

SPORT



Tamim Iqbal missed what could have been a deserved century in the second ODI against Zimbabwe at Chittagong a few days back. Will the dashing left-hander run harder to reach that mark in the third ODI at Mirpur today? PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'We'll have to put in everything'

SPORTS REPORTER

Zimbabwe batsman Vusi Sibanda has said that the visitors will 'put in everything' to prevent Bangladesh from bagging the 5-match series in Mirpur today. Having suffered heavy defeats in the first two ODIs in Chittagong, Sibanda hoped for a much better performance from his team.

"It is pretty much a do-or-die match. It is a one-off game in which we will have to put in everything. The guys are still feeling positive," said Sibanda in Mirpur yesterday.

Like in every series, packed stadiums have generated immense support for the Tigers in the last month and it seems as though the visitors have been taking a bit of the heat.

"It is obviously difficult to play Bangladesh in their backyard. Obviously their morale is quite high. We are quite far away from home, 25 guys against a whole nation. Having said that, we also have played good cricket here in the past. We will hopefully turn things around from this game."

Bans lifted

Mamun interim coach
SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) has officially lifted domestic and international suspensions on three more players -- forward Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, defender Imran Hasan Pintoo and goalkeeper Zahid Hossain -- during an executive committee meeting yesterday.

The decision comes in the wake of lifting of the suspension on midfielder Kamruzzaman Rana last month.

"The suspension of the three players has been lifted with immediate effect. However, Pintoo will have to pay Tk 25,000, instead of original fine of Tk one lakh, which was imposed on him for an assault on an umpire during a league match last year," said BHF joint secretary Anvir Adil Khan.

The meeting also endorsed the recommendation by the Coaches' Committee to appoint Mamunur Rashid as the head coach of the national team on interim basis ahead of the World Hockey League (Round-2). Alamgir Alam and Zahid Hossain Raju will be Mamun's deputies.

Hunt for the pace attack

NAIMUL KARIM

The exclusion of pacer Al-Amin Hossain from the third ODI against Zimbabwe did not create much of a stir in the cricketing fraternity. Maybe it was because of the way he has bowled in the series so far. He gave away 65 runs in 10 overs and picked a wicket in the two ODIs; the least effective figures amongst his teammates.

While at the face of it, it may seem as though the move was an obvious one, a glance at Al-Amin's record

this year however would make many question the move. The 24-year-old made his debut in February this year and gradually made himself a permanent member on the side.

With 17 wickets in 11 ODIs he is still Bangladesh's highest wicket-taker in 2014; two more than Shakib Al Hasan and one more than Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. Whether his form has been affected by the ICC's decision to inspect his action -- a suspicion that he was eventually cleared of -- or if it was due to the gap he had taken from international cricket after the first Test against Zimbabwe is still not certain, but

either way, the fact that the selectors were compelled to drop Al-Amin should be a concern.

His exclusion has come at a time when the team management is focusing on building the appropriate pace attack for next year's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, where the quick bowlers are likely to get more assistance. As bowling coach Heath Streak had said earlier, the series against Zimbabwe would be the last opportunity for him to test his pace attack.

Al-Amin's replacement, Shafiqul Islam, has been brought in after a good performance in the third Test

match in Chittagong, where he picked up four wickets. He also bowled well in the practice match against the Zimbabwean XI, finishing with figures of 2 for 24 after nine overs. Shafiqul, who has played just two ODIs this year, is getting another opportunity ahead of the major event next year.

The other bowler that the management is likely to wait on is Taskin Ahmed, who is currently recovering from an injury. With the changes being churned, the management seems like they are trying everything possible to suffice their hunt for the best possible pace attack.

TIGERS

have to go for the kill

BISHWAJIT ROY

Today is the chance for the Tigers to take a 3-0 lead and confirm the series with two matches remaining when they take on Zimbabwe in the third ODI at Mirpur. The momentum is with them, yet some fine tuning may still be needed, but everything is in favour of the hosts.

On the other hand, the confidence of the opponents hit rock bottom after a series of defeats on the tour, so the desire and expectation is that the home side will show their killer instinct and finish off the job. A loss may still not spoil their party but they cannot afford it at this moment and cannot wait to celebrate their first ODI series victory this year.

Captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza also exuded confidence while talking at the pre-match briefing yesterday but at the same time he was cautious against complacency. "Every match is a new match and we have to make a fresh start," was the message from the skipper. "At this moment it is very important to win the series, especially if you consider our performance this year. We want to go to the World Cup with confidence," the Narail Express added.

The captain sought a more consistent performance from his side as he believes that everything has yet to click together. He also spoke in favour of batting-order changes if a situation like the second game arises, before finally making it clear that the spinners will play the leading role on way to fulfilling the team's desire, despite the fact that the defactor is there.

And without any doubt the Bangladesh captain will love to see his main spinner comes up with his best once again.

It might not be an exaggeration to say that the Zimbabweans are gripped with Shakib-phobia in the series. The talismanic all-rounder can change the course of a game singlehandedly and the visitors experienced it this series. So, apart from the outcome of the match, the focus will be to see how strongly the all-rounder comes back after an off-day in the second game to confirm his side's series win.

He scored a golden duck but had very economical figures in bowling with one wicket in the match, but Shakib is a player who will not be happy to stay out of the lime-light for a second successive game, especially when he is in superb form.

Satisfaction is not a word which goes with the all-rounder as he is always hungry for success, so Zimbabwe have reasons to be afraid of, but Mashrafe knows he and the others have to complete the job if Shakib plays unlike Shakib and fails to perform.

Razzak, Hom day's stars

SPORTS REPORTER

Kalabagan Krira Chakra captain Abdur Razzak took four wickets and led his side to their second win in the Dhaka Premier League at the BKSP yesterday as they thumped Old DOHS by 90 runs.

In the day's other games, Prime Bank Cricket Club beat Mohammedan Sporting by four wickets, courtesy of a fine all-round performance from Shuvagata Hom at Fatullah, while a half-century from Liton Kumar led Abahani to a six-wicket win over Partex Sporting Club at the BKSP.

A cautious 50 from Jehan Mubarak and a late cameo from Razzak helped Kalabagan post 220 for 8 in their 50 overs. While Mubarak's 50 came off 89 balls, Razzak hammered a 17-ball 34 -- the innings witnessed two sixes and three fours. With the ball, the veteran slow left-armer finished with figures of 4 for 17 in 7.3 overs to help his side bowl Old DOHS out for just 130 in 37.3 overs. This was Old DOHS's fifth consecutive defeat.

At Fatullah, Prime Bank's slow bowlers restricted Mohammedan to 185 for 8 in 50

overs, after the latter decided to bat, with Naeem Islam's unbeaten 56 being the only respite. In reply, Shuvagata's 47 led Prime Bank to their target with 6.3 overs remaining. Earlier, Shuvagata played a vital role with the ball as well, recording figures of 3 for 39.

Liton's 64 off 49 balls and an unbeaten 44 from Rakibul Hasan helped Abahani chase down their target of 171 easily with 16.5 overs to spare against Partex.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KALABAGAN KC: 220 for 8 (Jehan 50, Razzak 34; Nehaduzzaman 3-58)
OLD DOHS: 130 all out in 37.3 overs (Ahsanul 32; Razzak 4-16)
Result: Kalabagan won by 90 runs.
MSC: 185 for 8 (Naeem 56 not out; Shuvagata 3-39)
PRIME BANK: 186 for 6 in 43.3 overs (Shuvagata 47, Saykat 46; Rahatul 3-33)
Result: Prime Bank won by four wickets.
PARTEX: 170 all out in 49.2 overs (Mehrab 54; Nasir 3-23, Nazmul 3-26)
ABAHANI: 175 for 4 in 33.1 overs (Liton 64, Rakibul 44; Rezaul 2-26)
Result: Abahani won by six wickets.



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is certainly enjoying his second stint as Tigers captain. PHOTO: STAR

Abahani's humble exit

SPORTS REPORTER

Four-time professional league champions Abahani were eliminated from the King's Cup after suffering a 0-2 defeat against I-League side Pune FC in their last match of Group B at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu, yesterday.

The second defeat in four matches for meant Abahani finished the tournament with four points, three behind Manang Marshyangdi Club of Nepal who qualified as runners-up from the group alongside group champions Pune FC, who have won all four of their matches.

Abahani's exit leaves Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club as the lone representative from Bangladesh in this nine-team tournament. The Bangladesh Premier League champions will take on Mohun Bagan tomorrow where a single point would see them through.

It was expected that Abahani would fall short of their 2004 feat when they reached the semifinals of this tournament as they left themselves requiring a five-goal margin win over one of the tournament favourites. Realistically, the Sky Blues were looking forward to ending the tournament with some pride salvaged, but they could hardly improve their performance rather they conceded two goals in the last six minutes to complete a miserable campaign in Bhutan.

Pune FC's young midfielder Fanai Lalrempuia broke the deadlock in the 84th minute with a sublime free-kick from 25 yards out before veteran defender Luciano Sabrosa struck from the spot two minutes from time to ensure Abahani's humble exit.

Vettori back for Kiwis

Pak-NZ third Test starts today

AFP, Sharjah

Veteran left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori's comeback and who wins the toss will be the joint focus in the series-deciding third Test between Pakistan and New Zealand starting in Sharjah on Wednesday.

New Zealand have included Vettori in the eleven in their bids to level the series which they trail 1-0 after losing the first Test by 248 runs in Abu Dhabi and drawing the second in Dubai.

The 35-year-old Vettori, who has 360 wickets, played the last of his 112 Tests (one Test for ICC World XI and the rest for New Zealand) in July 2012 and has since been sidelined due to a back injury.

Skipper Brendon McCullum confirmed Vettori will replace Jimmy Neesham in the side.

"Yeah, Dane will play and we are all excited about it," said McCullum on Tuesday. "He will become the most capped Test player for New Zealand and we are going with three spinners."

Vettori will overtake Stephen Fleming who also played 111 Tests for New Zealand.

Pakistan skipper Misbah-ul Haq admitted Vettori's inclusion showed New Zealand's aspiration to level the series.

"I think they will do every bit to level the series," said Misbah.

"Every team aspires to win, especially when they are 1-0 down and level the series. Vettori is an experienced campaigner but we have played him before so we know how he bowls."

Besides Vettori, the toss will also be a key factor as the team winning the toss dictated terms in the first two Tests.

Pakistan piled up 566-3 after winning the toss and then spun out New Zealand twice for a comprehensive win.

Despite the odds, New Zealand staged an impressive comeback in the second Test in Dubai, winning the toss and dictating terms before Pakistan, set a target of 261 on the final day, salvaged a draw to set up an intriguing finale.

Pakistan's spinners -- left armer Zulfiqar Babar (13 wickets in two Tests) and leggie Yasir Shah (11) -- will hold the key.

Robiul out for 6 wks

SPORTS REPORTER

A shoulder injury has put Robiul Islam's stint in the Dhaka Premier League in jeopardy after the pacer dislocated his shoulder in a league game against Legends of Rugganj on November 17.

The bowler is expected to be out for a minimum of six weeks.

During the game, which took place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur, Robiul was fielding at short mid-off and injured himself when he dived to stop the ball. He was immediately taken to hospital in an ambulance.

After a week's rest Robiul had an MRI scan yesterday. "We will decide a plan for him once we get the MRI report. Since it's a case of dislocation, he will be out of the game for at least six weeks," said Debasish Chowdhury, BCB's sports physician.

CA to probe Clarke selection row

REUTERS, Melbourne

Cricket Australia boss James Sutherland will grill Michael Clarke and national team selectors after a bizarre breakdown in communication over the injured captain's availability for the first Test against India next week.

Selectors on Monday named the injured skipper in a 12-man squad for the Brisbane Test with the proviso that he play a two-day tour match against the tourists starting on Friday to prove his fitness.

Hours later, Clarke, battling to recover from a hamstring injury, said he had already been ruled out of that match by the team's medical staff and said he intended to prove his fitness by playing for his Sydney club on Saturday.

The confusion grew late on Monday when Cricket Australia (CA) issued a statement siding with the selectors, and reiterating that Clarke needed to turn up for the Adelaide tour match.

CA chief executive Sutherland told Fairfax Media on Tuesday he would investigate the breakdown.

"I will speak to Michael and others who have been involved in the process to make sure I understand where these things have gone awry," Sutherland said.

"It's not really appropriate for me to go into any more detail."

"All I can say is I am concerned that there are some mixed messages coming out of Cricket Australia in the last 24 hours or so."

"I want to understand why things have fallen off the rails a bit there."