

SPORT



BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD: Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha (C) draws his players' attention during the Tigers' training session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday afternoon. PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Will the sun shine for long?

BISHWAJIT ROY



The skies were grey for the Tigers for most of this year. But with the advent of the winter and the arrival of Zimbabwe on these delta shores, a whiff of pleasant air replaced the gloom in the form of a sweet 3-0 Test series sweep for the Tigers.

You may call it a mission accomplished, a historic success or a much-needed boost for the Tigers ahead of next year's World Cup. Some may even term this success as another false dawn for a team languishing at the bottom of the elite table. But in terms of visible gains the victory is a step forward as the Tigers moved into the ninth position in the rankings, pushing Zimbabwe to the bottom.

And if it was a mission it was achieved at a price, as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had to spend approximately an additional 4 crore taka to accommodate an additional Test in an otherwise two-match series. And arguably the BCB got the full value of it.

Every first-of-its-kind success is historic. And 3-0 win against the backdrop of so many defeats coupled with low team morale following sacking, punishment and mental breakdowns, is unique to say the least. Besides, the way the home side gradually improved their performance in the three-match Test series, especially in terms of batting, certainly served as a tonic once again and solidified the team like a happy family.

The energy they brought into the games till the last day was outstanding. It was refreshing to see some top players returning to form. All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's performance was not surprising given his pedigree, but the way the young bowlers responded was encouraging. Above all the individuals' achievements brought the desired team success.

But then comes the million dollar question: Is this success a true yardstick of improvement?

Without underestimating the individual performances, nobody would have accepted anything other than a win against a team like Zimbabwe at home, so in a sense, Mushfiqur's side did the job that was expected of them.

They played against a team who hardly had any ideas about how to handle spinners but things will not go so smoothly when the Tigers meet teams like Pakistan, India and Australia next year at home. It is not easy to measure the toughness of Tigers against a team like Zimbabwe in their own den, only tough opponents can give a true assessment of the Tigers' toughness.

The success against Zimbabwe came as relief no doubt, but the authority cannot shrink from their duty of improving the standard of domestic cricket in order to challenge the top teams in different conditions. We have been talking about the issue for a while and the voices became louder from every corner when Bangladesh floundered in the longer-versions against mighty opponents. But we have to talk about this issue in good time.

The energy, the enthusiasm the authority shown in the international affair is needed also in the domestic circuit; otherwise it will be the same old story of the monkeys climbing up and down the oily bamboo stick. And only when the proper measures are taken can we ensure that nothing can take the sunshine away from the Tigers.

Navy stun MSC

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Navy defeated holders Mohammedan to take solo lead at the end of seventh round of the Walton Premier Division Chess League at the Bangladesh Olympic Association yesterday.

Bangladesh Navy recorded a hard-fought 2.5-1.5 point win over three-time defending champions Mohammedan as GM Enamul Hossain beat GM Ziaur Rahman, IM Minhazuddin Ahmed beat GM Niazur Murshed, GM Abdullah Al Rakib drew against Georgian GM Merab Gagunashvili while FM Taibur Rahman lost against Georgian GM Mikheil Mchedishvili.

Bangladesh Navy have 12 points, two ahead of Mohammedan after the seven round matches.

Eyes on Zim, sight on World Cup

NAIMUL KARIM from Chittagong



By the time Chandika Hathurusingha took over as head coach in May this year, Bangladesh had lost seven T20Is, as many ODIs and two Tests in 2014. Those included unexpected defeats against Afghanistan and Hong Kong in major competitions at home.

Apart from those losses against non-full member nations, the Tigers failed to go for the kill during a number of crucial situations and gifted away wins. Losing to Sri Lanka after reducing them to 67 for 8, or going down to Pakistan after posting 326, their highest total in ODIs, are just a few examples of the matches that the Tigers should have absolutely gobbled this year.

It therefore wasn't a surprise that Hathurusingha, for his first task, was asked to help raise the players'

confidence levels. Achieving the perfect score-line against Zimbabwe in the Test series, according to the coach, was a step towards that direction.

