

SPORT

Azhar leads Pakistan

AFP, Lahore

Azhar Ali hit a solid hundred to help Pakistan win their first one-day series in 17 months with a thumping six-wicket win in the second day-night international against Zimbabwe in Lahore on Friday.

Ali scored a 104-ball 102 for his second one-day century to help Pakistan chase down a target of 269 in 47.2 overs at Gaddafi Stadium for a 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

For Zimbabwe Pakistan-born Sikander Raza smashed an 84-ball 100 not out with eight fours and three sixes while Chamu Chibhabha's career-best 99 had 11 fours and a six.

Pakistan won the first match by 41 runs in Lahore. The third and final match will be played at the same venue on Sunday.

The one-day win followed Pakistan's 2-0 win in the preceding Twenty20 matches in the series which marked the return of international cricket in the country after a six-year gap.

Ali hit eight boundaries in his 104-ball knock and improved on his best score of 101 -- made against Bangladesh in Dhaka last month -- before falling with 69 needed to win.

Ali set the victory tone by adding 46 for the first wicket with Sarfraz Ahmed (22), 85 for the third wicket with Asad Shafiq (39) and 56 for the next with Sohail.

Pakistan's last one-day series win was against Sri Lanka in United Arab Emirates in December 2013.

SCORES IN BRIEF
ZIMBABWE: 268 for 7 in 50 overs (Chibhabha 99, Raza 100 not out; Riaz 2-55, Yasir 2-40)

PAKISTAN: 269 for 4 in 47.2 overs (Azhar 102, Sohail 52 not out; Cremer 2-52)

Result: Pakistan won by six wickets



Shakib Al Hasan and the Tigers toiled for a long time at the BCB Academy Indoor Gymnasium as they worked out during yesterday's training camp.

PHOTO: STAR

Tigers' hopes lie with spin

SPORTS REPORTER



Prior to the final round of the Bangladesh Cricket League, which came to an end last week, there were a few concerns for the selectors.

There were questions regarding the pace department. Most of the Test pacers were either out of form or injured. The kind of spin attack that the Tigers would use in the Test in Fatullah, which begins on June 10, was also an issue of debate. Shuvagata Hom, after all, hasn't lived up to his expectations as a fulltime spinner in the side.

And then there were questions over Mahmudullah Riyad's form and whether Soumya Sarker's inclusion in the Test side in the Pakistan series was a hasty gamble.

However, the selectors will feel relieved after the final round of the BCL, with a majority of the players in question hitting form.

Riyad and Soumya for instance scored centuries for their respective sides. Shuvagata's turners were instrumental in leading his BCL team to a cracking win in a low-scoring game at Mirpur.

Abul Hasan, who managed to get among the wickets as well, had a calming influence on the selectors' nerves as far as the pace department is concerned.

"Even though Shakib [Al Hasan], Mushfiqur [Rahim] and Tamim [Iqbal] didn't play the final round of the BCL, I thought the players who did managed to utilise the match well.

"I also think our pacers are in a much better situation right now. Rubel [Hossain] has received more time and is doing better. Abul has also got a few wickets. Honestly, in our conditions, pace won't matter as much. I think the pacers in our preliminary squad will be good enough for the Test," said chief selector Faruque Ahmed.

There is no doubt that the hosts' bowling line-up will depend on their spinners on a Fatullah track that isn't expected to support the pacers.

And with Shakib out of form, the burden may fall on Taijul Islam. The slow left-arter, although a bit inconsistent, picked up a five-for in the last series and hopes to continue his run.

"Apart from the Pakistan series, I picked up a five-wicket haul in the final round of the BCL as well. I hope that performance can inspire me to do well against India.

"Indian players play spin well, so it will be an extra challenge for me to perform. But if I do get selected I'll do my best in this series, because it's a big occasion for all of us," Taijul told reporters at Mirpur yesterday.

On a hot and sultry morning, Bangladesh's national players began their camp for the India series. While the players attended a gym session yesterday, they will begin their skills training today.

