

SPORT

Further slide or turnaround?

Tigers embark on West Indies mission

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket team leave the city tonight for a 37-day tour of West Indies with questions about their ability to emerge from their rough patch this year hanging over their heads. There is not much strength to be drawn from what they achieved during their last Caribbean trip in 2009 against an under-strength West Indies; Mushfiqur Rahim's men instead desperately need to regain some rhythm and form to make their presence felt in international cricket in 2014, a year during which they have had no success whatsoever save for T20 victories over Afghanistan and Nepal.

Expectations are not too high about this trip, coming as it does on the back of a string of losses -- including an ODI loss against Afghanistan and a T20 defeat to Hong Kong -- but anything short of a competent show will set the cat amongst the pigeons as far as preparations for next year's World Cup is concerned. The minimum expectation from the Tigers will be that they get their basics right on a consistent basis, an aspect that has been missing in their performances in 2014.

Half the team will be under the scanner and if they fail to regain their form they may even jeopardise their place in the team.

Opener Tamim Iqbal did end up hitting form in the last two practice games that he played in, but his form this year has been extremely poor; to the extent that the selectors decided to pick four openers for the team's top order.



PLAYERS ON THE BRINK IN ODIS IN 2014

BANGLADESH IN ODIS | MATCHES: 10 | WON: 0 | LOST: 9 | N/R: 1



TAMIM IQBAL

Innings: 2

Runs: 4

Average: 2.00

Test average: 12.00 (4 innings)



MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD

Innings: 6

Runs: 77

Average: 12.83



NASIR HOSSAIN

Innings: 8

Runs: 167

Average: 20.87



SHOHAG GAZI

Matches: 6

Wickets: 4

Bowl Avg: 43.75



ABDUR RAZZAK

Matches: 4

Wickets: 2

Bowl Avg: 109.00

SQUAD

MUSHFIQUR RAHIM (CAP)
TAMIM IQBAL
ANAMUL HAQUE
SHAMSUR RAHMAN
MOMINUL HOQUE
RUBEL HOSSAIN
NASIR HOSSAIN
MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD
MOHAMMAD MITHUN
ABDUR RAZZAK
MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA
SHOHAG GAZI
TASKIN AHMED
IMRUL KAYES
AL-AMIN HOSSAIN

Bangladesh's highest ODI wicket-taker Abdur Razzak is another player whose form has been a concern. He had a lacklustre performance during the World T20 and has an astounding bowling average of 109 this year. Questions have been raised as to whether the time has come for the veteran left-arm spinner to call it a day.

Mahmudullah Riyad and Shohag Gazi will also have to prove their worth in order to maintain their place in the side. Riyad has an ODI batting average

of 12.83 this year and has already become an irregular in the Test side. Gazi's fall in form can ironically be traced to his rapid rise in late 2012 and 2013. His form and behavioural issues have led to even the Dhaka Premier League clubs snubbing him during the players' transfers.

Nasir Hossain has steadily moved away from the 'Mr Dependable' tag while Shamsur Rahman has not lived up to his early potential.

With this backdrop, it would be

interesting to see how new head coach Chandika Hathurusingha motivates his side in his first real international assignment as a head coach of a national team, especially as he will miss the services of the talismanic Shakib Al Hasan, who is serving a six-month ban.

Before leaving the country, the new coach conducted a fitness and skills training camp for his charges, who also played two preparation matches where struggling batsmen like Tamim and

Mominul got back among the runs.

Bangladesh have twice previously visited the West Indies, in 2004 and 2009, for full series.

A 15-members team was announced for the ODI series, the matches of which are scheduled for August 20, 22 and 25. The only T20I will take place on August 27. The selectors will decide on the T20 squad when the remaining players join the team on August 24 for the Test series.

If the selectors stick to their initial

plan then it is all but confirmed that Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Taskin Ahmed and Abdur Razzak will return after the limited-overs series.

The Tigers will start their Caribbean journey with a one-day practice match on August 17 at the Progress Park in Grenada. They are also scheduled to play a three-day practice match from August 30 at St. Kitts before the start of the two-match Test series, to be held at St. Vincent (September 5-9) and St. Lucia (September 13-17).

