

# Tigers aim for Eden *tour de force*

AL-AMIN from Eden Gardens

The last time Bangladesh played an international match at the famous Eden Gardens in Kolkata was way back in 1990. It was an Asia Cup one-day match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka that the latter won by a massive margin of 71 runs. On a personal note it was a memorable game for Athar Ali Khan, the Bangladesh opener who scored a fabulous unbeaten 78.

26 years on, a new generation of Bangladesh cricketers will take the field at the historic venue, facing India's first High Court building, against Pakistan in a different format of the game today.

On that day in December in 1990, when Akram Khan played and scored four, his nephew Tamim Iqbal was only one year old, Shakib Al Hasan and Musfiquur Rahim were only three. Among the present lot, skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, aged seven then, could only understand a bit of cricket. The rest -- like Sabbir Rahman, Mustafizur Rahman and Taskin Ahmed -- were not even born.

Among all the cricketers now representing a vibrant Tigers, only Shakib has the experience of playing at the Eden Gardens, which is the home ground of Kolkata Knight Riders, the IPL franchisee he plays for. Tamim and Mushfiquur was part of the junior team to have played here against the selections of Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB).

But those games or even Shakib's IPL experiences are nothing compared to today's high-octane game against Pakistan, especially fol-

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LAST MEETING

Asia Cup T20 on March 2, 2016, Dhaka: Bangladesh won by 5 wickets with 5 balls to spare



lowing Bangladesh's five straight wins against them in the shorter formats on home soil over the last year.

To play at Eden is a dream for any cricketer and the Bangladesh captain was no exception. "Of course, Mirpur is my dream venue. But ven-

ues like Lord's, MCG and Eden are special grounds for any cricketer. I'm excited to play on this ground and I think the rest of my teammates are equally eager to play a very important match on this ground," said Mashrafe at the pre-match briefing. But what is the difference between

Bangladesh's last game 26 years ago and the one they will play today? Athar Ali Khan can explain it better than anybody else.

"I was lucky that day [to get the man-of-the-match award]. What I remember most was the velvety outfield and once the ball hit through the

gap it was four. But this generation of cricketers is completely different. They are an exciting team to watch no matter against whom they are playing. Athar said at Dharamsala airport on Monday.

Truly, this new brand of Tigers is different in mindset -- which is aggressive -- and different in terms of quality, which is versatile, and most importantly loves to take the fight to the best in the business. As a reporter I have travelled frequently in the 90s and have had the experience of attending press briefings where when the opposing captain or coach, while confronted with the question of how big a challenge Bangladesh could pose, irrevocably came up with that clichéd answer: "Oh, they are an up and coming side and we are not taking them lightly."

But at a crowded press briefing at Eden Gardens with Pakistan coach Waqar Younis in attendance, when a Pakistani journalist asked him whether he thought it was a '50-50 match', there was something in the air and nobody thought it was clichéd question.

The home of former Indian captain Saurav Ganguly and of India's most respected and imaginative cricket administrator Jagmohan Dalmiya, Eden is a place where a lot of cricketing history was made and of them all perhaps VVS Laxman's imperious 281 stands out. Whether or not it creates another piece of history, the Bangladesh-Pakistan game will start in earnest with full entertainment value in front of a 68,000-capacity stadium. Perhaps there will be a small measure of disappointment that Bangladesh's best friend on a cricketing plane, Jagoda, who as ICC president was instrumental in Bangladesh's ascension to Test status in 2000, will not be around.

## Return of the Fizz?

SPORTS REPORTER from Kolkata

Won't it be an interesting coincidence for Bangladesh's new pace sensation Mustafizur Rahman to make his World Cup debut against the team who were also his opponents in his international debut nearly a year ago?

Cricket fans talk more about his 11-wicket burst against India in the first two games of the three-match ODI series that Bangladesh won 2-1. But it was against Pakistan that the lithe left-arm pace bowler made his first impression in the lone T20I in Bangladesh's home of cricket in Mirpur.

His first international wicket was Shahid Afridi, the

Mustafizur was the focal point of discussion at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday, ahead of Bangladesh's opening group game of the Super Ten stage against Pakistan at the famous venue today. From press briefing to cricketing discussions, the one question that did the round was whether Mustafizur will make his World Cup debut at the Eden Gardens today?

The Bangladesh team management did not give a straightforward answer.

