



IT'S NOW TIME TO FOCUS ON TEST: The members of the Bangladesh Test team play a game of football as part of their preparation for the opening Test against South Africa that starts in the port city from July 21.

PHOTO:
ANURUP KANTI DAS

At home, but not at ease

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

One would ideally expect a team to take at least a day's break after achieving a historical landmark. After all, it's not everyday that a team gets to beat South Africa in an ODI series. So it wouldn't have been a crime had the Bangladesh national team members taken time off after completing the 2-1 series victory.

However, barely 12 hours after the win, Bangladesh's Test players were up and rolling in a training session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday afternoon.

Sure enough, a couple of the players -- Shakib Al Hasan and Rubel Hossain -- who were in the ODI squad were given a break, but the rest of them ensured that they made the most of the sessions just before being dismissed for the Eid holidays.

This is the kind of seriousness that Bangladesh's team management needs to show with regards to Test cricket. They may have turned the numbers around in ODIs, but when it comes to Test cricket, there is still plenty of room to learn.

The last two Tests, against Pakistan and India, didn't go too well for the Tigers. They went down to Pakistan, but they managed to hold their nerve and draw against India in a rain-affected Test. While the result was jotted down as a draw, rest assured, the Tigers of the new era wouldn't have been happy with the way they played in that lone Test against India.

The ODIs saw Mashrafe Bin Mortaza marshal his men quite well in order to complete the turnaround. And when it comes to the Tests, a lot will depend on Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim as well.

To put it straight, Mushfiqur hasn't been enjoying his run lately. In the last five Tests, his batting average has been a dismal 9.2. Ever since he had that finger injury against Pakistan, things haven't been the same for the player.

There's no doubt that Mushfiqur will have to play a vital role for the Tigers in the next two Tests. If he can hit form with the bat, he can hold Bangladesh's middle-order together and provide the team with plenty of stability.

The good news for Mushfiqur is that the Test team looks a lot stronger than

the one that played against India.

The return of Mahmudullah Riyad from injury will definitely suit the top order. He will also be happy to see inform Nasir Hossain in the side, who was chosen ahead of Shuvagata Hom, since the latter failed to live up to the role that was expected of him both with the bat and the ball. With Nasir churning in good turners in the ODIs and having runs under his belt, he could use this opportunity to seal his position in the Test team.

He will also have the services of Rubel Hossain and Mustafizur Rahman. While Rubel was in the Test squad for India, he was rested in a bid to keep him fresh for the ODIs.

On the other hand, the inclusion of Mustafizur could very well change the dynamics of this bowling line-up. Whether the team management will go in with Mustafizur on a generally placid Chittagong track remains a question.

However, the 19-year-old isn't a newbie when it comes to the longer version of the game. He made his first-class debut in 2014 and ever since then notched up quite a few four-wicket hauls in the domestic circuit.

In fact, Walton Central Zone -- the franchisee that he plays for -- had opted to play him in the longer version of the Bangladesh Cricket League as opposed to the 50-over competition that took place recently.

With the bowling attack looking stronger, the batting order likewise seems to be in good touch. Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar and Mahmudullah will be hoping they can carry on with the momentum gained from the ODIs, while Mominul Haque will hope to make the most of the Tests after being excluded from the ODIs.

Speaking to reporters at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday, Riyad said that he expected the players to perform much better in this Test series compared to the previous ones.

"Since we are all in a good mood after winning the ODI series, we will feel a lot better in the Tests. So, in that aspect, I am hoping for a better result in this Test series," he said.

"The one thing that I would like to emphasise on is that we are not a big team yet. We need to play consistent cricket more regularly in order to reach that level. Hopefully we can do that," he concluded.



'Not winning, dominating'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha described Bangladesh's ODI run in 2015 as a big achievement.

The Tigers have won their last four ODI series played at home against Zimbabwe, Pakistan, India and, most recently, South Africa. The results this year have been sheer contrast to their dreadful run in 2014.

Following Wednesday's nine-wicket win over South Africa at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Hathurusingha thanked his players for the 'amazing feat'.

"In terms of looking at all of Bangladesh cricket and the rest of the team and the coaching staff, it's a big achievement because we won three big series."

"I think at the start of the Pakistan series, if you would have asked me, I would have said 'Oh, I don't believe this'. So this is an amazing feat from the players," the Sri Lankan told GTV after the match.

The changes that the team underwent under Hathurusingha -- who was hired barely six months before the World Cup -- have been obvious. The team has played with an attacking spirit that was missing throughout 2014 and this was one of the key reasons why they had been successful in the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand, apart from winning the four series at home.

Explaining the kind of work that he did with the side, he said, "I think it's all about giving them a clear role based on their strengths and what they are capable of rather than telling them to do certain things which they cannot do. It's all about having a game-plan based on their strengths."

"When they give effort, you praise them; not the outcome. So that's the main thing. They are comfortable in their own skins and in the environment that we have created with the coaches," he added.

Riding high on the confidence of the back-to-back series wins, the

coach believed that his side could do well abroad as well and that it wasn't just the 'home-advantage' that brought the Tigers all the glory this year.

"Until we play outside, maybe some people will doubt us. But I don't think so, because of the way we are playing and winning matches. It's not that we are scraping through to wins, we are dominating games."

"And then we are improving with every game. In this series we won after three losses so that showed the character. The condition is whatever is in front of us, we can only play," said the Sri Lankan.

"In the World Cup we played in different conditions and beat England and then gave New Zealand a good run. So I don't see anyone doubting us. We do not doubt ourselves," a smiling Hathurusingha added.

