

SPORT

A blessing in disguise?

Tigers set for West Indies sans Shakib

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's last tour of the West Indies, back in 2009, saw an emphatic display from all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan—albeit against a weakened Caribbean setup—lead the Tigers to whitewash the home side in both the ODI and Test series.

Having been unexpectedly handed over the captaincy after Mashrafe Bin Mortaza got injured during the first Test, the left-hander performed gallantly both with the bat and ball and deservedly was adjudged the player of both series.

After five years Bangladesh head towards the Caribbean on August 13 on the back of a distasteful record—nine defeats out of ten this year—sans Shakib, now serving a six-month ban on disciplinary ground.

Are the Tigers without their best player bound to suffer in the West Indies this time? This is the biggest question Bangladesh think-tank is confronting as the Tigers embark on a tough series against a full-strength Caribbean team.

The importance of the player was perhaps best described yesterday by head coach Chandika Hathurusingha at Mirpur, where the Tigers rounded off a four-week conditioning camp.

"He is two players in one so replacing him is hard at this stage," he said.

"But we have enough players that we have selected keeping in mind our game plan. So I am happy with the team. We want to do everything possible to get an away win," he added.

Bangladesh Captain Mashrafe Rahim hoped that the absence of Shakib could, on the contrary, motivate his players to work harder and hit form.

"Yes he (Shakib) is a big performer and has been a great contributor for the last 8 years. But cricket is not a one-man game, we need at least three to four players to perform in our team. So from that aspect we need our players, who haven't been in form and have been working hard to get motivated," he remarked.

However, it's not all dark and gloom for the Tigers. In order to be inspired, all they need to do is to have a look at the way they played in their last series against the West Indies in 2012, where a Shakib-less Tigers beat Chris Gayle and Co 3-2 in the ODIs.

While those memories still remain fresh in Mashrafe's mind, he admits that it would be a difficult task to repeat the same this time. According to him this time Bangladesh's primary target will be to play 'consistent cricket'.

"It will be difficult. International cricket is not easy. Our first target is to play consistent cricket. If we can do that we would have won matches along the way," said Mashrafe.

"I think the West Indians will also be under pressure because they lost their last series to New Zealand at home. So hopefully we can do well," he added.

The key according to the captain would be to adjust to the conditions there as soon as possible.

"We have not played longer version cricket for a long time, so that will be a challenge. We have a one day practice game, a one day series and then a three-day practice match before the Test series begins. So we need to adjust to the conditions as soon as possible," he reckoned.

Coach Hathurusingha was similarly pragmatic. While he admits that there are certain aspects of Bangladesh's game that are yet to be tested in order to know their strong points, he hopes his spinners and batsmen can do the job.

With Bangladesh yet to win a single ODI this year, breaking that jinx in the West Indies would be a tough ask. It's an aspect that Mashrafe is aware of and in order to counter it, he aims to follow the only possible strategy available to him: forget the past.

As he puts it, "We have a number of games this year and the only thing we can do is look ahead and hope to meet the task."

Bangladesh leave for the West Indies on August 13 to play three ODIs, one T20I and two Tests. The first ODI will take place on August 20.

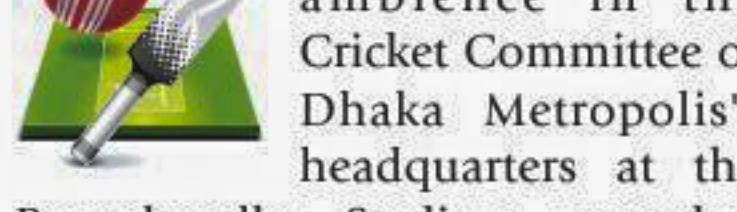


Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Rahim (L) briefs the media on their four-week camp for the upcoming tour of the West Indies as coach Chandika Hathurusingha listens in Mirpur on Sunday.

PHOTO: STAR

'Does money grow on trees?'

SPORTS REPORTER



In a rather celebratory ambience in the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis's headquarters at the Bangabandhu Stadium yesterday, nine players out of the 23-member national pool confirmed their teams for the Dhaka Premier League that begins in October.

The players' transfers, in a way, marked the start of this year's eagerly anticipated domestic cricket season in Bangladesh.

Of the nine cricketers, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was the only player not to change his club. Like last year, Mashrafe will captain Mohammedan Sporting Club. The club also signed batsmen Mithun

Ali and Naeem Islam.

Having finished fourth last year, Mashrafe is confident that his side will be able to put up a better display this time around.

"The player-transfer system last time did not allow officials or players to choose at will. It's different this time and this year the team is much better as well," said Mashrafe.

As per new rules of the competition, each club is bound to purchase one pacer from the pool. Pacers are also likely to receive seaming wickets during the league in a bid to help the players prepare for the World Cup and these were the changes Mashrafe welcomed.

"It's great that pacers are getting chances. It's a department that needs to improve and it's a step in that direction. It'll put pressure on

the pacers to perform," he said.

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Rahim shifted to Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club from Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club in a deal which the player claimed was the most lucrative in his career.

However, Mashrafe shot down claims made by a section of the media which suggested that the player had received an amount around Tk 50 lakh.

"I won't tell you how much I am being paid. It's personal. However, the media has definitely posted a bloated amount," said Mashrafe.

He even posed a rhetorical question to the media, "Is it that easy to pay Tk 50 lakh to someone? Does money grow on trees?"

Doleshwar surprised many last year by finishing third in the competition.

