

SPORT



A focused Imrul Kayes will once again try to strike a good balance with Tamim Iqbal at the top of the batting order in Fatullah next week when Bangladesh take on India in the lone Test match.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Batting wicket in the demand

SPORTS REPORTER



A glance at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday wouldn't have suggested that the Tigers were in fact getting ready for the one-match Test series against India.

For a moment, in the afternoon, it seemed as though the players practising at the centre wicket were getting ready for a twenty20 contest, competing to see as to who could hit the ball the farthest.

Soumya Sarkar, for one, was definitely enjoying his time in the middle. He went down the track against the likes of Jubair Hossain and Shuvagata Hom and cleared the ropes quite a few times.

His partner Mushfiqur Rahim seemed a lot more sober and worked on perfecting those straight-drives. Every now and then he unleashed that favourite slog sweep of his, crashing the ball onto the side of the net.

On one such occasion though, he missed and the ball hit the stumps. That was followed by a brief stare at his glove; a minute later he went on his merry way drilling the balls down the ground. The Test skipper is still recovering from a finger injury.

Towards the end of the practice session, yesterday evening, opener Imrul Kayes politely explained as to what the players were trying to do.

"The practice wicket was really good. We don't usually get such wickets. The ball came on to the bat well and so we were just trying to play our shots before the series."

The left-hander admitted that the hosts would be a happy unit if they received a similar wicket in Fatullah for the first Test.

"If you ask me, I will always want the wicket to be batting-friendly. In that case both teams can do well and that increases the chances of a draw. As a batsman that's what I want," said Imrul.

The left-hander's urge was understandable. After all, it was on a similarly placid track in Khulna that saw him and Tamim Iqbal race to a record-stand for the opening partnership. It took the Pakistan team by a surprise. Even the most optimistic of Bangladesh's fans didn't expect such a turnaround.

The left-hander -- he also had to keep for more than 120 overs in the absence of the injured Mushfiqur -- whose dedication was lauded following the Test, expects India's bowling attack to be less threatening compared to Pakistan's.

"Pakistan's bowling line-up is a lot more attacking. But as a team India is much more powerful side and we know that we all have to perform our duties responsibly in order to get a desirable result," said Imrul.

The left-hander, who returned to Test cricket in 2014 after a break of two and a half years, has scored three centuries since. While he doesn't have a target for the India series, he hopes he can continue the good run.

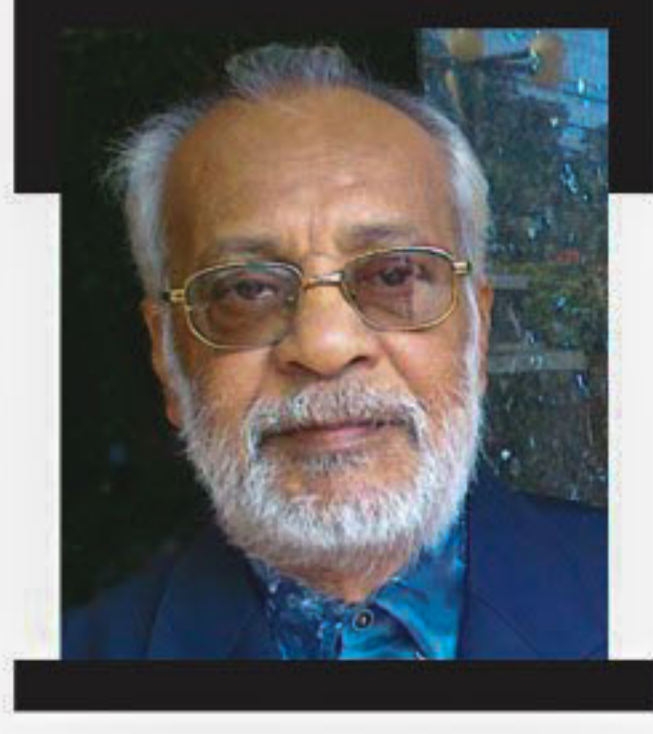
When asked as to which team he thought were the favourites for the series, Imrul provided a rather pragmatic answer.

"They are the favourites. We are playing well in all three departments in one-day cricket, but India is a very strong team. If we can play our best game I am sure things can get very interesting," said Imrul.

Bachchu bhai passes away

SPORTS REPORTER

Sirajul Islam Bachchu is no more. The confirmed bachelor of Bangladesh's football breathed his last at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Sunday afternoon. He died of kidney diseases. He was 69.



A life member of Wari Club, a former general secretary of the Bangladesh Football Federation who also served as the general secretary of the South Asian Football Federation, Bachchu bhai, as affectionately called by many, was better known to the football aficionados for others reasons than a number of portfolios he occupied.

Born in Jessore in 1946 and graduated from Dhaka University, Bachchu had more than one avenue to choose as a profession. But he decided to marry football and lived a life that a conventional sports organiser, who possesses unbridled passion for the game but very allergic to the drastic changes that an ever-changing world demands, would have normally chosen to live.

He could have been a good artist; he had been enlisted with both BTV and Bangladesh Radio. He was a good writer; he frequently wrote sports articles for Ittefaq, Sangbad, Millat and fortnightly magazine Krira Jagat.

There was not a single publication of the BFF that he was not associated with ever since he joined the organisation in 1991. He received the best organiser's awards by both Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association and Bangladesh Sports Press Association.

He also wrote books on "Laws of Volleyball" and satirical novel "Gadhar Jakhon Buddhi Holo".

But Bachchu, whose body was taken to Wari Club and then to the BFF House last night so that sports-lovers could pay their last respect, would be best remembered for his uncanny ability of smiling back at his hardest critics and for his loyalty to the country's football even in desperate times.

The veteran organiser will be buried at the Karbala graveyard in Jessore today after his second namaz-e-janaza at the district's Eidgah Maidan.

German-heavy Afghanistan

SPORTS REPORTER



Bolstered by foreign-based players Afghanistan are looking forward to carrying their performance in Laos to Tuesday's international friendly against Bangladesh which is being arranged as part of preparation for both teams' two World Cup and the Asian Cup qualifiers later this month.

SAFF champions Afghanistan under the supervision of German coaching staff came here on Saturday to play Bangladesh in the lone friendly after notching up a 2-0 win over hosts Laos.

For the Afghans, who had a one-week training in Bahrain, the Bangladesh match will be their last warm-up before facing Syria in their first qualifying match of the World Cup and Asian Cup E Group that also features Japan, Singapore and Cambodia.

After seven key players of Afghanistan resigned recently, their new German coach Slaven Skeledzic did well to reorganise the squad which is comprised mostly of foreign-based players (10 from Germany, three from Holland, one each from Denmark, USA and Vietnam) and only five are from the domestic league of Kabul.

"We have a new team and new philosophy. We want to practise against Bangladesh. The result is not my concern because we want to practise our philosophy and want to prepare well for the first game of the World Cup Qualifiers against Syria on June 11 in Iran. That's why we are here," said Skeledzic before the start of the team's first training session at the Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club ground yesterday.

The 43-year-old coach, however, hoped to carry their winning run from Laos to Bangladesh before leaving here on June 4. He also praised some of the Bangladeshi players after watching the

match against Singapore on Saturday.

"I saw Bangladesh playing against Singapore and they were very organised and had some chances. I think the match should have been a draw but they lost. I think there are some good players like number 10 [Hemanta Vincent], number 14 [actually 24, Jewel Rana] and number 6 [Jamal Bhuiyan]. It will be a hard game for us [on Tuesday]. We must have a good day and it will be better for us if we win," said the German, who signed a five-year contract with the war-ravaged country in February.

Asked about what Afghanistan's strong point is, the former FSV Frankfurt youth side coach said: "Our strong point is that we are a team like Germany. We stay together and can plan quickly how to win the match."

During the match between Bangladesh and Singapore, the players from both sides struggled in scorching heat but Skeledzic said that it won't be a problem for his side.



Afghan booters practise at the Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club ground yesterday before taking on hosts Bangladesh tomorrow.

PHOTO: STAR

IN A NUTSHELL

Misbah wants more nations to tour

INTERNET

Excited with the successful staging of international cricket in his home country, Pakistan Test captain Misbahul Haq has urged more international teams to visit the nation.

Misbah said that the people in Pakistan still love the game, adding that the passion was still there and that was evident from the jam-packed stadium, the Tribune reported.

'No decision on Indo-Pak series'

INTERNET

No decision has been taken on Indo-Pak cricket series, India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said on Sunday. Her remarks came in the backdrop of Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Shaharyar Khan's recent visit to India to push for the resumption of Indo-Pak cricket ties.

