



Tigers in fight to avert whitewash

Suspended Shakib to miss dead rubber

NAIMUL KARIM



When Bangladesh take the field today it will be their last opportunity to salvage some pride from a tour that has just not gone their way. Their job has been made slightly easier with the visitors deciding to rest Kumar Sangakkara, who has been Bangladesh's arch-nemesis on this tour, for the dead rubber that Sri Lanka have won 2-0. Tillakaratne Dilshan, who injured his hand in the second ODI on Thursday, will also be unavailable as Sri Lanka push for a whitewash.

In terms of the scenario preceding the match, it could hardly be worse for the hosts.

Defensive tactics, the failure of middle-order batsmen and shoddy fielding have already been criticised. A ban imposed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Shakib Al Hasan for the next three ODIs for his 'inappropriate gesture' on live television has only added to Bangladesh's woes.

The BCB's decision however, would mean that Naeem Islam, Bangladesh's highest run-scorer in the last series, will finally get a chance to make his mark in this series by slotting in at the number five spot.

Captain Mushfiqur Rahim had earlier stated after the series loss that the hosts were low on confidence and that they would have to work very hard to come out of the losing streak.

Tamim Iqbal continues to be doubtful for the starting eleven although he attended yesterday's optional training session for a brief period. Anamul Haque and Shamsur Rahman are expected to be the opening pair

in his absence. There is a chance that Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who missed the first match due to swelling on his knee, could be rested. With crucial matches coming ahead in the Asia Cup, Mashrafe's presence in the squad will depend upon his injury-management programme.

While the match may be a dead rubber, a win for the Tigers will help them regain the confidence that they garnered over the last two years and also help take the momentum into the Asia Cup.

Head coach Shane Jurgensen did state yesterday that he was not panicking as yet and a bit of 'tidying things up' is all that is required. He would definitely hope to have a win before entering the Asia Cup.

"It was pretty tough. My first series loss on home soil. We are playing against a strong team like Sri Lanka. We haven't played our best cricket, it is yet to come. We have to make sure to be positive tomorrow," he said.

The match will be a challenge for the Sri Lankans as well, albeit of a different kind. A whitewash here will take them to the number four spot in the ODI rankings, over England. However, they will have to do it without the services of their senior-most players. The last time the Sri Lankans played without either of these three players (Sangakkara, Dilshan and Mahela Jayawardene) was in the 1999 World Cup.

While the youngsters did fire in spells in this series, it's been Sangakkara who has been the major difference between the two teams. They will however be joined by opener Lahiru Thirimanne who will be replacing Dilshan at the top.



Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim (R) stretches with fast bowler Al-Amin Hossain during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday, ahead of today's third and final ODI against Sri Lanka. PHOTO: STAR

Afridi injured

PTI, LAHORE

The Pakistan cricket team suffered an injury scare ahead of the Asia Cup when their flamboyant all-rounder Shahid Afridi hurt his jaw during a practice match at the Gaddafi Stadium on Friday.

"Although the injury is not a serious one but doctors have advised him to speak less for two days because the impact was on the jaw," national coach Moin Khan told reporters.

Afridi was hit near the jaw when trying to paddle sweep pacer Junaid Khan. The ball flew off the edge of the bat and hit his helmet's visor which struck the jaw. Afridi was seen walking around with a big bruise on the right side of his face.

The former captain is expected to be a key player in Pakistan's campaign in the Asia Cup to be held from February 25 and the World Twenty20 Championships from March 16 in Bangladesh.

The outspoken player had told reporters a day earlier that Pakistan stood a very strong chance of winning the two major events.

"I am looking forward to these events as we have very good sides and I am keen to play a major role in them," Afridi said.

National TT

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Ansar and Comilla moved into the women's team final of the South East Bank 34th National Table Tennis Championship beating their respective semifinal opponents at the Rajshahi Women's Sports Complex Gymnasium yesterday.

Ansar beat Dhaka and Comilla beat Rajshahi, both in straight 3-0 sets.

In group semifinal of men's team event, Ansar beat Chittagong 3-0 while Bagerhat beat Rangpur 3-0.