With the selectors hoping to submit the Test team by May 2nd, the next few camps could well be crucial for players in the preliminary squad hoping to make the final cut for the first time.

"We played well in the last series and I think our team is pretty much settled. We just want to observe them for a few more days before submitting the team," said Faruque.

A friendly of opportunities

Hosts face Singapore today

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh and Singapore will get an opportunity to analyse each other ahead of the World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifiers when they face off in a FIFA International friendly match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

The hosts and Singapore have lined up to prepare themselves for next month's Joint Qualifiers and the main focus of both sides is to find the right combinations by playing the friendly, where each side is given six substitutes instead of the regular three. It is expected that neither coach will waste this chance to check on their players before going to the big stage of the World Cup Qualifiers.

Bangladesh yesterday announced a 23-member squad for the friendly with strikers Enamul Haque, Towhidul Alam Sabuj, defender Mohammad Linkon and German-based

midfielder Reasat Islam returning to the fold.

Dutch coach Lodewik de Kruijff is likely to bring a couple of changes to the playing eleven that played the Bangabandhu Gold Cup at home last February, as winger Zahid Hossain and defenders Raihan Hasan and Yeasin Khan are still nursing injuries, while others players are suffering from fatigue after restlessly playing domestic and international matches.

"It is a preparatory match. Our focus is on the two World cup and Asia Cup Qualifiers against Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. We want to use tomorrow's friendly to rehearse the style of play which we want to follow against Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," said Bangladesh's assistant coach Saiful Bari Titu, in the absence of head coach de Kruijff, who could not turn up for the official press conference due to stomach pains.

Though the assistant coach is looking to fix the style of play, fit-again captain Mamunul Islam is looking forward to doing something

that would help his side in the FIFA ranking.

"If we can beat or draw against Singapore, who are a higher ranked side (162) than Bangladesh (169), it will help us climb up the FIFA rankings. So we will be trying to do something against them," said Mamunul.

Singapore's German coach Bernd Stange echoed Titu's sentiments, but sees the friendly as an opportunity to test some options for next World Cup Qualifiers.

"We both need this game as preparation for the upcoming World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifiers. We need to test our players as we are missing a few regular players, but our team is an experienced and good side and is ready to perform against the hosts," said Stange.

Terming Bangladesh as dark horses, Stange said, "I don't know too much about them but we don't underestimate any team. We are close in the World Rankings so it should be an interesting game," opined Stange.

IN A NUTSHELL

Windies batsman arrested?

AGENCIES, Kingston

West Indies batsman Andre Fletcher has been reportedly arrested at the Douglas Charles airport in Dominica for possessing ammunition.

According to reports, Fletcher, 27, was practising with the Windward Islands team and was about to leave the country, when he was arrested.

A solid top-order batsman, the Grenada-born Fletcher has just played 15 ODIs and 22 Twenty20 internationals since his debut in 2008.

McGrath to train rookies

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Glenn McGrath is set to train a bunch of rookie Australian players at the MRF academy during his visit to India next month.

McGrath, who took over as coaching director from Dennis Lillee at the MRF pace foundation in 2012, will oversee a contingent from Australia's National Cricket Centre (NCC), which will travel to Chennai in early June.

Sachin's litchi-laden friend

INTERNET

Sudhir Gautam is Sachin Tendulkar's biggest fan and he has access to the legend that we could only dream of.

Sudhir has been gifting Sachin litchis hand-picked from his village in Muzaffarpur for 12 years. This year he had two cartons with 1000 litchis.



Sudhir says he was denied entry once, which led to Sachin scolding his entire security team on the spot.

"Once Sachin sir wakes up, I'll have breakfast with sir and Anjali bhabhi, give them the litchis and leave," says the friend of the legend.



The Bangladesh booters had their final day of training at the Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club ground yesterday before taking on Singapore today.

PHOTO: STAR

Kiwis crumbling

AFP, Leeds



Luke Ronchi marked his Test debut with a quickfire 88 as New Zealand fought back on the first day at Headingley on Friday after James Anderson became the first England bowler to take 400 Test wickets.

