

SPORT

Pakistan come here today

Junaid replaces injured Sohail

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan arrive here today for their first full tour of Bangladesh since November 2011. The cricketers, who are expected to land at 12:10 pm, will be provided with heavy security.

The Tigers however don't have a good record against their South Asian neighbours. Of the 32 ODIs, Bangladesh have won just once -- back in the 1999 World Cup. This time around though the in-form Tigers will look to better the statistics.

The Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and company, following a delightful stint in the World Cup, seem hungry for more. From Mahmudullah Riyad to Rubel Hossain, none of the players, who performed in the ICC event was keen on speaking on their time in Australia and New Zealand in the last few weeks; instead they wanted to focus on the upcoming series, a positive sign as far as Bangladesh's fans are concerned.

The Tigers can take heart from the fact that the Pakistan side arriving today won't be expected to be as strong as the sides that visited Bangladesh in the past. For one, their ODI outfit will be without Shahid Afridi and Misbahul Haq, with both retiring after the World Cup. Pakistan will instead be led by Azhar Ali, a batsman who played his last ODI back in January 2013. In addition, they yesterday had to call in Junaid Khan as a late replacement for Sohail Khan, who sustained a back injury.

The recent past has seen Bangladesh come close to beating Pakistan. The Asia Cups in 2012 and 2014 in particular saw the Tigers battle neck and neck against their Asian counterparts; however, on both occasions, they failed to cross the final line.

With the likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Rubel and Mahmudullah, terming the Tigers as favourites for the series, it's quite clear that Bangladesh are going into the competition with plenty of confidence. The series begins on April 17. The teams will first face off in three ODIs, then in two Tests and finally in a T20I. Except for the first Test, which will take place in Khulna, the rest of the games will take place in Mirpur.



The players of Islami Bank East Zone enjoy their moment after clinching the Bangladesh Cricket League title with a three-wicket win over BCB North Zone in the final at Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Thriller crowns East Zone

SPORTS REPORTER



Islami Bank East Zone were crowned champions of the first edition of the Bangladesh Cricket League's one-day version after a thrilling final in Mirpur yesterday.

Batting first, BCB North Zone, buoyed by Mahmudul Hasan's 107 and Nasir Hossain's 96, posted 291 in 50 overs. In reply, a fabulous 78 from East Zone skipper Mominul Haque and a half-century from Litton Kumar Das had placed East Zone at a comfortable 131 for 2 in 20 overs before rain interrupted play.

After the restart, East Zone required 278 runs in 46 overs, a target which for most parts of the innings they didn't seem like reaching. At the end of the 33rd over they were precariously placed at 186 for 6 and it didn't seem like their supposedly weak tail could fire; but unfortunately for Nasir Hossain and Mushfiqur

Rahim's North Zone, they were proven wrong.

The fightback began with Asif Ahmed, who reverse-swept his way to 46 off 51 deliveries. Nasir had no clue as to where to place the fielders for Asif, who changed his stance and cleared point and cover with ease.

Asif's antics brought the equation down to 48 off the last six overs. An over later though, Asif was caught while attempting to clear the point boundary and the game shifted back towards North Zone.

Abul Hasan, until then merely playing second fiddle to Asif, unleashed his fury and hammered three fours and a six. They needed 14

runs off 12 balls. The penultimate over saw Arafat Sunny and Abul smack sixes to clobber 17 runs and complete a dramatic win.

Earlier, Mahmudul and Nasir shared a 140-run stand and stood up for their team when it needed them the most. They helped North Zone recover from 88 for 3 to go past the 250-mark. Both players took their time before making a move on.

East Zone would have ideally wanted Tamim Iqbal to have performed in this contest, but the left-handed batsman was out for five. That's when Mominul and Litton shared a century stand to bring them back.

However, after the fall of Litton, they suffered a mini-collapse and it seemed as though Mominul held the key. And when the left-hander was run-out superbly by Sabbir Rahman in the 27th over, everyone on the ground thought that the match as a contest was over. That's when the tail began their amazing exploits and turned the game on its head.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NORTH ZONE: 291 for 9 (Mahmudul 107, Nasir 96; Asif 2-50, Arafat 2-51)
EAST ZONE: 281 for 7 in 45 overs (Mominul 78, Litton 50, Asif 46, Abul 39 not out; Tajjul 3-56)
Result: East Zone won by three wickets.