They rode on the likes of Mominul Haque and a number of other foreign players. This year Mashrafe hopes to take them all the way.

"This is a young team and I like to play with young players. They contacted me long ago, so it shows that they are very serious. The officials here are good as well," said Mashrafe when asked regarding his decision to change clubs.

Apart from the captain they have also signed pacer Shafiqul Islam.

Young Taskin Ahmed was signed up by Prime Bank Cricket Club. They have also signed Mahmudullah Riyad who played for champions Gazi Tank Cricketers last year and bagged all-round Forhad Reza.

Meanwhile Nasir Hossain made a last minute shift to sign for Abahani yesterday.

Kalpage in town

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Sri Lankan cricketer Ruwan Kalpage arrived in Dhaka yesterday morning to join the Bangladesh cricket team as its new fielding coach.

Australian Corey Richards was the last fielding coach for the Tigers. He resigned earlier this year. Kalpage has been signed on a two-year contract.

The Sri Lankan had earlier worked as the head coach of the National Cricket Academy from 2008 to 2010. He had come to Bangladesh in February along with the Sri Lankan team and stayed here for a while.

After arriving, Kalpage went to his hotel just to leave his baggage and then came straight to Mirpur to get introduced with the players.

Indian clubs in Club Cup?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) is planning to invite two Indian clubs to participate in the season's curtain-raising tournament, the Club Cup, which is supposed to take place in March next year.

"Many of the members of the executive committee raised the issue of inviting clubs from India for the Club Cup tournament during today's (Sunday) meeting. We will try to bring to two clubs, depending on their availability," said BHF's general secretary Khazi Rahmatullah after the meeting.

If the Indian clubs agree to take part, it will be the first time that a domestic competition in Bangladesh would feature foreign teams.

England pick a masked Broad

AFP, Manchester

England have named an unchanged 13-man squad for next week's fifth and final Test against India at The Oval, with Stuart Broad ready to play in a face mask.

The paceman was hit on the nose while batting at Old Trafford on Saturday after a Varun Aaron bouncer found its way between the peak of his helmet and the grille.

Broad, named player-of-the-match for his first innings six for 25, played no further part in England's crushing innings and 54-run victory, watching from his hospital bed.



National pool members (R-L) Mahmudullah Riyad, Forhad Reza and Taskin Ahmed wait in line to make their transfers to Prime Bank Cricket Club official at the CCDM headquarters on Sunday.

PHOTO: STAR

'Fold Trafford'

AFP, New Delhi

India captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni faced criticism from the nation's press Sunday for his "bizarre" tactics during the side's humiliating loss to England, while his batsmen were slammed for their "spineless surrender".

Lacklustre India lost the fourth Test at Old Trafford on Saturday by an innings and 54 runs, handing England an unbeatable 2-1 lead in the five-match series.

Under the back-page headline "Spineless Surrender", the Times of India lashed out at the country's batsmen for refusing to fight back in their second innings.

The newspaper said the batsmen had made millions of dollars playing

"slam-bang" limited-overs cricket, but failed to hone their skills for Test matches, the sport's most demanding format.

"Faced with the onerous task of saving the match, India's 'Young Millionaires' did not even attempt to face," its correspondent wrote.

"Instead they flaunted a flamboyant approach, so typical of limited-overs cricket, to bring about a quick end to the fourth Test."

"So pathetic was India's display that their second innings lasted just 43 overs."

The press praised England's "focus and determination", singling out Stuart Broad for his "heroic bowling". Broad, who retired hurt after breaking his nose while batting early on Saturday, was named player-of-the-match.

Dhoni came under fire for his "bi-zarre team tactics" that included fail-

ing to start India's bowling attack on Saturday with top-performing seamers Varun Aaron and Bhuvneshwar Kumar, the Hindustan Times said.

With the headline "Fold Trafford", the Sunday Express said that although Dhoni batted well during the match, he "desperately needs a crash course in the art of Test match captaincy".

India were praised last month when they won the second Test match against England at Lord's, securing the team's first overseas victory for three years.

That win eased pressure on Dhoni, who was facing calls to quit, and raised hope that India had turned the corner after poor performances since the retirement of batting greats including Sachin Tendulkar.

But the media said on Sunday that it seemed this was "just an illusion" and India's problems persisted.

Janata Bank extends BHF sponsorship

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) has retained Janata Bank Limited as the sponsors for the national team's foreign coach for another year, but the amount of sponsorship money has been reduced from Tk 90 lakh to Tk 50 lakh.

BHF president and Air Chief Air Marshal Enamul Bari and Janata Bank's DMD Iftekharuzzaman signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on behalf of their respective organisations at a press conference at the Bangladesh Olympic Association auditorium yesterday.

"Yes, the amount of money has been reduced but that is not the end of the story. We are hoping to extend our involvement with BHF in a greater way in future," said Janata Bank's acting manager

ing director Omar Faruque.

The cheque of the promised amount was also handed over to the federation officials during the press conference.

The BHF signed up Pakistani coach Naveed Alam as the director of coaching in July last year for one year term before handing a three-month extension on the completion of the term ahead of the upcoming Asian Games recently. It has been learnt that the game's governing body has spent nearly Tk 55 lakh on Naveed Alam, while the rest of the amount has been spent on preparation camps for the various tournaments that the national teams have taken part.

The new contract is effective from March 2014 onward for one year but the federation will enjoy a renewal if the promised amount for the foreign coach is spent before the completion of the one-year contract.