Big win for Proteas

REUTERS, Harare

Dane Piedt produced the best performance by a debutant South African spinner as the Proteas thumped Zimbabwe by nine wickets to retain their number one status following the one-off Test at the Harare Sports Club on Tuesday.

After bowling Zimbabwe out for 181 in the second innings, the visitors knocked off their target of 41 for the loss of opener Dean Elgar, who was bowled by Tendai Chatara for 21.

The 24-year-old Piedt finished with match figures of eight for 152 on a helpful wicket having been drafted into the side for leg-spinner Imran Tahir, beating the previous best debut figures of seven for 189 by Ian Smith against England in 1947.

Fast bowler Dale Steyn finished with eight for 84 in the match to move level with Ian Botham on 383 careers Test scalps, 13th on the list of most wicket takers.

A South African victory was always likely at the start of the day, but Zimbabwe can take heart from the fight they showed in delaying the Proteas' celebrations until the final hour of day four.

Resuming on 28 for one, they lost only nightwatchman Donald Tiripano (five) before lunch after he had a wild slog at a Piedt delivery and was bowled.

SCORES IN BRIEF
ZIMBABWE: First innings 256 all out (Taylor 93, Masakadza 45, Steyn 5-46, Piedt 4-90)

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 397 all out (Du Plessis 97, De Kock 81, Duminy 55; Nyumbu 5-157, Tiripano 2-65)

ZIMBABWE: Second innings 181 all out (Masakadza 19, Sibanda 45, Vermeulen 21, Mutumbami 43; Steyn 3-38, Morkel 3-15, Piedt 4-62)

SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings 44 for 1 (Elgar 21, Petersen 17 not out)

Result: South Africa won by 9 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Dane Piedt.

Will Naveed Alam's experiments work?

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh national hockey team's Pakistani coach Naveed Alam might have found a lot of positives from the 0-3 defeat in the three-match series against a second-string India side, but the high-ups of Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) are seemingly not satisfied with the performance of the team ahead of next month's Asian Games.

The Pakistani coach has been with the national side since July last year and guided his charges in the Asia Cup and Asian Games Qualifiers, to mixed results, but he has hardly managed to build a style which suits the team.

A disappointing seventh-place finish in the Asia Cup last year might have had reasons in unrest among the players but Naveed's charges struggled a lot against lesser teams like Iran, Sri Lanka and Singapore in the Asian Games Qualifiers this year and had a lot of weaknesses exposed during the series against India recently.

"Certainly there have been

improvements in the side over the last year but it has been a slow one. Still there are gaps in the midfield which is considered the nucleus of a team," said BHF vice president Abdus Sadek on Monday, having watched all the three matches between Bangladesh and India.

Since the suspension of attacking midfielder Rasel Mahmud Jimmy and midfielder Quamruzzaman Rana after the Asia Cup campaign, a big vacuum has been created in the midfield, resulting in lost possessions numerous times during the series against India.

Besides, the defense also looked vulnerable due to the absence of suspended Imran Hasan Pintoo and the exclusion of experienced Moshir Rahman Biplob. Naveed has yet to find good alternatives in those positions.

Even though BHF general secretary Khaza Rahmatullah did not express his frustration in public, he believes that Bangladesh must improve in some areas before the Asian Games if they are to achieve positive results.

"I talked to Naveed after the series. We must improve much in some areas. The players still lack positional senses,

fitness and have poor receiving ability, especially on the air. Besides, there is also lack of coordination among the three departments," said the former national player.

Selectors of the national team have recently requested Naveed to bring changes in the backline with the inclusion of a few players from the Youth Olympic Games squad but the coach seems adamant about sticking with the current squad.

Former Bangladesh coach Mahbub Harun tried to find out the reasons behind the poor performance of the national team.

"It won't be wise to judge the national team through the three-match series which was held on a sluggish turf and where the coach tried different strategies. But the fact is that our players are not capable of playing in new formations every game. It would have been better to stick to one style and one formation," said Mahbub, who guided Bangladesh to an unprecedented third position in the World Hockey League (Round-2) in 2013.