There's no doubt that it was the team effort that led the Tigers to their brilliant comeback in the South Africa series. The bowlers kept their composure throughout the series and all of them bowled miserly figures.

And due credit should go to skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who held his composure throughout the series and inspired his team to come back. His field placements and bowling changes throughout the series worked well for the hosts; therefore it wasn't a surprise that the coach lauded the skipper.

"Oh he's a great leader. He is a leader of men and the way he is leading on the field despite all these injuries and getting the respect of the players, that's really amazing," said the coach.

He also had special words reserved for the player-of-the-series, Soumya Sarkar, whose fluent stroke-play at the top did half the job itself for the hosts in the second and third ODIs.

"Soumya is world class. From the start I was really, really amazed by his talent and he is proving to everyone how good he is. I am not surprised by the way he is playing," said Hathurusingha.

PCB engages Wasim in talent hunt

DAWN.COM, Lahore

Having avoided any association with former captain and pace bowling icon Wasim Akram since his retirement from international cricket, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has decided to engage him indirectly via a sponsor in a country-wide talent hunt campaign for fast bowlers.

In a news release on Wednesday, the PCB announced that it is starting a talent hunt for pacemen with a leading business house.

"The PCB, together with LG, announces the start of the Super Speed Star Campaign, a nationwide search for the best young bowlers in the country. The campaign is set to officially get underway on July 23 with a series of trials taking place in five different cities. Bowlers selected during the trials will travel to Karachi and join leading fast bowlers for a 12-day camp with Pakistani great Wasim Akram," the PCB said.

According to the schedule the trials will be held in Peshawar on July 23, in Mirpur on July 27, in Multan on July 29, in Sukkur on July 30 and in Quetta on July 30 and 31.

The camp carries a prize money of Rs 30,000 to be divided among the top bowlers of the camp, the PCB stated.

During this year's ICC

Solid start for Oz

AFP, London

Chris Rogers was in sight of a coveted hundred at Lord's as Australia consolidated their strong position against England on Thursday's first day of the second Ashes Test.

At tea, Australia were 191 for one, with Rogers 81 not out and Steven Smith -- dropped on 50 -- 62 not out.

The pair had so far added an unbroken 113 for the second wicket.

Left-hander Rogers -- who plans to retire after this series -- knows the home of cricket well from his time with Lord's-based county side Middlesex.

This was the 37-year-old's seventh fifty in eight Test innings although none of those knocks had yet led to a century.

Australia got through the second session without losing a wicket and although a run-rate of under four an over was relatively slow by modern standards, they would have had few complaints about their position.

The only setback so far for the Ashes holders, looking to level the five-match series at 1-1 after England's 169-run win in

the first Test in Cardiff last week, was the loss of David Warner for a well-made 38 before lunch.

Australia captain Michael Clarke won the toss and elected to bat first on what looked another typically good Lord's pitch.

Initially overcast skies offered a hint of swing movement but long before tea the sun had broken through as conditions for batting eased.

The first over saw Rogers fortunate to survive when he edged an intended drive off James Anderson just over the top of the slips for four.

Warner is known as the more aggressive of Australia's two left-handed openers.

But it took him 25 balls to score his first four on Thursday, pulling first-change Mark Wood.

Rogers did not look secure and repeatedly played and missed.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 191 for 1 (Rogers 81 not out, Warner 38, Smith 62 not out; Moeen 1-35)

ENGLAND: Cook, Lyth, Ballance, Bell, Root, Stokes, Buttler, Moeen, Broad, Wood, Anderson.



Australia opener Chris Rogers plays the ball on the off-side during the opening day's play of the second Ashes Test against England at Lord's yesterday.

PHOTO:
AFP



After missing the first part of the tour, South Africa pace spearhead Dale Steyn (R) yesterday joined the Proteas for the two-match Test series.

PHOTO:
STAR

Younis not retiring

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan veteran Younis Khan has vowed to hold off retiring until he has guided his team to Test series victories in England and Australia to cap off a remarkable career.

The 37-year-old played his hundredth Test on the tour of Sri Lanka earlier this month and struck a brilliant 171 not out in Pakistan's run chase of 377 to anchor the win in the third and final match in Pallekele.

The win gave Pakistan a 2-1 series victory, their first in Sri Lanka since 2006.

But Younis insisted he was not ready to put away his pads yet.

"My only focus is on these two T20s - I'm not thinking about the IPL," Rahane said on

My only focus is on T20s

Says Rahane ahead of first Zim-Ind game today

AFP, Harare

India's stand-in captain Ajinkya Rahane insists that his squad's focus is on two Twenty20 internationals against Zimbabwe and not the turmoil rocking the Indian Premier League.

The Justice Lodhar Committee announced on Tuesday that the Chennai Super Kings and Rajasthan Royals would be suspended from the IPL for two years over illegal betting leaving players from the two franchises unsure of a contract next year.

Rahane is one of five affected players who could take the field against Zimbabwe in Friday's first T20, along with his Rajasthan teammates Stuart Binny, Dhawal Kulkarni and Sanju Samson, and Chennai seamer Mohit Sharma.

"We were completely focused on the third ODI on Tuesday, and with the T20s we'll just focus on the game. We want to give our best against Zimbabwe and win both games."

Sanju Samson has joined up with the Indian squad, who swept Zimbabwe 3-0 in the one-day series, and will provide competition to Robin Uthappa in the

Thursday.

"If you represent your country, your only aim is to give your best for your country and win matches for them."

There was more bad news for Indian franchise cricket on Wednesday, when it was confirmed that the Champions League Twenty20 would be scrapped with immediate effect.

Asked whether the Indian squad had been speaking about the developments, Rahane said: "No not at all - we haven't discussed anything."

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