'No leniency when it comes to discipline'

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) directors and officials spent a rather long Friday at their Mirpur headquarters yesterday deliberating whether or not to take disciplinary measures against Shakib Al Hasan for his indecent gesture on live Television during the second ODI against Sri Lanka at Mirpur on Thursday.

BCB insiders stated that there were two opinions at play -- one supporting the enforcement of a ban and the other following the traditional measure to spare Shakib with a warning. Shakib was eventually banned for three matches and fined Tk 3 lakh, one of the strictest disciplinary measures ever taken by the BCB.

Explaining the reasoning behind the decision, BCB president Nazmul Hasan Papon told The Daily Star that it was necessary for the board to set an example.

"When a player plays in the national team

he represents not only the BCB but the bigger aspect is that he represents Bangladesh. Any kind of behaviour that results in the country's defamation is not acceptable," said Papon.

"The level of cricket that we are at right now, professionalism is very important. I feel that if we don't take any exemplary decisions then the situation might get worse. It was necessary to set an example

"Personally I respect players a lot. There are ex-players who are part of this board. However, no matter how big a player is, he will not be excused when it comes to disciplinary matters. The entire country loves them and they should remember that," he added.

Papon also stated that he would have a talk with the captain and the coach about the Sri Lanka series ahead of the Asia Cup.

"Personally I was most disappointed with the way we lost the first ODI. We were in a very good position. I just want to have a chat with them regarding their game plans throughout the series," said Papon.

We've the edge: Misbah

APP, Lahore



Pakistan captain Misbahul Haq said Friday he hoped his team will carry the momentum of their recent one-day winning form into the Asia Cup starting in Bangladesh next week.

Pakistan will open the defence of the title they won under Misbah in 2012 with a match against Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

"For me every team is favourite (to win the Asia Cup) but we definitely have the edge as we have won our last two one-day series," Misbah told reporters on the last day of a training camp.

Pakistan won a three-match series in South Africa 2-1 before taking a five-match series against Sri Lanka in the United Arab Emirates 3-2 in December last year.

Five-time Asian champions India, hosts Bangladesh and Afghanistan are the other teams in the event which runs until March 8.

Misbah believed hosts Bangladesh are also dangerous.

"In their home conditions Bangladesh will also be very dangerous

because the way they played in the last Asia Cup, beating India and Sri Lanka, they will be equally dangerous," said Misbah.

Misbah said because of the twin wins, Pakistan have an ideal combination.

"We have given good performances and because we won the last two series the combination is good and when you are on a winning run your confidence is high and that's the case with us," said Misbah.

Misbah refused to reveal his plans when asked about when he would hang up his boots.

"I don't know why people are after me," said a visibly irked 39-year-old, who leads Pakistan in Tests and one-day matches.

"I want to play with commitment as long as I play," said Misbah, the world's leading scorer in one-days in 2013 with 1,373.

Despite his form there remain concerns who will lead Pakistan in the 2015 World Cup to be jointly hosted by Australia and New Zealand.

Pakistan will fly to Dhaka on Saturday.

A deluge of runs at BKSP

SPORTS REPORTER



It was raining runs on the second day of the fourth round of the National Cricket League yesterday. The highlight of the day was Taiabur Parvez's double century, which took Dhaka to a mammoth 662 for four against Rajshahi at the BKSP yesterday. Dhaka, which had already seen centuries from Abdul Majid and Rony Talukdar on the first day, witnessed Taiabur's onslaught today. He scored 20 boundaries in his eight-hour innings and was well supported by Nadif Chowdhury's 71 yesterday.

Ziaur Rahman joined in the fun with a well-timed 167 for Khulna which helped them post 352 against hosts Sylhet. In reply, the hosts reached stumps on 126 for three.

The surprise of the day came at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra where Dhaka Metro were dismissed for 48 (Tasammul Haque retired hurt) courtesy of a five-wicket haul from Sajedul Islam and a four-wicket haul by Subhasish Roy. After following on, scores of 94 from Asif Ahmed and 65 from Marshall Ayub helped them reach stumps at 260 for four.

