

SPORT

'Toss will be crucial'

SPORTS REPORTER From Ctg

Having lost the series, Zimbabwe captain Brendan Taylor hopes his players can play pressure-free cricket in the third and final Test due to begin in Chittagong on Wednesday. The uneven bounce has been a crucial factor in the first two Tests and as a result Taylor hopes the visitors can bat first in this match.

"We bowled well in the first Test and had a bit of a batting in the second. If we can be a little consistent and try and put those things together, we will be more of a threat. The toss will be crucial, you don't want to be batting on Day Five in these conditions.

"But that's out of our control. We just have to play each day as it comes and give our best," Taylor told reporters during Zimbabwe's practice session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.



Tamim Iqbal (L) shares a light moment with Mominul Haque during Tigers' training session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday, ahead of the third and final Test against Zimbabwe starting Wednesday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

TAMIM'S new avatar

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong



Flashy, powerful and exuberant; over the course of time these words have become synonymous with Tamim Iqbal. While it has been a good number of years since he absolutely bamboozled a bowling attack, memories of some of his finest knocks still linger. From destroying the English in their own backyard with a dominating 94-ball century to dancing down the track fearlessly against Zaheer Khan and hammering him out of the park, Tamim's aggression with the bat has been the focal point of his career.

In the recent past though, the left-hander seems to have made a shift in his batting approach in Test cricket. His free-flowing drives have been replaced with cautious leaves and he seems to be concentrating a lot more on his front foot defence in training.

Yesterday for instance, Tamim spent almost an hour in the nets with coach Chandika Hathurusingha during training at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, trying to figure out which deliveries to leave and which ones to put a straight bat to.

While Hathurusingha used a sidearm club to constantly bowl along the corridor of uncertainty, Tamim concentrated on his off stump; a simple exercise, and yet it goes on to show a possible change in the batsman's thought process.

The batsman's career statistics suggest a shift in approach as well. His strike-rate in the last two years has hovered in the mid 40s. On the contrary, prior to 2012 the opener had a strike rate of 60.15.

While he has occasionally occupied the crease for long periods in the past, his recent knocks suggest that he has put a special emphasis on that aspect.

He has a total of seventeen 50-plus scores in Tests and only six of those innings have been played at a strike-rate of below 50. Four of those six knocks took place in the last one and a half years. Prior to the century against Zimbabwe in Khulna last week, which came at a strike rate of 32.83, he faced 226 balls for his 64 against the West Indies. At Kingston he scored 53 in 143 deliveries, while his 70 off 218 balls against New Zealand in October 2013, was scored at a strike-rate of 32.11, his slowest thus far.

While it may be a shift from his natural game, the apparent change is not necessarily negative. For years the batsman has been criticised for playing too many shots in Test cricket; for throwing away his wicket after a quick half century. His reply used to be simple, "I feel settled when I see myself scoring runs."

His century against Zimbabwe, which saw him bat out a day for the first time in his career, suggests that the dashing opener is in search of a new avatar. He probably still needs to find the right balance between the number of runs scored and the amount of time spent at the crease. If successful, Tamim's new approach would be extremely handy for Bangladesh's top order, which is in dire need of stability.

'The ultimate is Test cricket'

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong

Amidst the hue and cry of Shakib Al Hasan's performance and Bangladesh's rare series win, the Tigers silently completed 14 years of Test cricket yesterday. With six wins and 11 draws in 87 matches, there is not much to show for, but, Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim expects greater times are ahead.

The captain, who believes that Bangladesh could have been in a much better position today, has emphasised the need for improving the country's first-class structure for a better future.

"The point is that Test cricket is the game that gives you the ultimate respect and those involved in it; the board members, players and everyone. I know they all are working hard, but more commitment is required.

"It's not just about the infrastructure but our players need to get motivated as well. Our first-class structure is not as strong as others. When our first-class competitions begin, the national players are not always engaged. So there is not much competition and hence not much pressure," reckoned Mushfiqur.

"But if you look at other countries, sometimes their first-class teams beat national teams. So, if

our first-class wickets are a bit pace-bowling friendly then at least we won't have to struggle outside," he added.

Half of Bangladesh's squad for the Zimbabwe series have just recently begun playing Test cricket. Mushfiqur believes that it's necessary for a number of these players to stick it out for the next five to six years for the overall development of the team.

"Test experience is a big deal so these players need to perform, maintain their position and gain that experience. There are a number of players who are not there in the setup today but could have done well. On the contrary, if you get performers like Mominul

[Haque] then that puts pressure on the seniors, which is good.

"Players don't get a chance to play too long in our first-class format so it takes time for them to settle in international level. If these young players can play consistently for four-five years our results will be better in the future," hoped Mushfiqur.

