

SPORT

TIGERS DOWN UNDER

The boy who has it all

BISHWAJIT ROY

Like his idol Shahid Afridi, Sabbir Rahman can hit the ball hard, his leg-spin bowling can add variety in any bowling attack and there is hardly any doubt over his athleticism while fielding. The 23-year-old all-rounder thus earns the tag of a utility cricketer. There were no questions when he was included in the 15-member squad for the ICC World Cup to be held in Australia-New Zealand, despite the fact that an all-rounder in Nasir Hossain was also drafted in.

Sabbir, the cricketer from fertile Rajshahi Division, so far has played five ODIs and as many T20Is since making his debut in February last year. He has no extraordinary performances under his belt though it is too early to tell whether he can fulfil his potential, but the big stage that awaits him provides the opportunity for him to excel with his career.

He may have to fight with experienced all-rounder Nasir for a place in the playing eleven. The player himself said that he has no competition with Nasir for a place in the team and also said that he does not have any set goals, rather his motto is to play according to the demand of his team. If he plays then the team would love to see him contribute with the bat in the late order with his powerful strokes as well as make a mark with his leg-spin. Sabbir's fielding was praised by none other than the national team's fielding coach Richard Halsall, who believes that the well-built cricketer's agility in the field

brought sharpness in this department against Zimbabwe in the last home series.

"I know fielding is a big part for a team. I can contribute to the team with good fielding and I will try my best to fulfil the desires of many. If I fail in batting then definitely I will try to make up for it with good fielding," said Sabbir.

Former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mashud, who got the opportunity to see the player's development from his childhood first-hand and played alongside him in domestic matches, had high hopes for the all-rounder.

"I believe he has got the potential to draw the attention of the cricket pundits in the World Cup. His technique and style are almost like the Australians and South Africans, which mean he has got lot of energy. Just from his body language, the guy is always positive," said an excited Mashud.

"He is yet to make any big scores in international cricket, but he has got the ability because he has every shot in his locker. The most important thing is that he has got the ability to adjust to any condition very quickly. What he needs is to be more calculative in his shot selection. His bowling is not that effective, but he can be useful if his captain utilises him at the proper time and many may not notice that he can bowl an arm-ball with power. And there is nothing to add about how good he is as a fielder; he can be an example for others," added Mashud.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed summarised in one sentence when he was asked about the reason behind Sabbir's selection: "He has got everything to be successful".



SABBIR RAHMAN

Akram removed as chief of cricket operations

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) handed national contracts to fourteen players for the period of January 1 to December 31 this year.

Opener Imrul Kayes, pacer Shafiqul Islam, left-arm spinner Taijul Islam, pacer Al-Amin Hossain and left-arm spinner Arafat Sunny were the new inclusions beside Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, Mahmudullah Riyad, Rubel Hossain, Nasir Hossain, Anamul Haque and Mominul Haque.

Veteran left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak, off-spinner Shohag Gazi and pacer Robiul Islam were dropped from the previous list.

Mashrafe, Shakib, Mushfiqur and Tamim have been drafted in Grade A+, while Riyad was given Grade A, Rubel, Nasir and Imrul got Grade B, Anamul, Mominul and Shafiqul have received Grade C and Grade D included Taijul, Al-Amin and Arafat.

The players' new contract was approved during the meeting of the BCB board of directors at a local hotel yesterday and this time there was no increase in salaries.

NO EXTRA PLAYERS
The board has decided not to send any extra players to Australia with the 15-member World Cup squad.

CHANGES TO STANDING COMMITTEES
The long-pending changes to a number of standing committees have finally been made. The most significant change to the important cricket operations committee occurred as former national skipper Akram Khan was removed as chairman of this committee. He will be replaced by another former national skipper Naimur Rahman.

"It was a commitment of the board presi-

dent that he would review the performance of the committee and accordingly he made these changes. The main objective of these changes is to make the activities more vibrant," said BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus.

The new chairmen of different committees are: Enayet Hossain Siraj (working committee), Naimur Rahman (cricket operations committee), Akram Khan (tournament committee), Tanjil Chowdhury (age-group tournament committee), Hanif Bhuiyan (grounds committee), Lokman Hossain Bhuiyan (facilities management committee), Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury Nadel (medical committee), Showkat Aziz Russell (audit committee) and Gazi Golam Murtoza (CCDM).

HIGH PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE
Mahbub Anam has been made chairman and AZM Nasir vice-chairman of this committee, which will look after the High Performance Unit. "This committee will actually run the High Performance Unit which will be revived soon. We need this unit properly run because of healthy back-up line-ups," said Yunus.

TECHNICAL COMMITTEE
A technical committee has been formed with six former cricketers in Jahangir Shah Badshah, Athar Ali Khan, ASM Faruque, Ishtiaque Ahmed, Mainul Haque and Shafiqul Huque Heera. The name of the convenor will be announced later.

"This committee will give their observations to the board on different activities, share their ideas and give suggestions. Our expectation is that they will follow the contemporary cricket to enrich the game in our country," said Yunus.

TEAM MANAGER FOR ICC WORLD CUP
BCB director and former national skipper Khaled Mahmud has been appointed team manager at the ICC Cricket World Cup.

Hockey World League Bangladesh lose final practice tie

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh national hockey team completed their preparations for the Hockey World League (Round-2) by conceding a 1-2 defeat to Ukraine in a practice match in Singapore yesterday.

Defender Khorsheedur Rahman put Bangladesh ahead before Ukraine struck two goals in the last three minutes of the 40-minute match to disappoint Bangladesh, informed Bangladesh Hockey Federation general secretary Khaza Rahmatullah.

Before the opening match of the Hockey World League (Round-2) against Japan in Singapore on Saturday, Bangladesh had more or less good practice as they played three matches under the guidance of new Malaysian coach Gobinathan Krishnamurti.

Bangladesh lost to Malaysia's U-21 team by 1-3 goals after arriving in Kuala Lumpur few hours before the match, but they bounced back in the second match strongly to beat the Malaysian U-23 side by 5-1 goals.

Keeping Arif away angers his brother!

SPORTS REPORTER

MS mum on retirement

AFP, Melbourne

Mahendra Singh Dhoni would not elaborate Thursday about his sudden retirement from Test cricket, ahead of leading India in the one-day international tri-series against Australia and England.

The 33-year-old stunned the cricket world -- and a completely unaware India team -- when he announced his immediate Test retirement after the drawn third Test against Australia in Melbourne late last month.

He had not mentioned it during his post-Test media conference only for Indian authorities to drop the bombshell via social media shortly afterwards.

India's World Cup-winning captain again had nothing to say in the subject as he launched the Indian one-day team's new uniform on Thursday ahead of their first tri-series game against Australia in Melbourne on Sunday.

Dhoni, who remains India's ODI and T20 captain, stood next to new Test skipper Virat Kohli and six other-teammates on stage with the closest he came to addressing the issue when he was asked about his time off since that Test.

"It has been good, a few days off," he said. And that was it. There were a few prepared comments about the uniform, but no questions were allowed from the assembled journalists.

The microphone was handed to Kohli, one of the few Indian players to enhance his reputation during the 2-0 Test series loss to Australia.

"It's been a very eventful month and a half since we came to Adelaide," Kohli said. "I've enjoyed every day of it. It's been challenging at times, but that's where international cricket is."

"All the boys have really enjoyed the challenge we got from the Australian team and the public as well."

Dhoni, who is one of the world's highest-earning sportsmen, was India's most successful Test captain, winning 27 of the 60 Tests he led the national side in, with 18 losses and 15 draws.



Sri Lanka batsman Tillakaratne Dilshan sweeps one for a four on way to smashing 116 against New Zealand in the second ODI at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday.

Lankans draw level in style

AFP, Hamilton

Sri Lanka cruised to a six-wicket win in the second one-day international against New Zealand on Thursday, thanks to a masterful century from Tillakaratne Dilshan and a comedy of errors from the Black Caps.

Dilshan scored 116 as the visitors comfortably overhauled New Zealand's total of 248 to level the seven-match series 1-1, with Angelo Mathews (39) and Kumar Sangakkara (38) also making valuable contributions.

Their efforts came after New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum won the toss and put the hosts in a strong position with a big-hitting 117, only for his teammates to squander any chance of victory through a series of basic mistakes.

SCORES IN BRIEF
NEW ZEALAND: 248 all out in 50 overs (McCullum 117, Taylor 34; Senanayake 2-55-2, Herath 2-36)
SRI LANKA: 252 for 4 in 47.4 overs (Dilshan 116, Sangakkara 38, Mathews 39 n/o; Henry 2-34)
Result: Sri Lanka won by 6 wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Tillakaratne Dilshan.

Biggies' final preps

AFP, Sydney

World Cup big guns Australia, England and India get their final preparations for next month's tournament under way when the one-day international tri-series begins in Sydney on Friday.

The Australians face England at the Sydney Cricket Ground in the first match before renewing hostilities with World Cup holders India in Melbourne on Sunday, just a week after their 2-0 Test series win.

England made the big call of replacing Alastair Cook with Eoin Morgan as captain less than two months out from the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand and he gets his chance to fine-tune the squad during the tri-series.

Morgan's team have been among the runs in their two warm-up games in Canberra, scoring a total of 755 with Ian Bell blasting 187 off 145 balls in Wednesday's 60-run canteen over the Prime Minister's XI.

Bell's knock was the highest innings by an England batsman in a competitive 50-over match, eclipsing Robin Smith's 167 against Australia at Edgbaston in 1993.

"It's nice to get some runs in the week we've had here," Bell said.

"It's a nice start to the tour and hopefully we can kick on in the main games."

"I've done a lot of netting in the last month, so it's nice to get a real big score in a competitive game."

England's recent ODI record has been

| FIXTURES | | |
|----------|---------------------|-----------|
| Date | Match | Venue |
| Jan 16 | Australia v England | SCG |
| Jan 18 | Australia v India | MCG |
| Jan 20 | England v India | Gabba |
| Jan 23 | Australia v England | Bellerive |
| Jan 26 | Australia v India | SCG |
| Jan 30 | England v India | WACA |
| Feb 1 | Final | WACA |

SA, WI tune up for WC

First ODI today
AFP, Durban

South Africa and the West Indies square up in five one-day internationals, starting at Kingsmead on Friday, in their final competitive matches before the World Cup starts in Australia and New Zealand next month.

South Africa will be fielding their World Cup squad, with the exception of injured wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock, who has been replaced for the series by veteran Morne van Wyk.

The West Indies announced their one-day squad for South Africa late last year and the World Cup squad, announced last week, shows three changes.

Darren Bravo, Sunil Narine and Kemar Roach will be playing in the World Cup but are not in South Africa. Three players named for the South African series, Carlos Brathwaite, Narsingh Deonarine and Leon Johnson, will not be going to the World Cup.

BRETT'S bye to cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australian pace bowler Brett Lee on Thursday announced he is to retire from all forms of cricket after a 20-year career, saying he was both emotional and excited.

The 38-year-old called time on his international commitments in July 2012, but continued to play Twenty20 in both the Australian Big Bash League and the Indian Premier League.

His Sydney Sixers have one Big Bash regular-season match remaining, against cross-town rivals the Sydney Thunder next Thursday at the Sydney Cricket Ground ahead of a possible finals clash.

"When that last ball's bowled I'll walk off happy and content," Lee said.

"I'm excited, I'm emotional, I'm happy, but I'm certainly not worried because I know that I've made the right call."

Lee played 76 Tests for Australia, taking 310 wickets, and 221 one-dayers with 380 dismissals.

His fastest delivery cracked the 161 kilometres per hour mark (100 miles per hour), with the blond speedster consistently bowling at 150kph over 20 years, making him a fearsome opponent through his sheer pace and toe-crushing in-swinging yorkers.

"He has been an exceptional cricketer who gained fans around the world not only for his electrifying pace and performances with the ball, but the way that he played the game," said Cricket Australia chief James Sutherland.

"Sir Donald Bradman often said that it is a player's responsibility to leave the game in a better state than when they first became involved. Brett Lee has certainly done that."



Made of 33 recyclable bottles!

PTI, Melbourne

Nike, the official apparel sponsor of the Indian cricket board, on Thursday unveiled Indian team's new one-day international kit which the players will sport in the triangular series in Australia starting from Friday.

The Indian cricketers will be seen in their new striking ODI kit when they take the field against Australia on Sunday.

The new lightweight kit combines high performance innovation with sustainability. Each kit -- jersey and bottoms -- is made out of an average of 33 recycled plastic bottles.

Nike crafted the latest Team India uniform in a bold new design with some of the company's latest global apparel innovations to help the team perform at their best.