

SPORT

Focused on first day

SPORTS REPORTER

It may have been the first day of the Bangladesh national cricket team's camp for the illustrious World Cup, to be held in Australia and New Zealand, but the players by and large remained calm and focussed during the training session at Mirpur.

Captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, for instance, was in his natural groove, joking around with the players and the journalists. "If we reach the finals, will you all fly over there to see us play?" a witty Mashrafe asked a group of journalists before getting back to his routine.

Aside from the 15 players selected, there were a number of other pacers assigned to join the camp in a bid to give the batsmen the best possible practice. While yesterday saw the cricketers involved in a conditioning session, Thursday will witness the beginning of their skills session.

After the training session, spinners Taijul Islam and Arafat Sunny interacted with the media. Opposing the more popular notion that spinners would barely get any assistance in Australia and New Zealand, Arafat believed that the size of the grounds would play to the slow bowlers' advantage.

"The grounds in Australia are big. So in the case of pace bowlers, the batsmen would find it easier to strike boundaries. In the case of the spinners it won't be that easy. In most



Arafat Sunny

Taijul Islam

of the cases they would offer catches. So it's an advantage for the spinners," said Arafat.

They both may be slow left-armers, but there remains a stark difference between the two. While Sunny aims to bowl wicket-to-wicket, Taijul will hope to make the most of the bounce.

"We are not of the same kind. My duty is to check the runs and if I can do that, I'll be happy. Taijul relies on turn and doesn't hesitate to give flight. He is a wicket-taker. But whoever gets the chance in the final squad will give his best," said Sunny.

Taijul reckoned that his experience from the West Indies would help him do well in the World Cup.

"The conditions will not be very troublesome for us. I played well on bouncy wickets in the Caribbean. I think self-confidence is the biggest factor here. We'll do well as long as we are confident," said Taijul.

A daring Taijul, who only made his debut in 2014, wants to make it through to the top 10 wicket-takers of the competition.

"My target is to find a place among the top ten bowlers of the World Cup. That will help my team as well," said the young left-armers.



TIGERS DOWN UNDER



All-rounder Mahmudullah Riyad (C) shares a light moment with teammates Rubel Hossain (R) and Soumya Sarker on the first day of the Tigers' week-long training camp at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Can Riyad rise to occasion?

BISHWAJIT ROY

Mahmudullah Riyad has the lazy elegance -- from walking to the crease to batting on -- in him. When the bat of the 28-year-old all-rounder speaks, it gives the ardent cricket lovers immense pleasure. But what remains to be seen is whether the man from Mymensingh can prove his prowess on the biggest stage -- the World Cup.

Undoubtedly Riyad has got the quality to put in an inspiring appearance during his side's campaign in Australia and New Zealand next month. He also has a secret World Cup dream which he did not want to make public while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

One may have forgotten his small but significant 21-run knock in his maiden World Cup appearance in 2011 which gave hosts Bangladesh a memorable two-wicket victory over England at the

Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong, but he will need to come all guns blazing in his second appearance in the mega event as a lot will depend on a senior member like him for the Tigers to succeed. Like his measured smile, the team expects a measured batting down the order and measured bowling from him.

Riyad has already played 110 ODIs since making his debut against Sri Lanka in 2007. And with his experience he knows best what he should do. More importantly his experience during the bad times when he had to swallow many bitter pills has definitely made him more matured. The right-hander started getting back his rhythm in the last West Indies trip and his performance against Zimbabwe at home gave him relief ahead of the big challenge.

"True, the performance against Zimbabwe provided me the much-needed confidence but I know I

have to do more, especially when I am going to play the World Cup in trying conditions. I am working hard like my other teammates and what I believe is that physical fitness is also very important for good and consistent performance," Riyad said.

"I can feel it that as a senior member of the team the expectation will be high not only as a batsman but also as an off-spinner. I believe we need to start well from the practice matches so that we can get the momentum with us going into the tournament proper and it's very important."

The experienced campaigner informed that he was watching the Big Bash League and the Australia-India series and that gave him the idea that the conditions were not as tough as told to be.

"It's my opinion that everybody should emphasise on their own strong point rather than trying something different," opined the

all-rounder.

It's not always easy to hog the spotlight batting at number seven, but the all-rounder said that he would love to contribute to the team from his position. "My motto is to contribute to the team, no matter if it's with one wicket or a few runs. Batting at number seven you may not get the opportunity to make big scores, but I would be happy if I can contribute. And if the opportunity comes to bat up the order then I will definitely try to make something big," hoped Riyad.

Riyad is apparently a very calm and quiet character, but he revealed he loves to make fun with his close friends and teammates. And he knows that only good performance by his team and especially by himself in the World Cup will provide him the opportunity to make more fun not only with his close associates but also with many others.



Roger Federer (L) and Cruz, son of Lleyton Hewitt (R), swap high fives before a Fast4 exhibition tennis match in Sydney yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Fed takes 'test' match

AFP, Sydney

Roger Federer fought his way to a tough win over old rival Lleyton Hewitt in the Fast4 tennis exhibition in Sydney on Monday.

The Swiss world number two continued his unbeaten run into the new season with a 4-3, 2-3, 3-4, 4-0, 4-3 win over the Australian in the short-form contest.

Coming off a four-match winning run in Brisbane, where he took the title in three sets over Milos Raonic on Sunday, Federer started where he left off.

The match featured an experimen-

tal style of play, with sets being won after four games, no deuces and play allowed to continue after lets on serve.

The shorter breaks between the changes of ends certainly worked, speeding up the pace considerably.

