

SPORT

Will Nasir make the cut? BCB names World Cup squad today

SPORTS REPORTER

Only two months ago Nasir Hossain's chances of making it the World Cup squad looked like a distant dream, but the all-rounder may witness a turn of fortunes when the 15-member team is announced today.

With Nasir in the lower middle-order there had always been hope for the Tigers and his performances brought him the acclamation of Mr. Finisher, but the 23-year old all-rounder lost all his reverence in the past year, which saw him go out of favour for the home series against Zimbabwe last November.

Faruque Ahmed-led selection panel then felt that the player needed a break from the top flight to get back his rhythm; and although Nasir did not display any extraordinary performances in the Dhaka Premier League, he showed positive signs of coming back to his natural form with three fifties and a hundred which made him the most discussed name ahead of the announcement of the team. And with the selectors counting on experience, Nasir's comeback is not unlikely.

Faruque is going to make a small piece of history today, becoming the only Bangladesh chief selector to pick two World Cup squads, but it is unlikely that he will include any big surprises like he did during the 2007 World Cup.

Despite their injuries, Mushfiqur Rahim and Tamim Iqbal have been drafted into the side as they are expected to be fit again well before the World Cup begins.

Two young all-rounders in Sabbir Rahman and Soumya Sarkar were also in discussion, but the latter may get the chance only if the axe falls on Imrul Kayes. Considering the



condition of the pitches, Bangladesh is likely to include four pacers and young Taskin Ahmed is all set to make a comeback after recovering from injury to line up alongside Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. Despite legal issues, Rubel Hossain also has a good chance to make it along with Shafiqul Islam ahead of Abul Hasan and Al-Amin Hossain, whose confidence was severely dented due to the calling of his action by the ICC.

There was a lot of interest on young leg-spinner Jubair Hossain, but left-arm spinners Taijul Islam and Arafat Sunny are likelier to get the nod ahead of the 19-year-old.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon will also be present

during today's announcement and he is likely to declare the name of the captain and vice-captain for the mega tournament.

It is all but confirmed that Mashrafe will lead the team in the World Cup for the first time, while Shakib Al Hasan will be his deputy. The duo had successfully performed their duties during in last home series against Zimbabwe.

The preparation camp for the World Cup will start from January 12 and continue till January 22 at Mirpur. The Tigers will fly for Brisbane on January 24. In Brisbane, the Tigers will play two unofficial practice matches against Cricket Australia XI before flying for Sydney on February 7, ahead of the ICC World Cup from February 14.

DPL awaits a new champion

SPORTS REPORTER



The Dhaka Premier League is all set to crown a new champion today as both contenders, Prime Doleshwar and Prime Bank Cricket Club, have never won the league before.

As things currently stand, Mahmudullah Riyad-led Prime Bank Cricket Club have the upper hand. They are at the top of the table with a two-point lead and a win over third-placed Abahani will hand them the championship.

However, if they lose, then Prime Doleshwar will have to beat Mohammedan by a margin which will have to overcome Prime Bank's run-rate in order to secure the trophy.

While Prime Bank's equation may be simple, they face the difficult task of beating Abahani. The side, which finished the first phase of the league on top, lost a couple of close matches in the Super Sixes and saw their title chances evaporate. Still, they will want to finish second and won't be mere walkovers.

So far it has been a combined effort from Prime Bank's players that has kept them in the race. Their top order, led by Soumya Sarkar, has been consistently scoring runs. Their bowling attack is also very strong, boasting Enamul Haque Jr, Taijul Islam and Taskin Ahmed.

The player to watch here however, will be Forhad Reza. He revived the side from dangerous positions both with the bat and the ball in the last match and seems to be in good form.

On the other hand, Abahani will be pinning their hopes on Nasir Hossain, who is the reason why the side won at least one game in the Super Sixes thus far. He scored a

Team	M	P	R/R
Prime Bank CC	15	24	0.738
Prime Doleshwar SC	15	22	0.708
Abahani Ltd	15	20	0.613
Kalabagan Cricket Academy	15	18	0.360
Mohammedan SC	15	16	-0.081

century in the last game and will be raring to go at Mirpur again.

Many expected Prime Doleshwar to stutter in the absence of their captain, Mushfiqur Rahim, in the last game, but their in-form top order eased past Shakib Al Hasan's Legends of Rugganj. So far, Doleshwar has been the best team in the league, winning all their matches; and a majority of that credit goes to their top order, who have been in flamboyant touch.

Their openers, Rony Talukdar and Mehedi Maruf, have scored two centuries each. Talukdar with 651 runs is the highest run-getter of the competition, while Mehedi has scored 519 runs. They also have Dawid Malan who has scored at an average of 55.

Elias Sunny and Delwar Hossain have been the pick of their bowlers. Sunny with 30 wickets is the highest wicket-taker of the competition and boasts an average of 17.50.

At the other end, Mohammedan will hope their top order, which has failed in the last few matches, can post some runs. They have been heavily dependent on their lower order batsmen. Skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who picked up four wickets and scored a half-century in the last game, will be their key player.

