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| HEAD-TO-HEAD IN WT20 | | |
|--|--------|---------|
| NEW ZEALAND | PLAYED | ENGLAND |
| 2 | 4 | 2 |
| IN ALL T20Is | | |
| 4 | 13 | 8 |
| LAST MEETING: June 23, 2015 in Manchester England won by 56 runs. | | |



PHOTOS: AFP

Today's World Twenty20 first semifinal between New Zealand and England will see some of the most talented batsmen in the world take centre stage. The Black Caps' best may be captain Kane Williamson, but firebrand Martin Guptill (L) is expected to lead from the front in the shortest format, while England boast the sublime talents of Joe Root (R).

Tests back on the agenda

BISHWAJIT ROY



The singing of the T20 song is still ongoing, which is natural as the national team have just returned home after playing the ICC World Twenty20 in India. The autopsy of the performance, analysis, future plans and much more are being discussed regarding the Tigers' possibility to make a mark on the shortest version of the game, which will reflect their ascendancy in the 50-over competition.

Bangladesh is probably the only country who is so engrossed in limited-overs cricket for such a long time. Under the charismatic leadership of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, the Tigers achieved one landmark after another in limited-overs cricket since the ICC World Cup last year in Australia-New Zealand which has apparently placed the urgency to improve their Test cricket in the backseat. So when the Tigers will go to play their first Test after nearly a year-long break in August this year, will the same old cry for the need to play more longer-version cricket return if Bangladesh continue to struggle in the format?

So far the Tigers have hardly any chance to play any longer-version match before their return to Test cricket when they travel to India to play their first Test on Indian soil in August this year. The only domestic competition they will play before then is a 50-over league. Bangladesh played their last Test series against South Africa in July-August last year, that too a heavily rain-affected one. The country hosted its last domestic longer-version competition, the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), without their key national players.

The Bangladesh team management will rely on practice sessions for Test preparation, but the importance of match practice cannot be overlooked. One need not look too far back for examples; while Mashrafe's leadership and coach Chandika Hathurusingha's planning helped Bangladesh show signs of improvement in T20 during the Asia Cup and the World T20, one cannot deny the substantial impact of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) on that improvement.

"It will be a big challenge and nothing would have been better than getting a few longer-version matches before the Test return but now we have to live with the reality that some of our players played BCL and most of the players are experienced in Test cricket," said chief selector Faruque Ahmed, who was satisfied with the team's recent T20 improvement.

"Because of the schedule we have no other option other than to plan well for practice and I am sure like limited-overs cricket our team management will set a good plan for the Test return. Still you can create good habits only by playing in the middle, so we need to adjust our calendar in the future," he continued.

The Tigers have certainly turned a corner in limited-overs cricket, but they need to show their character in Test cricket - the oldest format of the game -- to earn enduring respect. Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim probably described it best when after the last away series in Sri Lanka: "You can play as many ODIs and T20s you want, but Test cricket is the ultimate. You have periods of long struggle in Test cricket, it builds character and confidence."

'We're similar to 2010 champs' We just have to execute: Kane

REUTERS, New Delhi



England have made stunning progress in limited overs cricket over the last year and the current World Twenty20 squad have much in common with the champion 2010 side, skipper Eoin Morgan said ahead of Wednesday's semi-final against New Zealand.

Morgan was at the non-striker's end when then skipper Paul Collingwood scored the winning run to seal England's seven-wicket win against Australia in the Bridgetown final in the third edition of the tournament.

Six years since the triumph, Collingwood is now a consultant with the team and Morgan believes he leads a side far better than the bunch who crashed out of last year's 50-overs World Cup after a defeat by Bangladesh.

"I can't quite believe where we are with our one-day cricket and Twenty20 cricket," Morgan told reporters at the Feroz Shah Kotla Stadium.

"The guys that we've selected have done outstandingly well and shown a great amount of attitude in learning."

The 29-year-old has no illusions about the challenge ahead as his team take on a New Zealand side who stormed into the

REUTERS, New Delhi



New Zealand captain Kane Williamson is too familiar with the fickleness of cricket's shortest format to take his team's red-hot form for granted going into Wednesday's World Twenty20 semi-final against England.

The Kiwis cruised into the last four as the only unbeaten team in the tournament to book a clash with England who seem to be peaking at the right time.

"I know that going into tomorrow, it's a big, exciting match but our feet are firmly on the ground and we going to be running to perform our plans as best as we can," the 25-year-old told reporters at the Feroz Shah Kotla.

Williamson has displayed the tactical

flexibility required to win a major tournament by sacrificing pace and gambling with spinners, a ploy that paid off in the tournament opener against hosts India.

The presence of three left-handers -- Eoin Morgan, Ben Stokes and Moeen Ali -- in the England lineup could tempt him to try the trick again.

"We need to look at the condition before we decide on our final side," Williamson said.

"Naturally we'll consider the track we're playing on, the ground size and also the opposition."

He does not think of such moves as surprises.

"In terms of my perspective and our coach, they are not surprises to us," Williamson said.

"We simply tried to pick horses for courses, our best side on the condi-

tions at any given time. That certainly won't change in terms of philosophy."

England will go into the match with better knowledge of local conditions, having played their last two games at Kotla.

New Zealand have played their four group matches in four venues before landing in a fifth Indian city for the semi.

"England's been fortunate to play on these conditions a couple of times but I think in Twenty20 cricket, anything can happen," said Williamson, taking a light-hearted view of his team's city-hopping itinerary.

"That's great, we've been out to see more of India than most opposition sides," he added.