"He has improved a lot. We have 24 hours to make a decision on him after assessing his fitness," Mashrafe said at the briefing. While Mashrafe was attending the press conference, Mustafizur started bowling for the first time in 16 days [he bowled a few overs at Dharamsala on March 13] since suffering a side strain against Sri Lanka in the Asia Cup on February 28.

Mustafizur started his bowling with a short run-up at around 3.10pm with Tamim Iqbal taking strike in the Eden nets. Then tape was rolled to mark his full run-up and he bowled at full pace for nearly an hour without showing any sign of discomfort. He also took part in a fielding session with Al-Amin at the far end of the ground, showing every sign of playing Bangladesh's most important game of ICC's flagship event.

The Eden wicket, which takes spin, is also an ideal pitch for Mustafizur to use his cutters effectively. Although there is a notion that he was not fully fit and also lacked any match practice, it is absolutely imperative for Bangladesh to introduce him against Pakistan because if Bangladesh can win their opening game, it will set them on the right path to the knock-out stage of the tournament.

With Mustafizur around it not only adds variety to the Tigers' bowling, but more importantly it will act as insurance for Mashrafe, both in desperate and good times. And unless something extraordinary happens, the young pace bowling sensation is all set to walk onto the world stage at one of the world's premier venues.



**MUSTAFIZUR'S RETURN:** Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman is observed by coach Chandika Hathurusingha during practice in the Eden Gardens yesterday. He is expected to return from a side strain and feature against Pakistan today. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

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Pakistan captain who did not like his dismissal after being deceived by those famous cutters the world took note of for the first time. The 20-year-old's second wicket was Mohammed Hafeez. After failing to negotiate the slow cutters, the Pakistan opener tried to do something different. He shuffled across with an intention to flick from his off-stump. But he was absolutely dumbfounded by an intelligent leg-stump yorker that disturbed his furniture.

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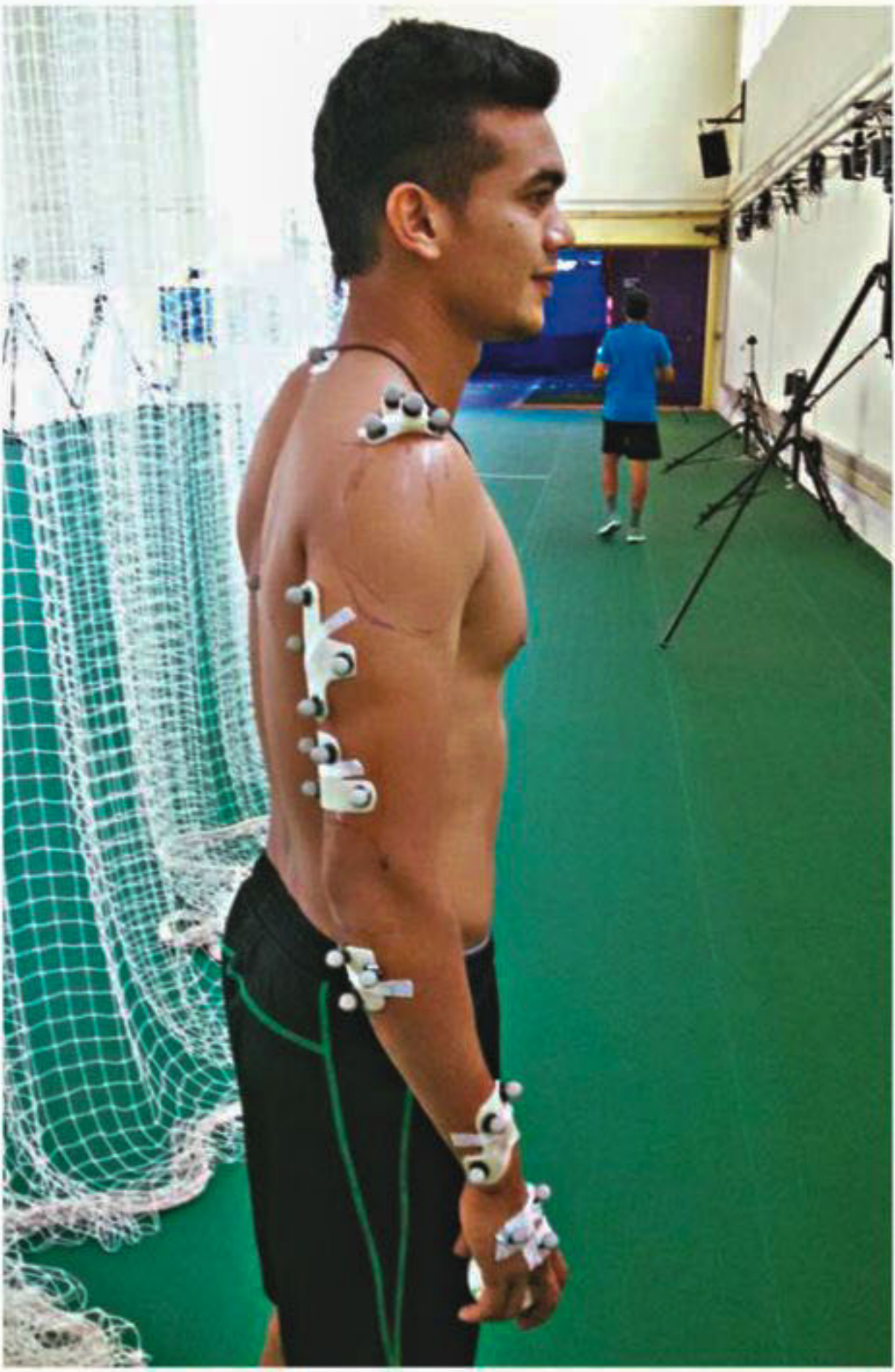
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PERFORMER OF THE DAY

