

SPORT

Tigers' last shot at regaining confidence

SPORTS REPORTER



The Tigers will play their last practice game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium at Mirpur today before their departure for the West Indies on August 13. Like the first practice game on Thursday, the second match will also be a 60-over per side affair and will be played with the red ball.

The first practice game saw a number of players hit form. Tamim Iqbal received a much-needed boost to a 102-ball 44. Mominul Haque, who had a torrid time in the West Indies while playing for Bangladesh A last month was also among the runs with a fluent 43.

Nasir Hossain and Shamsur Rahman also fared well with half-centuries.

One would hope that the practice matches help the Tigers rediscover their form, which they have been woefully lacking this year. They are yet to win an ODI in 2014, having lost nine out of the ten matches they participated in.

With a majority of the players not in form, they will hope to gain some confidence from their previous encounters against the West Indies.

Mahmudullah Riyad, for instance, boasts a batting average of 63.75 against the West Indies. He has scored 255 runs against them. Captain Mushfiqur Rahim too has a good record, having scored 415 runs at an average of 41.50.

The last time Bangladesh played the West

Indies was in 2012 where the Tigers won the ODI series 3-2. Off-spinner Shohag Gazi, who debuted during the Test series, performed well in both the Test and ODI series. He picked up a four-wicket haul in his first ODI and also finished with figures of 9 for 219 in his first Test.

Anamul Haque will also have fond memories of the West Indies as he scored his first ODI century against them in Khulna in 2012. His 120 helped the Tigers take a 2-0 lead in the five-match series. He is also the only Bangladesh player to score a century against the West Indies in ODI cricket.

Slow left-armer Abdur Razzak, with 18 wickets, is Bangladesh's highest wicket-taker against the West Indies.

While these statistics do provide hope for a possible turnaround for the Tigers, the fact remains that almost all of the players mentioned above are out of form. Razzak, for instance, has a bowling average above 100 this year; Gazi, as opposed to his emphatic beginning, struggles to find a place in the final 11; Nasir's average this year is hovering below 20 while questions have been raised regarding Riyad's place in the side.

As a result of the lack of form among the established players the onus will be on the newer players in the side such as Taskin Ahmed and the returning Imrul Kayes, both of whom have been in good touch recently.

However, there's no doubt that for this series to be a fruitful one, Bangladesh need its players to take a leaf out of the series in 2012.



A Bangladesh player (L) attempts to thwart an Indian attack during their second match of the three-match series at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan turf yesterday. The hosts lost the match 1-5.

PHOTO: STAR

3 practice matches for booters

Tabith holds talk with de Kruiif

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh U-23 national football team will play three warm-up matches at home and abroad before the Asian Games to be held in Incheon, Korea from September 19 to October 4.

"We want to make sure the Bangladesh U-23 team play three practice matches before the Asian Games, either at home or abroad. We have been in touch with India and Nepal about playing play two practice matches against them once the groupings of the football event of Asian Games is decided after August 19," said Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) vice president Tabith M Awal yesterday.

"Once those two matches are held, either at home or abroad, we will go for the third practice match somewhere on way to Korea," said Tabith after a meeting with Dutch coaches Lodewijk de Kruiif and Rene Koster at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan.

It is believed that Tabith visited the sports institution to hold talks with and Koster and De Kruiif, who made allegations to the media that the environment at the BKSP is unhygienic and the internet facilities there are poor. The BFF vice president, though, said that he had not received any such official allegation from anyone, hence he was not prepared to make any comments on the issue.

De Kruiif himself refused to make any comments on the issue, but said, "It was a private discussion which was held in friendly and family environment and we don't want to disclose the details as per our agreement. But we had a lot of discussion and we shared our feelings and ours sorrows."

De Kruiif denied making any comment on whether he wanted to leave the BKSP if things did not improve within a week.

Novak sent packing

AFP, Toronto



World number one Novak Djokovic slumped to a 6-2, 6-2 defeat to Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in the third round of the Toronto Masters on Thursday while Roger Federer advanced with a tight victory.

Newly married Djokovic, who needed almost three hours to get past Gael Monfils in his opening tie this week, looked under-prepared against Tsonga, the powerful French 13th seed.

The Serb was joined on the sidelines by his doubles partner Stan Wawrinka, with the Australian Open winner losing to Kevin Anderson 7-6 (10/8), 7-5.

Wimbledon champion Djokovic finished with 18 unforced errors and dropped serve four times.