"Surely it happens just by coincidence. The guys braced the flights and enjoyed the variety of hotels," he said, causing laughter in the room.

Taskin to be test-ready in 6 weeks

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh bowling coach Heath Streak reckons that it will take Taskin Ahmed a little over a month to attempt his second bowling test at an International Cricket Council (ICC) accredited

centre. As per the ICC's norms, once a bowler has been banned from bowling he needs to go through remedial work and apply for a re-examination. He will only be allowed to bowl in international cricket if he passes the test.

Streak, who began working with Taskin on Monday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, is confident that the pacer would be ready within a month's time.

"Because we have not got any international cricket [over the next few months] we don't have any time-pressure. I think he can go for the test within one month to six weeks time. We just need to be a hundred percent sure before we send him to get reinstated. I don't think it's a major problem for us," Streak told the media following a session with Taskin at Mirpur yesterday.

"Hopefully he will get comfortable with some of the modifications [in his action] that I suggested and after that he can give it a go," he added.

When asked if there was any particular test centre that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) wanted to send Taskin to, Streak said: "It does not

matter. All the labs use exactly the same technology, whether it's Chennai, Cape Town, or Australia. It's all the same."

The umpires reported Taskin during Bangladesh's first-round ICC World Twenty20 game against the Netherlands. He then had to give the test at a centre in Chennai, after which his action was found to be illegal.



HEATH STREAK

According to Streak, the few sessions that he is conducting for Taskin will focus on a specific set of deliveries rather than a complete overhaul of his bowling action.

"His action has never changed. It's been the same ever since I saw him first and honestly

speaking we never really had any reason to suspect him and I was surprised [when Taskin was reported]."

"All his yorkers, length deliveries and most of his bouncers were fine. Three out of his nine bouncers [as per the ICC report] were over the limit. In fact all his quick bouncers were within the legal limit. It was actually his slower ones that maybe caused a bit of concern. I don't think it's a big problem and we can get back him to play soon," said Streak.

Furthermore, Streak also believes that the BCB should form a committee that focuses on bowlers bowling with suspect actions in domestic cricket.

"I think it's [the bowling action problem] not just Bangladesh, but it's around the globe. Since there are facilities available to test them, I think they should be sent there automatically just to get fixed and cleared. That should be the case at least with the players who have a chance of playing in the national team."

"Taskin and [Arafat] Sunny aren't the first ones, there are lots of people with suspect actions. They should be tested. With the naked eye, it's hard to tell," he said.

Streak, who is joining the Indian Premier League (IPL) team Gujarat Lions as a bowling coach from May, has neared the end of his contract with Bangladesh. He is however hoping to continue with the BCB and has put in a request to the board.

Gayle wary of India firepower

AFP, Mumbai

Chris Gayle lauded Virat Kohli as a "world beater" on Tuesday but warned that the West Indies were ready to upset hosts India in their World Twenty20 semifinal on Thursday.

Big-hitting Gayle said the form of Kohli, who is the highest scorer of players still in the tournament with 184 runs, was "no surprise" and jokingly urged him not to fire on all cylinders.

"I have said it over the years that he is going to be the world beater he is today," Gayle told reporters in Mumbai ahead of the last-four clash at the Wankhede Stadium.

"I am hoping, please don't fire, Virat. He can still get runs but for a losing cause. We'll be happy with that as well," joked Gayle, 36.

"We are not going to focus on only Virat, there are so many match-winners there and anyone of them can actually fire on any particular day."

Waqar ready to resign

AFP, Lahore



Pakistan's head coach Waqar Younis Tuesday begged forgiveness from the nation and said he was prepared to resign after his team was eliminated from the World Twenty20.

The 2009 champions have been widely blasted by fans following a lacklustre performance with just one victory against lowly ranked Bangladesh and big losses to India, New Zealand and Australia.

Team members were jeered on their return this weekend by huge crowds at Lahore airport, who chanted "Shame! Shame!"

Addressing a press conference at the Pakistan Cricket Board headquarters in Lahore on

Tuesday, Younis said: "I place my hands together and beg forgiveness from the nation." The fast-bowling legend, who was hired as head coach for a second time in 2014, added that he was prepared to stand down if it was in the team's best interest.

"If my leaving makes things better, then I would do it without delay," he said.

He also echoed calls made last week for a revamp of the country's domestic structure, and added that the malaise stemmed from Pakistan's lack of home games.

"When there is no cricket at home then the foundation will for sure become weak," he said.

Pakistan's early exit prompted a wave of criticism in the cricket mad country, with veterans like Shahid Afridi and Shoaib Malik singled out.

Watto bows out at the top

AGENCIES, Brisbane



Shane Watson has finished his international career as the number one ranked all-rounder in Twenty20s, according to the International Cricket Council's (ICC's) player rankings announced today.

Courtesy of strong performances with both bat and ball in the ongoing World Twenty20, Watson retained his spot at the top of the all-rounder rankings, ahead of Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan at second and Pakistan captain Shahid Afridi at third.

Watson announced mid-tournament

that this World Twenty20 would be his last appearance in Australian colours and was influential in his final tournament.

After solid performances in his preferred opening position for Australia's first two World T20 matches, Watson was moved to the unfamiliar spot of six for their last two games but demonstrated his versatility, smashing a crucial 44 off 21 against Pakistan and then 18 off 16 against India.

He was also vital with the ball, picking up five wickets for the tournament and was the pick of Australia's bowlers in their loss to India, finishing with 2-23 off four miserly overs.



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