SENSATIONAL SANTNER

When Mitchell Santner made his Test debut against Australia in November last year he did not set the world alight but what came through was the ease with which he batted and bowled, as if he belonged at the highest level. He carried that calm into the frenzy of T20Is as he blew India off their own pitch with fabulous figures of four for 11 off four overs. The Indians had prepared a dry pitch that turned square in the hope that their spinners skittle the Kiwis out, instead it was Santner who extracted sharp turn which, coupled with his accuracy, proved too hot to handle for the Indian batsmen who are known to be good at playing spin. Rohit Sharma was beaten by spin and stranded out of his crease, Suresh Raina panicked when he saw one spit back into him and spooned a catch, Hardik Pandya was trapped in front by a quicker one before the coup de grace -- having a desperate MS Dhoni caught at long-on. Before all that, Santner hit a crucial 18 to take his team to a defendable total.



**Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed uploaded a picture of himself on Facebook at the end of his bowling test in an ICC-accredited centre in Chennai yesterday. He wrote that he expects to receive the results soon and asked his fans to pray for him.** PHOTO: COURTESY

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SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: 126 for 7 in 20 overs (Guptill 6, Williamson 8, Munro 7, Anderson 34, Taylor 10, Santner 18, Elliot 9, Ronchi 21 not out, extras 13; Ashwin 1-32, Jadeja 1-26, Nehra 1-21, Bumrah 1-15, Raina 1-15)

INDIA: 79 all out in 18.1 overs (Sharma 5, Kohli 25, Yuvraj 4, Dhoni 30, Ashwin 10, extras 4; McCullum 2-15, Santner 4-11, Sodhi 3-18, Milne 1-8)

Result: New Zealand won by 47 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Mitchell Santner.

## Kapali fuels East Zone

SPORTS REPORTER



Alok Kapali continued his good

form with 111 as title contenders East Zone consolidated their position against South Zone on the second day of the final round of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) match in Fatullah yesterday.

In Mirpur, league leaders Central Zone put in a poor showing with the bat as they finished the day trailing North Zone by 156 runs with four wickets in hand. A 77-run last wicket partnership between Dhiman Ghosh and Shafaq Al Zahir helped North Zone -- who resumed the day on 308 for nine -- get to 378.

Almost all the Central

Zone top-order batsman got starts but failed to make a big one as they ended the day at 222 for six.

At Fatullah, Kapali hit 111 off 185 balls and took his team to 422 in the first innings.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**NORTH ZONE:** 378 all out in 110 overs (Farhad 131, Jahurul 38, Sanjamul 70, Dhiman 53 not out, Shafaq 25; Shahid 3-84, Sharif 6-105, Tanveer 1-10) v **CENTRAL ZONE:** 222-6 in 60 overs (Marshall 34, Rakibul 63, Shuvagata 51, Tanveer 16 not out,

Zabid 1 not out; Mahmudul 3-41) **EAST ZONE:** 442 all out in 153.4 overs (Liton 51, Irfan 26, Mominul 78, Tasamul 41, Kapali 111, Sajjad 58; Moynul 4-83, Razzak 3-126) v **SOUTH ZONE:** 101-2 in 30 overs (Nafees 36, Anamul 26, Tushar 23 not out)

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