

SPORT

BATTING WOES

concern Faruque

SPORTS REPORTER

 With a number of Bangladesh's top-order batsmen struggling to hit form, BCB's chief selector Faruque Ahmed said that he was concerned about the national team's batting and that it was an aspect that the Tigers would have to improve upon before the World Cup.

While Bangladesh's ploy to field seam-wickets in the India series did manage to trouble the visitors' strong batting line-up, it also however backfired heavily as the Tigers were bundled out for just 58 in the second ODI.

The second-stringed Bangladesh team which visited the West Indies recently has many players who are currently in the preliminary squad for the tour in August -- including Nasir Hossain, Mominkul Haque, Marshall Ayub and Shamsur Rahman -- and yet their batting display in the Caribbean was far from satisfactory.

In the first four-day game, Bangladesh A were thumped by 351 runs inside three days. They were bowled out for 140 and 152. A similar result beckoned in the second four-dayer which saw them give in for just 219 in the first innings in reply to the hosts' 354. The visitors' last-wicket pair batted for nearly half an hour in the fourth innings to earn a draw.

"Batting is definitely a concern as we did not do well in the past, except for certain occasions. In the last series we did well in the first match, but could not win a low scoring second game."

"We are having problem as players have gone out of form together. The opening pair has not clicked and the middle order, which was our strength before, is not doing well either," said Faruque.

"I think we have to take this as a prepara-

tory series for the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. In order to adjust to the West Indian conditions we are practising on simulated wickets. We are working hard against the short-pitch delivery. We will hopefully do well under the guidance of the new coach," he added.

Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim clearly leads the pack in ODIs with an average of 50 this year. However, his closest competitor Anamul Haque has averaged just 35. Once Bangladesh's trusted finisher, Nasir has scored just 167 runs in the last eight innings. Mahmudullah Riyad has it no better with an average of 12.86 in the last six innings.

But perhaps the most concerning factor for the Tigers will be opener Tamim Iqbal who has scored just four runs in two ODIs this year.

He is however likely to avoid the axe as Faruque wants him to get in form before the World Cup.

"Tamim is definitely a concern. He is one of our best players and I want all the key players to peak before the World Cup. When a player goes through a lean patch, we try to see whether he is doing things correctly. And I think he is working hard."

"He is working on different skills training. We still don't know if he will return to form, but we need to back the players."

With the BCB set to go on Eid vacation from tomorrow, Faruque and company are expected to finalise the squad for West Indies today and it won't be a surprise if the selectors opt to insert a few fresh faces.

The quandary for Faruque though will be to keep a check between the balance of the new players and the veterans, with the World Cup just six months away, the freshers need to get used to the demands of international cricket quickly while the old hands seemingly need to hit maturity again.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha (R) gives Shamsur Rahman a few front-foot batting tips during the national team's net session at the Mirpur Indoor Stadium yesterday.

AFC PRESIDENT'S CUP

Sk Russel eye 14 nat'l booters

SPORTS REPORTER

 Sheikh Russel KC are expected to form a strong squad with the possible inclusion of 14 national booters ahead of September's AFC President's Cup final where they will be the first Bangladeshi club to challenge for the title of the third-tier club competition of Asia.

Even though Sheikh Russel KC struggled in the Bangladesh Premier League this season and are set to finish at sixth position in the 10-team table after having won the league title last season, they produced brilliant result by finishing top of their group in the qualifying round of the AFC President's Cup under the guidance of Montenegrin coach Dragan Djukanovic.

Sheikh Russel, along with five other teams -- Sri Lanka Air Force FC, FC MTTU of Turkmenistan, Rymongsu Club of

North Korea, Manang Marshyangdi Club of Nepal and FC Erchim of Mongolia -- qualified for the six-team final round which will get underway from September 20 in Sri Lanka.

Sheikh Russel's hopes of winning the AFC President's Cup silverware has been given a boost by the news that the Asian Football Confederation (AFC), governing body of the tournament, has given an opportunity of recruiting new players to the six qualifiers through a transfer window from July 25 to August 20.

The football standing committee of Sheikh Russel today (Wednesday) sat in a meeting which decided unanimously to send a strong team to the AFC President's Cup finals. As Sheikh are the first Bangladeshi club to be participating in the final round of this tournament, we want to make our appearance a memorable one," said Saleh Jaman Selim, football director of Sheikh Russel KC, after emerging from the meeting yesterday.

Selim informed that they have already started talks with the national team players, 14 of whom have agreed to join the club for the upcoming season but admitted that the players are in a bit of a quandary as the transfer window for the Bangladesh Premier League has not opened yet.

It has been learnt that Sheikh Russel are set to release most of their current players except for four or five and rope in players mostly from Mohammedan, Abahani and a few other clubs.

"We will talk to the chairman of professional football league committee soon and request him to find a way so that we can sign up those players in the transfer window through advance payment ahead of the President's Cup finals," said Selim.

Selim also hinted that they might bring in a foreign coach for the tournament as well as for the next season where they want to be title contenders.

Abahani finish 2nd

SPORTS REPORTER

 Abahani finished runners-up in the Nitol Tata Bangladesh Premier League after a single-goal win over hosts Chittagong Abahani in their last match at the MA A z i z S t a d i u m in Chittagong yesterday.

Right-back Atiqur Rahman Meshu struck the decisive goal in the 60th minute to help the four-time professional league champions notch their 14th win in 27 matches as well as finish second with 52 points, nine less than champions Sheikh Jamal DC who still have a match in hand.