Two-time Canadian winner Federer was meanwhile forced to the limit by Croatian Marin Cilic, with the Swiss second seed finally claiming a 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (3/7), 6-4 win on his seventh match point.

Cilic ignited the drama in the 10th game of the second set, holding serve in the 19-minute epic and saving six Federer match points on the way to levelling at a set each.

Federer, who turns 33 on Friday, finally regained control late in the third set as he converted after more than two-and-a-half hours on the court.

Djokovic came to Canada having won five of the last six Masters events he had contested.

Thursday's loss was only his fifth of the season against 38 wins.

The victory marked the third time that Tsonga had beaten a world number one after putting out Rafael Nadal at Queen's three years ago and defeating Federer in Canada in 2009.

Spain's fifth seed Ferrer saved six break points in the second set in his comeback win over Ivan Dodig 1-6, 6-3, 6-3, while Canadian sixth seed Milos Raonic kept home hopes alive by beating France's Julien Benneteau 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 with 15 aces, taking four match points to go through to his third straight Canadian quarterfinal.

Raonic takes on Spaniard Feliciano Lopez, a winner over Czech fourth seed Tomas Berdych 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

SL make Pakistan toil

Ton-up Sangakkara goes past Dravid

AFP, Galle



Kumar Sangakkara rose to fourth place in the list of century-makers as he and the retiring Mahela Jayawardene plundered Pakistan's bowlers on the rain-hit third day of the first Test in Galle on Friday.

The hosts, who began the day at 99-1 in reply to Pakistan's 451, carried their first innings to 252-2 by tea before heavy rain wiped out the final session of play.

Just 46 of the stipulated 90 overs were bowled during the day, leaving a draw as the likely result with just 12



Sri Lanka batting maestro Kumar Sangakkara (L) is congratulated by teammate Mahela Jayawardene after scoring a century on the third day of the first Test against Pakistan at the Galle International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

wickets having fallen over the first three days.

Sri Lanka will resume on Saturday trailing by 199 runs with eight wickets in hand.

Left-handed Sangakkara - who turns 37 in October -- was unbeaten on 102, his seventh three-figure knock in the last 14 Tests, taking his overall tally to 37 centuries, overtaking Indian great Rahul Dravid (36).

Only the retired trio of India's Sachin Tendulkar, with 51 centuries, Jacques Kallis of South Africa who had 45, and Ricky Ponting of Australia on 41, have

scored more hundreds.

Jayawardene, set to quit Test cricket at the end of this two-Test series, showed he was good enough to prolong his 17-year career as he survived an anxious start to hit an unbeaten 55.

The tried and trusted duo of Sangakkara and Jayawardene, whose partnership of 624 against South Africa in Colombo in 2006 remains a world record, have so far put on 108 for the third wicket.

Rain had reduced play to 20 overs in the post-lunch session in which Sri Lanka scored 78 runs.

BANGLADESH-INDIA HOCKEY SERIES

Hosts suffer heavy defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Visiting Indian hockey team handed a massive 5-1 defeat to hosts Bangladesh at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan yesterday to go 2-0 up in the three-match series.

Like the previous match, Bangladesh took the lead early in the first half before conceding five goals in succession, thanks to some erratic defending by the hosts.

The home side, who are playing the series as part of their preparation for September's World Hockey League and Asian Games, made a brisk start and went ahead in the eighth minute when Hasan Jubair Niloy, receiving a flick from Pushkor Khisha Momo, broke the deadlock with a simple tap in. But the lead lasted only three minutes as Harjeet Singh equalised with a reverse-hit before Yuvraj Walmiki put India ahead in the next minute.

India launched the attacks through

the flanks with a lot of pace and power and unsettled the Bangladesh defenders. Gaps opened up between the three departments of the Bangladesh side and the midfield found it hard to bridge the gap between attack and defence.

India took advantage of the lack of communication in the Bangladesh team and scored three more field goals though SK Uthapa, Yusuf Affan and Devender Sunil, who was awarded the man of the match.

"We have yet to put up our best performance on the pitch and we must play better tomorrow (Saturday). There are still some areas for improvement and we must improve the way we want to play," said India coach Khandoker Tusher after the match.

Tusher though praised some Bangladeshi players for their sense but he believes Bangladesh needs to work hard each and every day to get better.

"I don't think there are any limitations in the Bangladesh side but there

are some areas (tactical) to be improved and it is a work in process because you can't change everything overnight," said Tusher.