"When I came here, we sat down and talked about the areas, we were very much concerned about. How we execute our game plan under pressure was one of the problems; so that part of it, yes I am happy, but then we are still working on it," explained Hathurusingha prior to Bangladesh's training session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday.

The other aspect that the coach was pleased about was Bangladesh's batting. In the third Test, Bangladesh had posted their highest ever match total, 822. Tamim Iqbal, who looked out of sorts this year, had one of the best series of his career. Bangladesh's top order, which rarely manages to put more than 200 runs on the board, excelled in the last one month.

The coach, who individually spent quite a lot of time with each of the batsmen during training, believed that the players were steadily getting accustomed to their roles in the team.

"I have been working with everyone. Tamim is the one who really showed it in the middle, even [Mahmudullah] Riyad for instance really batted well.

"I am happy with most of the batters, they understand their roles now. It doesn't mean that they are going to score runs in every game but as long as they know how to go about doing things, they will be successful more often than not," said the Sri Lankan.

The ODI series is Hathurusingha's next challenge and he expects Zimbabwe's hard-hitting batsmen and accurate pacers to make it a tougher contest. At the same time, the Sri Lankan hopes to find the ideal combination for the World Cup.

When asked if the team was

hoping for another whitewash, a popular demand among the country's cricketing fraternity, he replied, "That's what we would obviously like to have but you can't predict what's going to happen, it's important to start well; if you start well the momentum will take care of the rest. At the same time for me winning is a part of it, but the process is also there, the bigger picture for me is the World Cup combination."

As opposed to the Test series, which saw tracks favouring the spinners, the management might also prepare pitches that will help the Tigers get accustomed to the pace conditions of Australia.

"We will try to prepare wickets that will help us win games first and then think about the World Cup as well. But the main thing for me is getting the players to perform to their roles and understanding them. That's more important than condition," said Hathurusingha.

MINTU bhai no more

SPORTS REPORTER

Manzur Hasan Mintu was a true renaissance man. A brilliant student and an efficient public servant, he earned fame both as a multitasking sportsman and a sports commentator. The otherwise introvert bespectacled gentleman lived a life larger than canvas and whichever he did, he excelled.

A national sports awardee for his contributions in football and badminton, Mintu earned more hearts as a sports commentator. With a cultured tone and rich Bengali vocabulary, he earned respect and admiration among peers and listeners at times when sports commentary was as much literature as it was sports.

This beacon of Bangladesh sports breathed his last yesterday evening after suffering a heart attack in the North Indian city of Jaipur. Mintu was with his wife professor Parvin Hasan while in a visit to Ajmer Sharif. It was learnt that he collapsed in the hotel bathroom and was rushed to the hospital where duty doctors pronounced him dead in the evening. He was 74. The soft-spoken sports personality left behind his wife, a son and a host of well-wishers to mourn.

Born in the southern district of Satkhira, Mintu joined the public service after graduating from the University of Dhaka and worked as an Income tax commissioner for long. After his retirement from public service, Mintu joined national sports council as treasurer where he served for the rest of his life.

But despite his administrative responsibilities, Mintu stayed with sports till the last day of his life. A Blue of the Dhaka University, he started his football career as a goalkeeper of Kamal Sporting in second division in 1958 before joining the then invincible Dhaka Wanderers in the early 60s. He also represented Pakistan national football team in the 1958 Asian Games in Tokyo.

The multitasking sportsman, who won the national sports award in 1978, also played cricket for Bakshibazar Sporting Club and National Sporting Club for 26 years and played badminton as well.

After calling time as a sportsman almost forty years ago, Mintu started sports commentary on radio and television, making himself a household name among the mass.

Hoping for a new chapter

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong



There isn't much that a coach can do to motivate his players when his side is whitewashed by their closest competitors in international cricket, but Zimbabwe coach Stephen Mangongo believes that his players can put in a much better effort in the five-match ODI series.

"It's a new chapter going into the one-day series [beginning on Friday]. I think it will be a close-fought competition. Most of the one-day games are always bitter and tough between these two nations and I expect the same," said Mangongo. The two teams have faced each other 59 times so far, with Bangladesh winning 31

and Zimbabwe 28.