The format has been piloted at clubs across Australia and is being billed as the Twenty20 of tennis, a reference to the fast and furious form of cricket that has proved a huge hit.

Great friends off the court, Federer and Hewitt have one of the most enduring rivalries in tennis. The pair, both aged 33, has faced each other 27 times since 1999, with Federer win-

ning 18 of them.

Federer was pushed all the way by his evergreen rival, the contest going its full allotment of five shortened sets.

Both players looked in good touch. On plenty of occasions in the first set and a half Hewitt told Federer his shots were "too good" before the world number 86 found some rhythm to get back into the contest.

Hewitt, who lost in the opening match of the Brisbane International against compatriot Sam Groth in his only other hit-out of the year so far, will now head to his home town of Adelaide to play an exhibition match against Czech Tomas Berdych.

Hockey team lose against Malaysia U-21s

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national hockey team suffered a 1-3 defeat to Malaysia U-21 team in the first of the two practice matches ahead of the Hockey World League in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

All four goals were struck in the last quarter of the match where Bangladesh conceded three successive goals before Rumman Sarker pulled one back, according to a message from the Bangladesh Hockey Federation.

They will play their second practice match against Malaysia A team today and for Singapore tomorrow to take part in the eight-nation World Hockey League (Round-2), which will get underway from January 17.

Kane to miss 3 SL ODIs

REUTERS, Wellington

New Zealand's Kane Williamson is likely to miss the next three one-day internationals in the World Cup warm-up series against Sri Lanka to recover from a minor shoulder injury.

The top-order batsman damaged the shoulder when fielding in the first test against Sri Lanka in Christchurch and will be sidelined for the next seven to 10 days, almost certainly ruling him out of games two, three and four of the seven-match series.

Shakib tops all formats

SPORTS REPORTER

Ace Bangladesh cricketer Shakib Al Hasan now tops the ICC all-rounders' ranking lists in all three formats of the game. He became the first player ever to top the charts in all formats.

According to the latest ICC rankings published yesterday, Shakib is at the top of the all-rounders' lists in Tests, ODIs and T20Is with 398, 403 and 377 rating points respectively.

This comes as a reflection of his recent outstanding performances during Zimbabwe's tour of Bangladesh at the end of 2014. Against Zimbabwe he became only the third player in the history of Test cricket to take ten wickets and score a century in a Test match. He had also taken a four-wicket haul and scored a century in an ODI during the same series.

Shakib is also ranked fourth in the ICC rankings for ODI bowlers with 680 rating points. He is currently in Australia playing for the Melbourne Renegades in the Big Bash League.

Gayle fumes over team

World Cup squad picked on merit: WICB

AGENCIES, Johannesburg & St George's

Chris Gayle has accused the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) of victimisation after key all-rounders Dwayne Bravo and Kieron Pollard were left out of the country's World Cup squad.

The powerful left-handed opener was left flabbergasted by the axing of the pair, which he feels has little to do with their performance on the pitch.

Bravo and Pollard were seen as leading the player revolt in India that forced the abandonment of the West Indies tour last October after a pay dispute with the WICB.

"There's no way you can tell me those guys shouldn't be in the team," Gayle told reporters. "For me it's got to be victimisation towards those two guys. Come on guys, it's just ridiculous. Honestly, it choked me up."

The players had been told they would be left out of the World Cup team as the country was building a team for the future, though as Gayle points out, the timing is odd going into a major tournament.

Gayle added the team would be weakened by the loss of the pair both in the batting and bowling departments.

The duo helped West Indies win the Twenty20 series in South Africa where they lead 2-0 going into Wednesday's final match in Durban. They were also overlooked for the five-match ODI series against South Africa starting Friday.

Meanwhile, WICB president Dave Cameron has rejected claims that Bravo and Pollard were axed from the World Cup squad because of their roles in the controversial abandoned tour of India.

When the squad for South Africa was announced last month, St Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves wrote to Cameron to complain that the WICB had "dishonoured that undertaking" of not punishing any player involved in the India tour walk-out.

However, Cameron remained adamant the one-day international squads for both the South Africa tour and the World Cup were selected on merit.

"We have not gone back on our agreement. At the point in time we made it very clear we didn't want to use the terminology that was being suggested," Cameron said Sunday.

Muhith promises to help football

SPORTS REPORTER

Finance minister Abul Maa Abdul Muhith promised to help the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) financially when the BFF president Kazi Salahuddin placed a budget of Tk 39 crore at the minister's office yesterday.

The budget includes an estimated expenditure to run competitions for one year, estimated expenditure for the BFF academy in Sylhet and partial expenditures for hosting the six-nation Bangabandhu Gold Cup international football tournament, which will start from January 29 in Dhaka and Sylhet.

"There were a lot of issues discussed regarding the budget and I officially received the budget for the first time. We will consider BFF's proposal as the government wants to keep football rolling and we will do everything that they need," Muhith told reporters after the meeting.

The finance minister also gave his consent to unveil the logo of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, which will take place at the BFF House on Thursday.

Zia held twice in a row

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman drew consecutive boards in the 13th Parsynath Delhi International Open Grandmasters Chess Tournament in New Delhi yesterday. The second GM of Bangladesh drew his fifth round game against Vignesh NR of India before drawing against Ravi Teja of the same country in the sixth round. The two draws means Zia now has 3.5 points from six matches.

In B Category Rated event, Raja Mia and Shahidul Islam finished 271st and 277th respectively with five points each while Tipu Sultan finished 394th.