Another issue that Mushfiqur addressed was the lack of Test opportunities for the Tigers. Since 2013, Bangladesh have played just 12 Tests. The Future Tours Programme for the Tigers does not look too bright either.

"Even when Sachin [Tendulkar] had come, he too said Bangladesh would only improve if they play

more Tests. Whether you do good or bad, at least you get the opportunity to learn," said Mushfiqur.

"So here we have a responsibility as well. The more consistent we play the more the other teams will want to play us. Hopefully we can win this series 3-0, seal our dominance and bring more matches in the future," he added.

At the end of it all, the captain hoped that his calls did not fall on deaf ears.

"Anniversaries will come and will go. I might be asked these same questions even next year. But the point is that we should not think about these issues just for a day, but remind ourselves about them every day."

3RD SAFF WOMEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

Bangladesh in Group A

SPORTS REPORTER

A 29-member Bangladesh women's football squad, including 20 booters, went to Pakistan yesterday afternoon to participate in the 3rd SAFF Women's Championship, which is set to kick off in Islamabad today.

Bangladesh have been pitted in Group A alongside two-time champions India, Afghanistan and Maldives, according to the fixtures released by the Pakistan Football Federation yesterday. Bangladesh will play their first match against Afghanistan on Thursday before taking on India on Saturday and Maldives on Monday.

The B Group consists of hosts Pakistan, Sri Lanka, current runners-up Nepal and Bhutan. The final will be played on December 21. All the matches will be held at the Jinnah Football Stadium in Islamabad.

30TH NATIONAL HOCKEY Navy, Police in final round

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Police emerged champions in their respective groups to qualify for the final round of the ATN Bangla 30th National Hockey Championship at the Maulna Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Star-studded Bangladesh Navy routed Narayanganj by 18-0 goals, with Rimon Kumar Ghosh (seven goals) and Krishna Kumar (four goals) slotting hat-tricks, while Bangladesh Police beat Rajshahi 2-1 in the day's other match.



Leaving for a football future

ANISUR RAHMAN

A luxurious bus, filled with 40 budding booters, left the Bangladesh Football Federation premises yesterday evening. The parents said tearful goodbyes, but the young booters were consumed by a dream of becoming promising footballers.

"It could have been a memorable day for Safat's father (Nurul Islam who died of brain stroke three years ago) had he been alive. Safat's father took his son to the football ground from a very early age as Safat showed interest in playing football," said Safat's tearful mother, Shamsun Nahar Dipu, on the eve of the departure.

The bus headed for the BFF Football Academy in Sylhet which will officially take off on Thursday with these 40 booters. Safat belongs to the 20-member U-13 group, who were selected through a country-wide talent hunt programme conducted by the BFF with assistance from the National Sports Council. The other 20 booters of U-17 group were selected from amongst 300 of the Pioneer Football League.

"I feel bad as my mother is crying for me and I have to stay away from my family. But I want to fulfil the desire of my father by becoming a top footballer," said Safat, who is a Class-VI student of Narayanganj Adarsha School.

"It is a mixed feeling for me. I feel sad because my mother is crying while I feel happy that I will get some new friends and play football with them at the academy," said Shakib Khandaker from Bashabo, another booter of the U-13 group.

These boys will start having their first academic football lessons from Thursday at BFF Academy, which has taken nearly three years to take off after BFF had availed a five-year lease of the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan facility in Sylhet. The 100-student capacity academy has two practice grounds, one administrative building, an officer-and-staff quarter, a gymnasium and a swimming pool.

Even though not all of these facilities have been completed over the last two years, the football's governing body is eager to start the academy from somewhere and take it to the international standard gradually.

Shehzad fractures skull

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Pakistan opener Ahmed Shehzad suffered a fractured skull after being hit by a bouncer during the second day of the first Test against New Zealand on Monday.

Shehzad, 22, scored a career-best 176 but was dismissed in the last over before lunch, hit wicket off New Zealand's seamer Corey Anderson.

Shehzad attempted a hook but missed the ball which hit him on the side of the temple. He fell and as he did so, his bat hit the stumps for a hit-wicket dismissal.

Shehzad felt dizzy and had to be helped off the field by team physio Brad Robinson.

He was rushed to a hospital where a scan revealed a minor fracture.

DPL starts today at last

SPORTS REPORTER



Dhaka Premier League (DPL), the main source of income for the majority of the country's cricketers, finally gets underway today at three different venues.

Defending champions Gazi Tank Cricketers will take on promotees Old DOHS at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur in one of the opening day's fixtures while Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club meet Paretex Sporting Club at Fatullah and Prime Doleshwar Sporting Club face off with Kalabagan Krira Chakra at BKSP.