Now the onus is on Naveed to show that his experiments have been worth it in the Asian Games.

Khulna in line for its 2nd Test?

SPORTS REPORTER



Renovations in Khulna have begun in a bid for the city to host one of the three Test matches of the Bangladesh-Zimbabwe series in October. As per the current schedule, Chittagong's Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium is expected to host the first two Tests of the series after which the players travel to Dhaka to play the final Test. However, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is contemplating a change.

A team formed to investigate the scenario in Khulna finished its inspection yesterday and painted a positive picture. The main worry has been the accommodation in the city, which according to officials has improved.

"The hotel which we plan to keep the players in has expanded. There were 64 rooms before and now they have 90. They are also building a swimming pool which is also a part of the requirement. From an accommodation perspective things are looking good," said BCB's media manager Rabeed Imam, who is also a member of the inspection committee.

"The road from the airport to Khulna has a few issues. However, we have spoken to the chief engineer of the Roads and Highways department and they have assured us that for the nation's interest, they will fix those problems in time for the series," he added.

Rabeed further added that the board is looking to shift the second Test to Khulna if everything goes as planned.

Cricket Operations Chairman Akram Khan has said that he is hopeful about the shift.

"If everything is fine and develops in time then we will definitely instruct the board to shift the Test. But we are still waiting for a report from the team," he said.

Khulna's Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium hosted its first Test in 2012 when Bangladesh played the West Indies.

Sunny survives rainy crash

PTI, London

Former India skipper Sunil Gavaskar was lucky to escape unhurt in a car crash while travelling from Manchester to London on Sunday after the completion of the third Test between India and England.

According to media reports, Gavaskar, who is part of the Sky Sports commentary team, was seated in a Jaguar with fellow-commentator Mark Nicholas and his close friend Chandresh Patel when he met with the accident.

It is learnt that the legendary opener was sitting on the left side of the rear while Nicholas was sitting beside the driver when a car coming from the opposite end collided with their Jaguar.

Gavaskar's driver, who had reportedly dozed off, was slow to react on a wet road and a late manoeuvre did avoid a head-on clash but the speeding vehicle slammed onto the other car. It was Gavaskar who had to shout to get the drowsy driver back in his senses as the others were also fast asleep.



Players of Mohammedan Sporting Club are ecstatic after thumping Gulshan Youth Club by 99 runs in the semi-finals of the Metropolitan Women's Cricket League at Mirpur yesterday. Gulshan were bowled out for 59 in pursuit of 159 in a rain-curtailed match.

PHOTO: STAR

BOA president frustrated Wants Asian Games squad trimmed

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) president and Army Chief General Iqbal Karim Bhuiyan expressed his frustration over the performance of the Bangladesh

contingent in the just concluded Commonwealth Games and instructed to trim the squad for the upcoming Asian Games, which will be held in Incheon, Korea from September 19 to October 4.

The high ups of BOA, including secretary general Syed Shahed Reza met the BOA president yesterday in Cantonment to appraise Bangladesh's performance in the Commonwealth Games as well as the status of Bangladesh's participation in the Asian Games.

"The BOA president is frustrated with the performances of the Bangladeshi athletes in the Commonwealth Games. Everything including the performance of the officials has also been discussed in the meeting. He has instructed us to select the Asian Games squad in light of success of the

Commonwealth Games. He said the contingent will not be sent only for travelling like previous occasions," said BOA joint secretary general Badal Roy.

Seeking anonymity, another BOA official said, "The president instructed us to reduce the number of athletes and participating disciplines as much as possible. I think the number of disciplines may be reduced to half from initial 21."

"Those who failed in the exam (Commonwealth Games) should be kept out of the Asian Games contingents and the number of officials should also be made as few as possible," said the source, quoting the BOA president.

The BOA has preliminary penciled a 220-member mega contingent for 21 disciplines and the last date of sending entries is August 15.

Bangladesh won one gold and one silver medal in cricket and clinched a bronze medal in women's kabaddi in the last Asian Games in China.

The members of the BOA executive committee will sit in an emergency meeting today to finalise the disciplines and athletes for the Asian Games.