlington will be the ones whom Sheikh Jamal will bank on for the goods up front while skipper Mamunul Islam will play in vital play-maker's role, along with Sohel Rana as the other play-maker. Nasiruddin Chowdhury will start in front of the four-man defence, which is thought to be the weakest link in the side.

In the last match against Mohun Bagan, which Sheikh Jamal won 1-0, the defence -- marshalled by Yeamin, Yeasin, Didarul and Linkon, was split open a number of times. Sheikh Jamal coach Joseph Afusi reminded everyone of the dangers of letting it slip in this big match.

"We have to be strong mentally and technically against East Bengal. Everyone will have to take responsibility at their respective positions. I want hundred

percent effort from all the players as the semifinal is as important as the final," said Afusi to reporters on the eve of the match.

East Bengal, who moved to the semifinals wins over United SC (2-0), Singapore's Geyland International (2-0) and a 1-1 draw against Korea's Bushan Sunmoon University, are reportedly taking Sheikh Jamal pretty seriously, according to Kolkata newspapers.

"Definitely, Sheikh Jamal are a strong side and they proved it by putting on good show in every match. But we are not worried with the performance rather we are confident of playing in the Shield final," East Bengal's coach Armando Colaco was quoted as saying in a Bengali daily in Kolkata.

Last edition's finalists East Bengal are expected to be a bigger threat than Mohun Bagan, who have failed to win any titles in the last four years. East Bengal have a number of national players in their ranks and they have two potent strikers in Chidi Edeh and James Moga, who knows Bangladeshi players very well, having played here for the Muktijoddha Sangsad quite a few seasons.

However, Federation Cup champions Sheikh Jamal have already made history by becoming the first Bangladeshi team to beat Mohun Bagan on their home soil and they would be looking to become only the second Bangladeshi club, after Dhaka Mohammedan, to reach the final of the world's fourth oldest football tournament.

Shirin holds solo lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Holder Sharmin Sultana shirin maintained her solo lead in the Sultana Kamal 34th National Women's Chess Championship at the close of the fourth round at the Bangladesh Chess Federation hall room yesterday.

Shirin beat Jahanara Haque Runu to earn maximum four points from as many games while last season's runner-up WIM Shamima Akter Liza, WFM Zakia Sultana and WFM Tanima Parveen earned three points from four matches.

Liza beat Kiswara Shajrin Evana, Tanima beat Mahmuda Hoque Chowdhury Moly and Zakia drew with WIM Rani Hamid.

PCB chief removed

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Monday removed the country's cricket chief Zaka Ashraf in the latest twist to the long-running saga dogging the national board.

It is the second time in less than a year that Ashraf has been unseated as chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), which will be run for now by an 11-strong interim committee appointed by Sharif.