Traditional rivals Abahani and Mohammedan will face off in the second round tomorrow at Mirpur.

The league, the country's lone 50-over competition which is also a List A competition, was initially scheduled to start on October 10 but shifted to November 2 because of a BCB XI side's tour to Kolkata as BCB sent a strong team on former India captain Sourav Ganguly's request to cele-

brate 150 years of Eden Gardens. The reason behind the last postponement was however unknown.

"Now our main aim is to complete the league as early as possible. We are also planning to arrange six matches in a day so that we can complete it before the start of the national team's camp for the upcoming World Cup," said Amin Khan, coordinator of the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM).

The 12 participating teams will first compete in single league format from where the top six teams will qualify for the Super League. The bottom three sides will have to play the relegation league and two of them will be relegated to the First Division.

The teams will be allowed to field one foreign player and Amin informed that so far nine clubs completed one foreign player each while Abahani and Mohammedan were yet to sign any. Most of the foreign players are coming from Sri Lanka but no club has signed any big name player yet.

Dhoni out of 1st Oz Test

AFP, New Delhi

India on Monday named a jumbo 19-man squad for the four match Test series in Australia starting next month even as captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was ruled out of the opening match due to injury.

Batsman Virat Kohli will lead the tourists in the first Test in Brisbane from December 4, with Dhoni returning to the helm for the remaining three games, the Board of Control for Cricket in India said in a statement.

The series opener in Brisbane will be followed by Tests in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney.

TEST SQUAD

Mahendra Singh Dhoni (captain), Virat Kohli, Shikhar Dhawan, Murali Vijay, Lokesh Rahul, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Rohit Sharma, Suresh Raina, Wriddhiman Saha, Naman Ojha, Ravichandran Ashwin, Karn Sharma, Ravindra Jadeja, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohammed Shami, Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav, Varun Aaron.

Benaud has skin cancer

AFP, Sydney

Legendary cricket commentator Richie Benaud revealed Monday he is battling skin cancer and is undergoing radiation therapy, but said he was coping well.

The 84-year-old former Australian captain made his illness public at the Nine Network's launch for its Australian summer cricket coverage, saying he was receiving treatment for skin cancers on his forehead and the top of his head.

Pakistan pile up runs

AFP, Abu Dhabi



Ahmed Shehzad hit a career-best 176 before being rushed to hospital with a fractured skull as Pakistan's batsmen smashed New Zealand around the ground in the first Test on Monday.

Younis Khan and Misbahul Haq also hit dominant tons to put Pakistan in control on 566 for three declared. But Shehzad's injury briefly set alarm bells ringing.

Before the incident, he had hit 17 fours and a six in his 371-ball innings.

While team managers worried about the opener, Younis went on to smash an unbeaten 100 - his 28th Test hundred and fourth in five innings.

Misbah knocked an unbeaten 102, his third ton in three innings. Azhar Ali missed his hundred after he was dismissed for 87.

At the close on the second day New Zealand were 15 without loss with

Brendon McCullum on nine and Tom Latham on five. They need another 352 to avoid the follow-on.

Younis, who scored 468 runs against Australia in a series which ended last week, hit ten fours in his 141-ball knock.

He hit a century in each innings in the first Test against Australia in Dubai and followed that with 213 in the Abu Dhabi Test last week.

Misbah, who smashed twin hundreds in the second Test against Australia, knocked nine fours and a six off 162 balls.

The two veteran batsmen added 193 for the unbroken fourth wicket stand to build on another second wicket stand of 169 runs between Ali and Shehzad.

Misbah survived two chances, one on 17 and the other on 20 as fielders failed to reach uppish shots with Ish Sodhi the luckless bowler on both occasions.

It was Younis who reached his hundred first, hitting an uppish shot off

McCullum which Tim Southee failed to catch at short mid-on.

Misbah drove McCullum in the same over for three to complete his eighth Test hundred.

Pakistan lost Shehzad and Ali in the two sessions after resuming at 269 for one.

Ali missed a sharp turner from Sodhi and was bowled. He hit four boundaries off 215 balls.

Anderson was the best bowler with 2-68 while Sodhi finished with 2-162.

The New Zealanders paid dearly for giving Shehzad a life on Sunday. He had been on 16 when wicketkeeper B.J. Watling failed to stump him off the bowling of spinner Mark Craig.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: First innings 566 for 3 in 170.5 overs (Shehzad 176, Misbah 102 not out, Younis 100 not out, Hafeez 96, Azhar 87; Anderson 2-68, Sodhi 1-162)
NEW ZEALAND: First innings 15 for no loss in 7 overs (McCullum 9 not out, Latham 5 not out)