Bangladesh's Pakistani coach Naveed Alam was satisfied with the way Bangladesh played but was unhappy about the margin of defeat. "If you watched the first game, the score was alright but the tempo of the game was not right. Today (Friday) the tempo was alright but the margin was not" said Naveed.

"Today we used three new players including the goalkeeper. Their confidence level was not very high and it is not unexpected. Sometimes they lacked plan, which was to mark every player. Three goals were gifted and the boys were a little bit down once the opponents struck the fourth goal," explained Naveed adding that they would try to do better in the third and final game which will be held today.

Root, Buttler guide England

AFP, Manchester



Joe Root and Jos Buttler held firm for England before rain stopped play in the fourth Test against India at Old Trafford on Friday.

England were 237 for six in reply to India's 152 all out, a lead of 85 runs, when what became heavy rain forced the players from the field at 2:15pm local time (1315GMT) on the second day.

No further play was possible in the 85 minutes before the scheduled tea interval.

Although by then the sun had started to break through the grey skies, there were large puddles in several places around the boundary edge.

Root was 48 not out and wicketkeeper Buttler, on his Lancashire home ground, 22 not out.

The pair had so far put on 67 runs for the seventh wicket.

England resumed on 113 for three after bowling out India -- who won the toss -- for just 152 before tea on Thursday, with fast-medium bowler Stuart Broad taking six for 25.

However, India's total in an innings featuring a Test record-equalling six ducks represented something of a recovery after they had been eight for four inside six overs and the tourists were indebted to a battling 71 from captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

England's Ian Bell was 45 not out, with nightwatchman Chris Jordan yet to score at the start of Friday's play.

India badly needed an early breakthrough and

swing bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar, a thorn in England's side with both bat and ball this series, duly obliged by taking two wickets for one run in eight balls to remove both Bell (58) and Jordan (13).

Bell, fresh from his hundred in England's 266-run win at Southampton -- their first victory in 11 Tests -- that levelled the five-match series at 1-1, completed a 63-ball fifty including eight fours and a six.

With conditions as overcast as they had been on Thursday morning, there was plenty of swing movement on offer.

But it was Kumar's looping bouncer that did for Jordan as he mistimed a pull and was well caught by Varun Aaron, moving low to his right at midwicket.

And 136 for four became 140 for five when Bell, beaten the ball before by Kumar's superb outswinger, was undone by another good length delivery that this time

took the edge on its way through to wicketkeeper Dhoni.

England had now lost half their first-innings wickets and had still to equal India's score.

Moeen Ali had proved vulnerable to the bouncer in his brief Test career to date.

But Ali's response to two successive Kumar short balls was to get over the top of both deliveries and pull them down for well-struck fours.

However, Ali fell for 13 when recalled fast bowler Aaron, from around the wicket, hurried him with a short-pitcher before next ball bowling the all-rounder with a full-length delivery as the left-hander aimed towards midwicket.

SCOREBOARD					
PAKISTAN: First innings 451 (Younis 177, Shafiq 75, Sarfraz 55, Rehman 50, Perera 5-137, Herath 3-116)					
SRI LANKA: First innings (overnight 99-1)					
Tharanga lbw b Junaid	19				
Silva c Sarfraz b Talha	64				
Sangakkara not out	102				
Jayawardene not out	55				
Extras: (b-1, lb-3, w-6, nb-2)	12				
Total: (Fort two wkts in 80 overs)	252				
To bat: Mathews, Vithanage, Dickwell, Perera, Prasad, Herath, Eranga.					
Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-144.					
Bowler	O	M	R	W	
Junaid	20	6	71	1	
Talha	14	4	45	1	
Ajmal	29	7	76	0	

SCOREBOARD					
INDIA: First innings 152 (Dhoni 71; Broad 6-25, Anderson 3-46)					
ENGLAND: First innings (overnight 113-3)					
Cook c Pankaj b Aaron	17				
Robson b Kumar	6				
Ballance lbw b Aaron	37				
Bell c Dhoni b Kumar	58				
Jordan c Aaron b Kumar	13				
Root not out	48				
Moeen b Aaron	13				
Buttler not out	22				
Extras: (b-5, lb-9, w-4, nb-5)	23				
Total: (For 6 wkts in 71 overs)	237				
To bat: Broad, Woakes, Anderson					
Fall of wickets: 1-21, 2-36, 3-113, 4-136, 5-140, 6-170.					
Bowler	O	M	R	W	
Kumar	18	6	47	3	
Pankas	17	2	79	0	
Aaron	16	2	48	3	
Ashwin	13	1	28	0	
Jadeja	7	0	21	0	