At the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong, the hosts were bowled out for 179 in their first innings. In reply, Barisal lost five wickets before reaching stumps with 135 runs on board.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SYLHET: 123 and 126 for 3 (Imtiaz 39; Nahidul 1-18)

KHULNA: 352 all out in 89.4 overs (Ziaur 167; Nabil 5-85, Enamul 4-127)

DHAKA: 662 for 4 (Taiabur 204; Majid 182; Saglain 2-147)

RANGPUR: 240

DHAKA METRO: 48 for 9 (Marshall 13; Sajedul 5-24, Subhasish 4-20) and 260 for 4 (Asif 94 not out, Marshall 65; Sohrwardi 2-64)

BARISAL: 199 and 135 for 5 (Fazle 48; Yasin 3-56)

CHITTAGONG: 179 all out (Irfan 58;

ASIAN GAMES QUALIFIERS

Naveed trims squad to 30

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national hockey team's Pakistani head coach Naveed Alam trimmed his 40-member preliminary squad for the Asian Games Qualifiers to 30 after a friendly match was held among the ranks at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday to mark the language movement martyrs' day.

Defender Moshir Rahman Biplob, who was a playing member of the Asia Cup last year, is a remarkable omission from the squad as the defender is nursing an injury to his chin bone which he sustained during the last match of the Premier Division Hockey League earlier this month.

In the friendly match, Green team, comprising mostly of the players from the Asia Cup, handed a 3-2 defeat to Red team.

The Asian Games Qualifiers will be held in Dhaka from March 13 to 26 with eight second-tier teams of Asia, out of which the top six teams will qualify for the tournament proper.

Sheikh Jamal take on BJMC today

SPORTS REPORTER



IFA Shield runners-up Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club will resume their Bangladesh Premier League campaign when they take on Team BJMC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

The Federation Cup champions are in the fourth position currently with 13 points from five matches, five behind leaders Abahani, who however have played three matches more than Sheikh Jamal's five.

Muktijoddha Sangsad and Mohammedan stay in second and third positions respectively with 15 and 14 points from nine matches.

Having played out a 1-1 draw against Mohammedan SC in their last match of the ongoing professional football league on January 22, Sheikh Jamal went to take part in the 118th IFA Shield and returned home on February 17, after losing the final in tie-breakers against Kolkata Mohammedan

Sporting Club.

Following their scintillating performance in Kolkata, football fans in Dhaka will be expecting a similar display from the team in the rest of professional league, but Nigerian coach Joseph Afusi believes such performance depends on the attitude of the opposition as well.

"Playing attractive football also depends on the positive attitude of the opponents. We performed in Kolkata the way we do in Bangladesh, but no one took notice earlier. It was only noticed in Kolkata because the oppositions were also playing positive and attacking football," Afusi told reporters yesterday.

The Nigerian coach also felt it is not possible to play beautiful football if the opposition took an ultra-defensive approach.

Afusi however believes his charges will transfer their IFA Shield performance to the Bangladesh Premier League as all the players are fully focused to secure maximum points from the remaining four matches of the first leg, which will be against BJMC, Abahani

Pakistan touch down tonight

SPORTS REPORTER

The Pakistan cricket team will arrive tonight to take part in the Asia Cup starting from February 25.

Pakistan, who had broken the hearts of millions of Bangladeshi fans on March 22, 2012 to clinch the title of the previous edition with a two-run victory against the Tigers in the final at Mirpur, will play the opening match on February 25 against Sri Lanka at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

India, led by Virat Kohli after MS Dhoni was left out in the eleventh hour because of a side strain, will arrive tomorrow at 12pm while Afghanistan, the new entry in the competition, are due to land at 7.30pm.

The five teams will play a round-robin tournament before the final between the two top sides that will be held on March 8 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Dilshan in doubt for Asia Cup

PTI, Colombo

Sri Lanka's veteran batsman Tillakaratne Dilshan is in doubt for the upcoming Asia Cup after picking up a finger injury which has ruled him out of the rest of the ongoing series against Bangladesh.

"He would return home today," Sri Lanka Cricket announced.

He may miss the Asia Cup tournament also to be played in Bangladesh from February 25 as the selectors would not want to risk him ahead of the World T20 also to be held in Bangladesh from March 16.

The left-handed middle-order batsman Lahiru Thirimanne would replace Dilshan for the Bangladesh tour. Dilshan hurt his finger in the second ODI which Sri Lanka won on Thursday to clinch the series.

Dilshan was among the leading Sri Lankan players who went unsold at the IPL auction last week.