The match at Fatullah between Shakib's Legends and Anamul Haque-led Kalabagan Cricket Academy will decide which team gets the fourth spot.

BANGABANDHU GOLD CUP Starting Jan 16 or not?

SPORTS REPORTER



With only twelve days left before the scheduled start to the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is still undecided whether it can start the tournament on January 16 as scheduled.

A BFF official yesterday gave the strongest hint about the possibility of deferral by saying that they 'might defer the tournament by two to five days', but said a decision would only be taken a day before the extraordinary general meeting of AFC in Melbourne on January 8, where BFF president Kazi Salahuddin is expected to meet with officials of participating countries.

"As things stand, it seems we might defer the start by a few days, which could be two days at least and five days

in the most," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, adding that the issue regarding Bahrain U-23 team's participation is the main reason behind the deferral.

"We hope everything will be settled by January 8 when the BFF president gets to meet the officials of participating teams in Melbourne," added Shohag.

The proposed six-nation tournament was scheduled to be held in Dhaka and Sylhet from January 16 to 27.

"Bahrain requested us to defer the tournament for a few days as their Under-23 team will be involved with the U-23 Gulf Cup at home at that time (Jan 16-26). But we want to complete this tournament by this month because we have to start the domestic season and the domestic season of Singapore will also begin from the first week of February," Shohag added.

The BFF general secretary also informed that the participation of Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand national teams is all but confirmed and the sixth team would be chosen from among Nepal and Sri Lanka. In case Bahrain is unable to send any team, there is a possibility that the BFF might start the tournament as previously scheduled.

Meanwhile, the National Sports Council (NSC) has started renovation work of the two venues, the Bangabandhu National Stadium and the Sylhet District Stadium.

"We have set a target of completing all the work by January 14. We will spend Tk one crore for renovating the Sylhet venue and Tk 31 lakh for the BNS. In Sylhet, we will spend Tk 50 lakh in renovating the gates, VIP stand and the press box while the rest of the amount will be used to upgrade the floodlights," NSC secretary Sibnath Roy told reporters yesterday.

Proteas solid in reply

AFP, Cape Town

South African captain Hashim Amla made a patient half-century as he and AB de Villiers steered their team towards a sound position on the second day of the third and final Test against the West Indies at Newlands on Saturday.

South Africa were 227 for three when rain ended play half an hour early - 102 runs behind the West Indian first innings total of 329.

On a day of largely attritional cricket, the West Indies opted for defensive fields after an initial burst of aggression with the new ball, while the South African batsmen were content to keep the scoreboard ticking over.

It was a game of patience, with only one South African batsman falling victim to frustration - when Faf du Plessis, whose 68 was the top score in the match, leapt out of his crease and was stumped off left-arm spinner Suleiman Benn.

A near-capacity crowd then saw Amla and De Villiers forge a careful unbeaten fourth wicket partnership of 70. Amla made 55 not out off 130 balls with seven fours, while De Villiers was on 32 off 52 deliveries, hitting four boundaries.

Fast bowlers Dale Steyn and Morne Morkel took two wickets each as South Africa wrapped up the West Indian first innings inside the first hour.

Resuming at 276 for six, the West Indies lost their remaining four wickets amid a flurry of strokes.

SCORES IN BRIEF WEST INDIES: First innings 329 (Smith 47, Johnson 54, Samuels 43, Blackwood 56, Ramdin 53; Steyn 4-78, Morkel 2-83, Harmer 3-71) **SOUTH AFRICA:** First innings 227 for 3 in 68.3 overs (Petersen 42, du Plessis 68, Amla 55 not out, de Villiers 32 not out; Holder 1-46)



SANGAKKARA fastest to 12000

AFP, Wellington

Sri Lankan batsman Kumar Sangakkara joined an elite group of cricketers Saturday when he became only the fifth to make 12,000 runs in his career.

The prolific 37-year-old left-hander reached the milestone when he knocked Trent Boult square for two in Sri Lanka's first innings of the second Test against New Zealand in Wellington. At stumps he was not out on 33.

Sangakkara started the two-Test New Zealand series on 11,988 runs and after scoring six and one in the first Test in Christchurch, he was determined to get the final five in Wellington.

"When he fails, it's a coach's nightmare. You have to throw (balls to Sangakkara) for hours and hours," captain Angelo Mathews said ahead of the Test.

"He's been working really hard in the nets and he's desperate to go out there and get some runs."

Since launching his Test career in 2000, Sangakkara has made an impressive average of over 58.00, including 37 centuries in 130 Tests. His highest score was 319 against Bangladesh.

He sits behind four retired cricketers but has a superior average on the all-time scoring list which is headed by India's Sachin Tendulkar who compiled 15,921 from 200 Tests at an average 53.78.

Australian Ricky Ponting (13,378 at 51.85), Jacques Kallis from South Africa (13,289 at 55.37) and India's Rahul Dravid (13,288 at 52.31) round out the top five.