New Zealand, after being sent into bat by England captain Alastair Cook following a washed-out morning session, slumped to two for two.

But a sixth-wicket stand of 120 between opener Tom Latham, dropped four times on his way to 84, and the dashing Ronchi helped New Zealand recover to 297 for eight at stumps.

Anderson struck twice in three balls to reduce them to two for two after England captain Alastair Cook won the toss following a washed-out first session.

The 32-year-old paceman removed both opener Martin Gupthill and Kane Williamson for ducks.

Anderson started this match, his 104th Test, with 399 Test wickets.

And the Lancashire swing bowler needed just eight balls Friday to become

just the 12th bowler overall to take 400 Test wickets.

Latham made fifty when a Ben Stokes delivery caught the shoulder of his bat.

McCullum (41) was out to the first balls after tea when he drove Stokes straight to Mark Wood at mid-off.

Ronchi, New Zealand's wicket-keeper during their run to this year's World Cup final came in at 144 for five.

The 34-year-old raced to fifty off just 37 balls, including eight fours and two sixes.

There was no hundred either for Ronchi, who had been on course to surpass India star Shikhar Dhawan's 85-ball record for the quickest century by a Test debutant.

But his 70-ball knock, including 13 fours and three sixes, ended when Broad, from around the wicket, had him hooking straight to Anderson at fine leg.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 297 for 8 (Latham 84, Ronchi 88; Anderson 2-43, Broad 3-83)

ENGLAND: Lyth, Cook (capt), Ballance, Bell, Root, Stokes, Buttler (wkt), Moeen, Broad, Wood, Anderson.
Toss: England

Afghanistan due today

SPORTS REPORTER

Afghanistan are scheduled to arrive here today to play a FIFA international friendly match against Bangladesh as part of their preparations for the upcoming Joint Qualifiers of the World Cup and Asian Cup.

SAFF Champions, Afghanistan, consisting of overseas players, will play the friendly on June 2 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, just three days after Bangladesh's friendly against Singapore.

Bangladesh and Afghanistan faced each other twice at the senior level and both of the encounters produced stalemates, but Bangladesh U-23 team has a better record than their Afghan counterparts as the U-23's emerged SA Games champions beating Afghanistan U-23 in the final and also beat them in Asian Games in South Korea.

Maria, Roger reach last 16

APP, Paris



Defending champion Maria Sharapova reached the French Open fourth round for the 11th time on Friday with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Australia's Samantha Stosur.

Second seed Sharapova, also the champion in 2012 and runner-up in 2013, goes on to face Czech 13th seed Lucie Safarova for a place in the quarterfinals.

Roger Federer reached the last 16 for the 11th straight year, coasting past Damir Dzumhur of Bosnia-Herzegovina 6-4, 6-3, 6-2.

He will play either Gael Monfils of France or Pablo Cuevas of Uruguay for a place in the quarterfinals.

Former champion Ana Ivanovic also reached the last 16 in just 53 minutes Friday while Alize Cornet kept home hopes alive by making the second week for the first time.

Serbian seventh seed Ivanovic triumphed over 18-year-old Croatian opponent Donna Vekic 6-0, 6-3.

Gasquet, a former Wimbledon semifinalist and world top tenner, finally saw off the challenge of Argentine claycourter Carlos Berlocq 3-6, 6-3, 6-1, 4-6, 6-1 after the match had been suspended overnight at two sets all.

Fourth seed Tomas Berdych of the Czech Republic reached the last 16 of the French Open on Friday with a 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4 win over Frenchman Benoit Paire.

His opponent in the fourth round will be either Jo-Wilfried Tsonga of France or Pablo Andujar of Spain.

Former Australian Open champion Stan Wawrinka blasted past American Steve Johnson, while Gilles Simon saw off a tough challenge from fellow Frenchman Nicolas Mahut 6-2, 6-7 (6/8), 6-7 (6/8), 6-3, 6-1.



Switzerland's Roger Federer serves the ball to Bosnia-Herzegovina's Damir Dzumhur during the third round of French Open in Paris yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP