

SPORTS

Selectors lean towards spin

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The ODI series may still be a week away, but the makeup of Bangladesh's T20I squad already suggests that the Tigers are likely to follow a different strategy, in comparison to the team that played versus India, against South Africa.

The 14-member T20I squad has witnessed three changes from the one that played against Pakistan. Mahmudullah Riyad, Taskin Ahmed and Abul Hasan have been replaced with spinners Jubair Hossain, Shohag Gazi and pacer Rubel Hossain.

"Mahmudullah has not completely recovered from his finger injury. However, hopefully we will get him by the time the ODI series begins," chief selector Faruque Ahmed told The Daily Star. Taskin, who suffered a side strain has also been left out while Abul has been dropped.

"We have decided to include two spinners [Jubair and Shohag] considering our opponents and the place where we are playing in. The kind of bowling attack in the T20Is will depend upon the team management," said Faruque.

Talks regarding a different strategy against South Africa have been floating around ever since Bangladesh completed a series victory over India. Skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, during the post-match media briefing of the final ODI against India, had indicated that Jubair could find a spot in the limited-overs format in the South Africa series.

In the same vein, vice-captain Shakib Al Hasan in a recent interview had said that the strategy against South Africa might well be 'opposite' compared to the four-man pace attack used against India.

It therefore wasn't a surprise when the selection committee decided to recall off-spinner Shohag. The player, who had a brilliant start to his career back in 2012, lost his way ever since his action was reported. While he did correct his action, he wasn't selected for the India and Pakistan series.

Three out of the 14 players, Litton, Rony Talukdar and Jubair are yet to make their T20I debuts.

The two T20Is will take place on July 5 and 7. Prior to that, the South Africans are scheduled to play a practice match at Fatullah this Friday.

T20I SQUAD

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (captain), Tamim Iqbal, Litton Das, Rony Talukdar, Soumya Sarkar, Shakib Al Hasan (vice-captain), Mushfiqur Rahim, Sabir Rahman, Nasir Hossain, Arafat Sunny, Jubair Hossain, Shohag Gazi, Rubel Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman.



The selectors finally drafted in a proper off-spinner in the national team by recalling Shohag Gazi (R) for the South Africa T20s after a gap of almost one year.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

A new dawn for Gazi

BISHWAJIT ROY



"I consider it a new debut for me."

That was how Shohag Gazi termed his return to the national side after nearly a one-year break.

The 23-year-old off-spinner -- who made headlines in October 2013 after becoming the first cricketer in the history of Test cricket to score a century, take a hattrick and finish with more than five wickets in an innings -- pointed towards his club's T-shirt while he was talking at the Mirpur Indoors yesterday and said that it was not easy to accept that he was bowling in the national team's nets wearing a jersey other than the national one.

"The feeling was not good as I bowled in the national team nets wearing a different jersey but I know it's natural. I must consider the recall as a turning point in my career. The team has been doing well. The newcomers are doing well, so

it's not easy to get a place while competing with them. I still think I am new in international cricket. I also know without performing I cannot survive," said Gazi in his instant reaction over his inclusion in the side for the two-match T20I series against South Africa.

The concern was whether he can bowl the same way as he did in the past after remodelling his action and how ready he was to return to action after his long hiatus since his last ODI in August last year against the West Indies.

There was however no shortage of confidence in the bowler.

"My action has not changed much. My action resembled the other spinners and I practised like that. Everything is okay now. I played the national league, the Dhaka league and BCL and I am satisfied with my action. Yes, I may feel a bit nervous but I prepared myself to make a new start," said a confident Gazi, who cleared the test in his second attempt in Chennai after he was suspended on October 8 last year.

Gazi was reported during the second ODI against West Indies in August last year which had virtually shattered his dream of playing the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

When his attention was drawn to Pakistan off-spinner Mohammad Hafeez, who is again embroiled in problems after remodelling his action, Gazi said, "I always took videos in my mobile phone and I don't think there is any problem. And I worked hard with my action; even bowling 800 deliveries in a single day."

Gazi made sure to thank his family who supported him through the tough time.

"I must thank my family for their support. Whoever supports you in the bad times is a genuine friend. I had to do everything myself but still I needed some support and I got it from my family, not any other people."

"I know very well what one should need to do to get a place in the national team. I can only benefit through hard work and nothing else," he concluded.

Aussies suffer Harris blow

AFP, London

Australia fast bowler Ryan Harris's hopes of being fit for next week's first Ashes Test suffered a blow on Wednesday with a recurrence of the knee trouble that has blighted his career.

The setback ruled him out of the team's final warm-up match against Essex.

Although officials labelled Harris's latest injury as nothing more serious than "soreness" it may well be enough to keep him out of the side when Australia launch their defence of the Ashes on July 8.

Harris missed Australia's recent series win in the West Indies in order to be present for the birth of his child.



The Proteas had their first training session at Bangladesh's home of cricket in Mirpur yesterday. They are a team who are yet to concede a game in the Tigers' den across all formats.

PHOTO: STAR

IN A NUTSHELL

Gayle outdoes Samuels, Guptill

Chris Gayle's red hot T20 form carried over to Warner Park in St Kitts where his unbeaten 72 led Jamaica Tallawahs to a seven-wicket win against St Kitts and Nevis Patriots, overhauling their total of 160. Gayle finished the chase with a pulled four, taking his team to their second win of the season.

Gayle's aggressive knock, which included six fours two sixes, was not without shaky moments though. After drinks were taken with the score at 71 for 1 in 10, play resumed with Gayle, on 28, hitting the third ball of the 11th over from Marlon Samuels to long-on where Martin Guptill's one-handed effort nearly produced a sensational catch.

Kyrgios courts trouble again

Nick Kyrgios fired another verbal volley at Wimbledon officials on Wednesday following his fine after shouting "dirty scum" in a row with umpire Mohamed Lahyani in his first round match.

The 20-year-old Australian started off by grumbling about the hot weather and his own performance, saying: "Every time I bend over, I feel like I'm gonna pass out" and then "I can't make a ball, I can't make a ball, I can't do anything right now."

Then Kyrgios snapped angrily to a line judge saying: "Is that a threat? Does it feel good to be in the chair up there? Do you feel strong up there?"

Kyrgios wasn't finished and he told the line judge: "You're a real champion. Did you get your point across?"

It isn't the first time Kyrgios has fallen foul of the officials at a major event. He received four fines totalling \$11,000 at the Australian Open in January after shouting at one spectator to "get off your fucking phone", while berating some others for sneaking out halfway through his fourth round match.

The analyst's assistant

When South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis indicated that the visitors had left no stones unturned while preparing for this series, not many in Bangladesh expected to see the team using a drone to analyse the visitors' performances.



Flying above the likes of AB de Villiers and du Plessis during training was a drone, which reportedly belonged to their team analyst.

Now that's not a scene that one gets to see every day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Compiled by Star Sport Desk

Tickets to go on sale tomorrow

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Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) revealed the ticket rates for the Bangladesh-South Africa cricket series to be held in Dhaka and Chittagong.

UCash tickets will be available for collection two days prior to each match at designated UCB branches and physical tickets will be available at designated UCB branches one day before each match.

Mirpur will host both T20Is (July 5 and July 7), the first two ODIs (July 10 and July 12) and the second Test (July 30 to August 3) while the third and final ODI (July 15) and the first Test (July 21-25) will be held at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong.

UCB's ticket selling outlets and booths have also been announced. For the Mirpur matches, the Mirpur branch will be the only one physically selling tickets, while Pragati Sarani, Mirpur Road, Shantinagar and Uttara branches will be making UCash sales.

The outlets and booths for the Test and ODI in Chittagong will also have one location physically selling tickets; Halishahar branch, The Dampara, Muradpur and Anderkilla branches will be making UCash sales.

TICKET PRICES FOR TWO T20I AND TWO ODIs AT MIRPUR: BCB Hospitality Lounge-Tk 3000, Grand Stand North/South-Tk 3000, VIP Stand-Tk 1000, Shahid Mustaque/Jewel Stand-Tk 500, North/South Stand-Tk 250 and Eastern Stand-Tk 150.

TICKET PRICES FOR SECOND TEST AT MIRPUR: BCB Hospitality Lounge-Tk 1000, Grand Stand North/South-Tk 500, VIP Stand-Tk 300, Shahid Mustaque/Jewel Stand-Tk 200, North/South Stand-Tk 80 and Eastern Stand-Tk 50.

TICKET PRICES FOR THIRD ODI AT CHITTAGONG: Grand Stand-Tk 3000, International Stand-Tk 1000, Club House East/West-Tk 500, Western Stand-Tk 250, Eastern Stand-Tk 150.

TICKET PRICES FOR FIRST TEST AT CHITTAGONG: Grand Stand-Tk 500, International Stand-Tk 300, Club House East/West-Tk 200, Western Stand-Tk 80, Eastern Stand-Tk 50.

Faf did his homework

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During Mahendra Singh Dhoni's maiden press conference last month, he was asked if he had seen the way Bangladesh performed against Pakistan -- a series which ended a couple of weeks before India's arrival.

A slightly embarrassed Dhoni admitted that he didn't exactly find the time to observe Bangladesh's players during that series but that the team would dig in the video archive to gain some more information on the younger Bangladeshi national players.

In comparison, it was a completely different atmosphere during South Africa's maiden press conference yesterday. South Africa's T20 skipper Faf du Plessis seemed as though he had done his homework.

"I watched quite a bit of the India series. There are nice young guys coming through for Bangladesh. It's incredible that Bangladesh is playing good cricket. It's good for world cricket. They are no longer minnows. They are beating big nations. It's great to see them beat India. It's a nice opportunity for a smaller team to show what they are all about," said du Plessis.

"And it also makes us come here and respect their capabilities as a team. They have played really well. But we wouldn't want any other way. We have got a strong squad. We are going to play the best players to try and beat Bangladesh," he added.

Du Plessis admitted that he was a bit surprised when he saw pacers dominate in Bangladesh's last series against India.

"I think that's a surprising factor. When you play against subcontinent teams, you expect spinners turning up and I suppose India would have thought that as well. So that was the surprise of the series. There were so many good seamers coming up in that series," said du Plessis.

"Whether they will do the same against us, I am not sure. I assume that because they did pretty well, you don't think they are going to change too much but there will probably be a bit more spin option against us," he added.

He also mentioned that he was aware of Mustafizur Rahman, the young left-arm pacer whose 13 wickets in the series led Bangladesh to the historic series win.

"I have had a look at him while watching the game. But we haven't had a closer look at him. We didn't really sit down on his video footages as yet. I did see that he did really well. But we can learn from the way India didn't play too well against him. We can make changes," explained du Plessis.

A crucial factor that will play a role in the series, according to du Plessis, is the temperature. Describing the conditions as a challenge, the South African believed that his side would be able to overcome it soon.

South Africa coach Russell Domingo echoed du Plessis's sentiments. He recalled the fact that South Africa had beaten Sri Lanka in both Test and ODI series in 2014, the last time they toured the subcontinent. They also beat Pakistan in the UAE back in November 2013.

"I think South Africa's record in the subcontinent has been good in the recent past. The subcontinent seems to bring out the best of South Africa. The guys really connect well as a team," said Domingo.