Last month, Sangakkara became only the fourth batsman to surpass the 13,000-run mark in one-day internationals, achieving the feat in his 386th match.

The ODI list is also headed by Tendulkar, who made 18,426 runs in 463 matches, ahead of Ponting with 13,704 runs from 375 ODIs and Sanath Jayasuriya of Sri Lanka, who has 13,430 runs in 445 games.

Mushy injury 'not severe'

SPORTS REPORTER

Scan reports have confirmed that Bangladesh batsman Mushfiqur Rahim is suffering from a shoulder subluxation, an injury which will keep him out of the final round of the Dhaka Premier League today.

BCB sports physician Debashish Chowdhury described the injury as 'not severe' and expects the player to be back within a week.

"We compared the injury to his previous shoulder injury and I don't think it's too severe. We have asked him to take a break for a week, after which we will assess him again. There should not be any problem in the long run," said Debashish.

The wicketkeeper-batsman had injured himself during training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on Thursday.

Andy handed Abu Dhabi title

AFP, Abu Dhabi

World number one Novak Djokovic withdrew from the final of the Mubadala World Tennis Championships in Abu Dhabi on Saturday handing Andy Murray his first title of the season.

Serb Djokovic had dismissed Stan Wawrinka in the semi-finals of the exhibition event on Friday but the defending champion revealed on Saturday he was suffering from a fever.

Murray had himself complained of pain in his left shoulder during his 6-2, 6-0 win over Rafael Nadal in the last four.

Murray is set to undergo a scan before continuing his build-up to the first Grand Slam of the season, the Australian Open, at the Hopman Cup in Perth next week.

Nadal shrugged aside his defeat against Murray to beat Wawrinka 7-6 (7/1), 6-3 in the match for third place.

Johnson out of 4th Test?

AFP, Sydney

Australian fast bowler Mitchell Johnson missed training on Saturday citing hamstring soreness, throwing into question whether he will be fit for the fourth and final Test against India, reports said.

Johnson, 33, has bowled long spells during the first three Tests against India, and has said he is hoping for a more responsive pitch in the fourth which begins in Sydney on Tuesday.

Johnson missed a training session with the rest of the team on Saturday, Australian Associated Press reported, adding that he had stayed instead at their hotel for treatment.

Australia's squad includes fellow left-armed Mitchell Starc and Peter Siddle as potential back-up pace bowlers - along with Ryan Harris and Josh Hazlewood.

Harris has said he is planning on playing in Sydney, and if Johnson is rested he could be replaced by Starc.

SL in precarious position

AFP, Wellington



Fifteen wickets fell in a bowlers' blitz Saturday as Sri Lanka ended the first day of the second Test in Wellington at 78-5 in reply to New Zealand's first innings 221.

Sri Lanka's response in their attempt to level the series after an eight wicket drubbing in the first Test has been highlighted by Kumar Sangakkara becoming just the fifth player in cricket history to post 12,000 career runs.

New Zealand's innings was rocked by batting hero Brendon McCullum's second-ball duck.

At stumps Sangakkara was 33 not out while recalled New Zealand paceman Doug Bracewell had three for 23.

Bracewell, who was only added to the side after New Zealand viewed the pitch and weather in the morning, believed the home side have the upper hand.

With conditions ripe for bowlers, Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews had no hesitation in making New Zealand bat first on a green strip with overcast skies and a blustery wind.

New ball bowlers Nuwan Pradeep and Suranga Lakmal wasted the advantage in the first session, bowling short and wide, but still managed to remove New Zealand openers Tom Latham for six and Hamish Rutherford for 37.

But the game changed as they pitched the

ball up more in the middle session when five New Zealand wickets fell, while the last three New Zealand wickets and five top Sri Lankans were removed after tea.

First Test centurion Dimuth Karunaratne (16) was first to go for Sri Lanka when he was lured into chasing a ball that moved off the seam and edged a comfortable catch to Jimmy Neesham in the slips.

Kaushal Silva, in a cautious start, faced 30 deliveries before he played on Doug Bracewell for five. Mathews, Sri Lanka's rock with two half centuries in Christchurch, could only manage 15 before he was squared up by Tim Southee and edged the ball to wicketkeeper BJ Watling.

Prasanna Jayawardene gave Bracewell his third wicket when he was caught off the last ball of the day for six.

As the wickets fell at one end Sangakkara proved an unshakeable force at the other as he easily knocked off the five runs he required to reach 12,000 and cruised through another 28 runs before stumps.

New Zealand made a bright start to the day, reaching 141-2 before the Sri Lankan bowlers found how best to utilise the conditions and the last eight wickets fell for 80.

SCORES IN BRIEF NEW ZEALAND: First innings 221 (Rutherford 37, Williamson 69, R. Taylor 35; Lakmal 3-71, Pradeep 4-63) **SRI LANKA:** First innings 78-5 in 25.4 overs (Karunaratne 16, Sangakkara not out 33; Boult 1-18, Bracewell 3-23)