However, despite the second-place finish, which is an improvement on the third-place finish in the last season, it has been Sky Blues' second barren season in a row. Like the previous season, Abahani failed to qualify for the final of Federation Cup and the Independence Cup, with their only

chance of a silverware remaining in the Super Cup, which is expected to be held in October.

Abahani had their chances though to get back into the race as eventual champions Sheikh Jamal stumbled quite a few times, but they failed to gain the initiative, thanks to the mediocrity of the squad and less effectiveness of their aged foreign recruits under the Iranian coach Ali Akbar, who has delivered only one league title in three attempts.

Meanwhile, Team BJMC finished seventh after beating fifth-placed Brothers Union 2-1 in their last match at the the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday, with Samson Iliasu and Ismael Bangoura striking one goal apiece for BJMC while Rubel Mia pulling one goal back for Brothers. The eighth win in 27 matches took BJMC to 30 points while Brothers finished fifth with 38 points. Chittagong Abahani finished eighth with 25 points.

The tests, conducted by Cardiff Metropolitan University, confirmed that his elbow extension when bowling exceeded the 15 degrees of flex permitted under ICC regulations, NZC said.

The 23-year-old, who will continue in his primary role as a batsman, said he was determined to work on his action and pass the biomechanical tests so he could once again bowl for the Black Caps.

"[I] will concentrate on changing whatever's necessary to return to the bowling crease," he said.

"Clearly, the onus is on me to satisfy assessors as to the legality of my action, and I'm aware I have some hard work in front of me to achieve that goal."

Schumi could be released from hospital

CNN-IBN, Zurich

There is some good news for Michael Schumacher fans. The Formula One legend could return home by the end of August, according to a report on Daily Star website on Tuesday.

The report said experts at the Switzerland hospital, where he is currently being treated, say the German is using his eyelids to communicate with his wife Corinna, daughter Gina-Maria and son Mick.

He is likely to be given an advanced wheelchair that he can control with his mouth to help with his recovery. The seven-time F1 champion remains paralysed after waking from a six-month coma last month.



South Africa pace spearhead Dale Steyn stretches during a practice session ahead of their second Test against Sri Lanka in Colombo yesterday.

SRI LANKA MAY CHANGE KEEPER

2nd Test starts today

REUTERS, Colombo

 Sri Lanka may hand a first Test cap to 21-year-old wicketkeeper Niroshan Dickwella as they bid to level the two-Test series against South Africa.

Dickwella was drafted into the squad for the match in Colombo starting on Thursday after fast bowler Shaminda Eranga was ruled out of the series with a hand injury.

Eranga had eight stitches inserted to the webbing between his right thumb and index finger while fielding in the first Test at Galle which Sri Lanka lost by 153 runs.

Dickwella may replace out-of-form wicketkeeper Dinesh Chandimal.

"Chandimal is available for selection but Dickwella also has a good chance of playing tomorrow," captain Angelo Mathews told a news conference on Wednesday.

"We will take final decision after looking at the wicket."

Mathews said the loss in Galle was a

wake-up call for his team who had been in a good run since December, winning the Asia Cup, the World T20 and their first Test series in England.

"If you look at the past six months we have played some good cricket but that is all history and in the past, we have got to move on take one game and series at a time," Mathews said.

"Every series is a challenge for us it is mentally and physically depressing, it can take a lot out of your body as well but that's the challenge as players we have got to face."

The Sinhalese SC track is normally excellent for batting.

"It is usually a flat wicket, it does a little bit in the morning session and then turns out to be a batting paradise. I hope it will be different," said Mathews.

"But whatever the pitch we play on we've got find ways to beat South Africa."

"They are a very balanced team in all three departments and we expect a massive challenge from them."

DPL transfers in two phases

SPORTS REPORTER

The inter-club players' transfers for the upcoming Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League will take place in two phases at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. In the first phase, the centrally-contracted players and those who will be travelling to the West Indies in August will take part in the transfers, set to take place on August 10 and 11.

The second phase, set to take place on August 27 and 28, will involve the remaining players. The league is scheduled to begin on October 10.

As per the Bangladesh Cricket Board's decision the national pool players will be paid on a 'pro rata' basis, which means that the players will be paid based on the number of matches they play.

The national players will leave for the West Indies tour on August 13. While they will be available for the first round of the league, they will however be busy for the Zimbabwe series, set to begin on October 24, and therefore are not likely to play in the second round of the competition.

Kiwi spinner banned for illegal action

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand part-time spinner Kane Williamson has been banned from bowling after biomechanical tests confirmed his action is illegal, New Zealand Cricket (NZC) said Wednesday.

Williamson was reported following New Zealand's 10-wicket defeat in the second Test in the West Indies and ordered by the International Cricket Council (ICC) to undergo independent testing on his delivery.

The tests, conducted by Cardiff Metropolitan University, confirmed that his elbow extension when bowling exceeded the 15 degrees of flex permitted under ICC regulations, NZC said.

The 23-year-old, who will continue in his primary role as a batsman, said he was determined to work on his action and pass the biomechanical tests so he could once again bowl for the Black Caps.

"[I] will concentrate on changing whatever's necessary to return to the bowling crease," he said.

"Clearly, the onus is on me to satisfy assessors as to the legality of my action, and I'm aware I have some hard work in front of me to achieve that goal."