Shaharyar, during a joint press statement with BCCI president Jagmohan Dalmiya in Kolkata, proposed a series in December this year but the BCCI has not given any categorical statement yet on the proposed series and the venue.

Ambrose wouldn't have killed him!

INTERNET

Former West Indies fast bowler Curtly Ambrose earned a reputation of not interacting with reporters during his playing days. But he has opened up now because of his autobiography, Time to Talk. He spoke on various subjects including some incidents involving the legendary Brian Lara.



"Brian and I were roommates. It was a one-off situation when he really got me very upset with him," said Ambrose about the hotel room incident with Lara. "I was so furious with him. I did not say I would kill him. I said if he touched any part of the room which was my area, the West Indies would be one batsman short. But we get along well."

Rain spoils third ODI

AFP, Lahore

The third and final day-night international between Pakistan and Zimbabwe ended as no result in Lahore on Sunday after play was ended by a sandstorm followed by rain.

Zimbabwe, chasing a target of 297 to win, were 60-0 before a power failure in a floodlight tower and a heavy sandstorm forced the players to walk off the field at Gaddafi Stadium.

The teams came back for one over during which Zimbabwe, chasing a revised target of 281 in 46 overs under the Duckworth-Lewis formula, added eight more runs without losing a wicket.

A heavy downpour then forced the umpires called off the match.

Pakistan took the three-match series 2-0 having won the first game by 41 runs and the second by six wickets -- both in Lahore.

Nishikori ends 82-year jinx

AFP, Paris



Kei Nishikori became the first Japanese man in 82 years to reach the French Open quarterfinals on Sunday with a 6-3, 6-4, 6-2 win over Russia's Teymuraz Gabashvili.

Fifth seed Nishikori goes on to face Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, who disposed of Tomas Berdych 6-3, 6-2, 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, for a place in the semifinals.

Swiss eighth seed Stan Wawrinka eased into the quarterfinals with a 6-1, 6-4, 6-2 win over French 12th seed Gilles Simon.

Wawrinka, who also made the last-eight in 2013 where he lost to Rafael Nadal, will face either second seeded compatriot Roger Federer or home hope Gael Monfils for a place in the last four.

The match between Federer and Monfils was suspended due to poor light late Sunday with the contest level at one set all. It will resume today.

Ana Ivanovic reached last eight for the first time since her 2008 title run where she'll face Elina Svitolina, the first Ukrainian to make the last eight.

But defending champion Maria Sharapova's scheduled last-16 clash

against Lucie Safarova was pushed back until Monday after rain caused a lengthy stoppage at a chilly Roland Garros.

The Russian second seed now faces the prospect of playing matches on two successive days with the first two women's quarterfinals already programmed for Tuesday.

Seventh-seeded Serb Ivanovic defeated Russian ninth seed Ekaterina Makarova, a semifinalist at the Australian Open in January, 7-5, 3-6, 6-1 to book her eighth career Grand Slam quarterfinal.

Watched again by German World Cup winning football star Bastian Schweinsteiger, the 27-year-old Ivanovic shrugged off a two and a half hour rain stoppage to secure her third three-set win in four rounds in Paris.

The 20-year-old Svitolina beat fellow former Roland Garros junior champion Alize Cornet on a windy, chilly Court Philippe Chatrier 6-2, 7-6 (11/9).

"It's amazing to be in the quarterfinals again. To be honest, coming into the tournament I didn't really expect that at all," said Ivanovic.

"But I really worked hard for each match. I worked hard even before the tournament to reach the quarter-final again."

Svitolina, seeded 19, is only the second Ukrainian woman to reach a Grand Slam quarter-final after Kateryna Bondarenko made the last eight at the 2009 US Open.

It was Svitolina's first win over Cornet in three meetings and the result ended French hopes in the women's singles for another year.

She displayed nerves of steel to achieve victory, failing to serve out the tie in the 10th game of the second set and then allowing five match points to slip through her fingers.

However, she secured victory on her sixth match point when Cornet went long with a backhand, her 42nd unforced error of the windswept tie.

Svitolina will take a 6-0 losing record into her clash with Ivanovic, a run that includes a second round loss in Paris last year and again on clay in Madrid earlier this month.

"I hope I can serve better, of course, because I was serving not so good against her in Madrid," said Svitolina.

With four men's last-16 ties still to be played on Court Philippe Chatrier and Court Suzanne Lenglen, it was decided that Sharapova and Safarova will play their fourth round on Monday instead.