IN A NUTSHELL



Benaud was a loving husband

AGENCIES, Sydney

Former Australia leg-spinner Stuart MacGill has revealed that late commentating doyen Richie Benaud never really felt apart from his wife Daphne whenever he was away for extended periods of time and used to raise a glass of wine to her every evening from whichever corner of the world he was.

Benaud, the former Australia captain and legendary broadcaster, passed away on Friday aged 84 after battling skin cancer.

Recalling his most treasured memories of the Australian cricket great, MacGill stated that to define Benaud solely by the game of cricket -- to describe him as merely a former player and commentator -- sells short the rich and varied experiences he accrued across many countries and cultures and over 83 remarkably well-lived years.

Meanwhile, the family of the cricket icon has declined the offer of a state funeral, Australia's Prime Minister Tony Abbott said on Sunday.

Abbott said the offer was a mark of respect for a man who meant so much to millions of people in Australia and around the world.

Hughes's bat to be on top of Everest

ANI, Johannesburg

In an attempt to pay homage to Phillip Hughes, the Cricket Association of Nepal has said that a cricket bat and a shirt used by the late Australia batsman will be taken to the top of Mount Everest.

Hughes passed away in November after being struck in the neck by a bouncer during a Sheffield Shield match at Sydney Cricket Ground.

Mountaineer Churim Sherpa, who holds the record of climbing Everest twice in a single season, has been entrusted with the responsibility of carrying the bat.

Siddle's means of proposing

ANI, Sydney

Australian fast bowler Peter Siddle popped the question to his blonde sweetheart Anna Weatherlake on a weekend getaway two weeks ago with the help of his dog and the glamorous cricket couple is now engaged.

Siddle won the Sheffield Shield with Victoria and while he was on a weekend getaway on the Mornington Peninsula with his girlfriend of four years Weatherlake, he took the help of one of their four dogs to pop the question to her.

The couple kept the news hidden until after the cricket weddings of their good friends David Warner and Candice Falzon, held last weekend, and Clint McKay, who got married on Friday in Bali.

Siddle had the giant ring attached to the collar of one of their beloved dogs.

BKSP back in youth hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) has decided to complete the 25th National Youth (U-18) Hockey Championship, which begins on Wednesday, within 13 days due to impending fixtures up next.

Even though the participating teams will get less number of matches than usual, the championship will feature a record 36 teams, who will be playing on knock-out basis being split into two groups. The championship is being sponsored by Agrani Bank, who penned a three-season deal with the federation last year for running this championship at a budget of 36 lakhs.

"We want to complete the youth champi-

onship before the start of next month's Club Cup and Premier League. So we don't have enough time to hold the championship in league format, yet we believe the talented players from this championship will be able to attract club officials for top-flight competition," said tournament committee chairman Kazi Moinuzzaman Pila at a press conference yesterday.

Defending champions Faridpur will play against Barisal in one of two opening day's matches at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium but focus will be on Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP), who have returned to the championship after missing the last edition due to their international engagement in India.



BACK WITH A WIN: Jamaican world record holder Usain Bolt slows down after winning the 200-metre race, his first in 20 months, at the UTech Classic event in Kingston on Saturday. Bolt eased to victory with a time of 20.20 seconds ahead of Olympic teammate Nesta Carter, who finished second in 20.60. Bolt however was disappointed to have failed to win under 20 seconds -- his world record is 19.19 seconds -- and said he would have to look at the video to see how he can gain more speed.

PHOTO: INTERNET

Bhaji blitzes in vain

SPORTS DESK



Mumbai Indians suffered their second consecutive defeat in the 2015 IPL yesterday. This time it was against Kings XI Punjab by a margin of 18 runs.

But it was the sheer power-hitting by Harbhajan Singh that gave the Mumbai fans at the Wankhede Stadium something to cherish despite the defeat, which could have been an embarrassing one after they were reduced to 59-6 in 13.4 overs, chasing a George Bailey-powered Kings XI total of 177-5.

Harbhajan struck 64 off 24 balls that contained six maximum and five fours in an astonishing counter-attack that gave the Kings a real scare. Bhaji received a standing ovation after he was holed out in the deep in the penultimate delivery of the innings.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KINGS XI PUNJAB: 117-5 (Bailey 61, M Vijay 35, Sehwa 36)
MUMBAI INDIAN: 159-7 (Harbhajan 64, J Suchith 34)
Result: Kings XI won by 18 runs.

DELHI: 184-3 (Duminy 44; Morris 2-35)
RAJASTHAN: 186-7 (Rahane 47, Hooda 54; Tahir 4-28)
Result: Rajasthan won by 3 wickets.

Focus on pace on spinning wickets

SPORTS REPORTER



A stark difference awaited the Tigers in their first training camp ahead of the Pakistan series yesterday. It may have been an optional session with just six players taking part, but it was enough to display how different the upcoming training sessions would be compared to the ones for the World Cup.

The granite boards, which helped the Tigers practise against the extra bounce, were nowhere to be seen. In the nets, there were a bunch of left-arm pacers piling in those bouncers against the national batsmen. With left-arm pacers dominating Pakistan's attack, one can expect to witness plenty more of such sessions in the coming days. The players who sweated it out yesterday morning were Taskin Ahmed, Rubel Hossain, Rony Talukdar, Mahmudullah Riyad and Soumya Sarkar.

Mushfiqur Rahim, Arafat Sunny, Abul Hasan, Sabbir Rahman, Nasir Hossain, Mominul Haque and Tamim Iqbal will join the camp today along with Shakib Al Hasan, who returned from India yesterday.

One of the more successful players in the World Cup, Rubel will have a different challenge this time around. While he got plenty of assistance from the pitches down under, he may have to work twice as hard to dominate in Mirpur; amidst conditions which are expected to support the spinners.

"There isn't much time left for us. We have to get used to bowling pace on spin-friendly wickets again. That's what we focussed on during training," said Rubel. "The whole team wasn't available due to the BCL final so there wasn't much pressure in training... I tried batting a bit as well and practised my favourite shot... the cover drive," he added gleefully.



RUBEL HOSSAIN

BD-PAK SERIES Tickets on sale from April 15

SPORTS REPORTER

Tickets for the Pakistan ODI series will be available from April 15 at six different branches of the United Commercial Bank in Dhaka and Khulna. The UCB was declared as the series ticketing partner by the Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday.

In Dhaka, tickets will be available at Bijoynagar, Bashundhara, Mirpur Road and Mirpur branches. While in Khulna, it will be available in the Khulna and Khan Jahan Ali Road branches. However, four out of the six branches will sell tickets through UCash only. The only branches that will sell the tickets outright are the ones in Mirpur and Jahan Ali Road.

The rates of tickets (excluding a VAT charge of 15 percent) are as follows:

ODI/T20I Test	
SBNCs, Mirpur	
Hospitality/Corporate Box	Tk. 3000 Tk. 1000
Hospitality Lounge	Tk. 2000 Tk. 1000
Grand Stand	Tk. 1000 Tk. 300
VIP Stand	Tk. 500 Tk. 100
Shahid Mushtaque /Jewel Stand	
Northern/Southern Stand	Tk. 300 Tk. 75
Eastern Stand	Tk. 150 Tk. 50
Western Stand	Tk. 100 Tk. 20
SANs, Khulna	
BCB Corporate Box	Tk. 1000
Grand Stand West/East	Tk. 300
International Stand	Tk. 100
Club House	Tk. 75
Western Stand	Tk. 50
Eastern Stand	Tk. 20

Bangladesh favourites, says Riyad

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's most successful batsman in the recently concluded World Cup, Mahmudullah Riyad, believes that Bangladesh can beat Pakistan in the upcoming series if the Tigers can continue to play the brand of cricket they displayed in Australia and New Zealand.

Riyad, who became the brand ambassador of ScanCement at a ceremony at the Westin Hotel yesterday, said, "We have proved ourselves in the World Cup and we are a confident bunch now. This is an opportunity for us. If we can hold on to that performance then, I am sure we will get positive result against Pakistan."

"Our team's goal is to win the series. The preparation has been good so far. We are also keeping an eye on their left-arm pacers. We have a few left-arm bowlers bowling at us in the nets. We know what kind of a length they may bowl... on the whole we are preparing well," he added.

The last few weeks saw Shakib Al Hasan and Rubel Hossain term Bangladesh as favourites for the upcoming ODI series. Riyad echoed his colleagues' sentiments.

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