Zimbabwe have a host of new players in the squad and Mangongo hopes the inclusions will be a breath of freshness in the side. In Solomon Mire and Peter Moore they have two uncapped players in the side and they are expected to make their debuts.

"We hope that the young guys we have brought will be the new blood into our system, we believe that they will bring freshness into the team. We have got Peter and Solomon, who is playing in Australia. So we think the breath of freshness will help the guys stand up," hoped Mangongo.

Bangladesh's spinners, who scalped 49 wickets in the Test series, have been a nightmare for the visitors. Mangongo

however believes that his side's batting has improved over the last month and that they are gradually getting used to the conditions here.

"We have improved by every game and I am very pleased with the way my batsmen are progressing. In the first Test we really struggled, and then we got to Khulna where we scored 368 runs and then 374 in Chittagong.

"So we are improving with every game and I think bowling in Test cricket and bowling in one-day cricket are totally different. In Test cricket you can set a lot of attacking fields and if you set those kind of fields in one-day cricket you will get murdered, so that's a different ball game," reckoned Mangongo.

Dilshan lifts Prime Bank

SPORTS REPORTER



Dilshan Munaweera's all-round performance guided Prime Bank, as they outclassed Kalabagan Cricket Academy by 113 runs in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The Sri Lankan hammered 72 runs as a one down batsman and shared a 123-run second wicket stand with opener Shadman Islam (53) as Prime Bank piled up 274 runs. Dilshan then took five wickets for 40 runs with his off-break bowling to dismiss Kalabagan for 161 runs. Left-arm spinner Taijul Islam and off spinner Shuvagoto Hom returned to the domestic circuit after a successful Test series against Zimbabwe by taking two wickets each.

It was Prime's second win in three matches while Mohammedan rode on Ezaj Ahmed's 84 and Naeem Islam's 52 to register their second victory with a 44-run win against Brothers Union at BKSP.

At the Fatullah Cricket Stadium, Partex Sporting Club defeated winless Old DOHS by 12 runs to secure their second success in three games.

SCORES IN BRIEF
MOHAMMEDAN: 259-9 in 50 overs (Ezaj 84, Naeem 52, Ariful 47; Asif Hasan 5-47, Sadiqur 2-37)

BROTHERS: 215-7 in 50 overs (Sadat 46, Sadiqur 32 not out, Shahajada 31 not out; Amit 2-28, Ferdous 2-45)
Result: Mohammedan won by 44 runs.

PRIME BANK: 274 all out in 49.4 overs (Shadman 53, Dilshan 72, Nurul 40; Sharif 2-35, Nabil 2-55, Hasan 3-26)

KALABAGAN CA: 161 all out in 40.5 overs (Mendis 36, Nazmul 35; Dilshan 5-40, Taijul 2-10, Hom 2-38)
Result: Prime Bank won by 113 runs.

PARTEX: 189-8 in 50 overs (Rajin 30, Mehrab 48; Shahidul 3-41, Nehaduzzaman 2-23)

OLD DOHS: 177 all out in 49.1 overs (Sajib 30, Kafi 33; Masum 3-46, Shafiq 3-23)
Result: Partex SC won by 12 runs.

BCB XI, Zim play today

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong



A BCB XI, led by Anamul Haque, will play the visiting Zimbabweans in a one-day practice match at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium here today.

This will be the only practice game for Zimbabwe following which the five-match ODI series will begin on November 21.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board has prepared a strong team, which includes the likes of Nasir Hossain, Sabbir Rahman, Shamsur Rahman, Shafiqul Islam and all-rounder Muktar Ali, for the match. Apart from Sabbir and Anamul, who are already in the squad for the first two ODIs, the rest of the players will take a break from the ongoing Dhaka Premier League and come to Chittagong to play the match.

Zimbabwe had their training session in the afternoon yesterday while the Tigers began training from 5 pm. All the five ODIs are day-night matches. The first two will take place in Chittagong while the rest will be in Dhaka.



Prime Bank's Sri Lankan recruit Dilshan Munaweera (R) celebrates with teammates after taking one of his five Kalabagan wickets in the Dhaka Premier League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: STAR