

SPORT

A lifeline for the out of favour

SPORTS REPORTER

When former international players are included in a preliminary squad, it does not necessarily signal a revival of their international careers but it does provide some hope. Above all, it sends the message to those players that their careers are not over. This sentiment was reflected in Shahriar Nafees's comments when he said that it was like a lifeline for him after the left-hander was drafted into the 30-member preliminary squad announced yesterday for England's tour of Bangladesh in October this year. The camp will start at Mirpur on July 20.

Rakibul Hasan, who was also rewarded for his domestic performances, voiced a similar sentiment. "The recall only gave me the message that everything is not finished yet. I can still live with my dream of returning to the national side."

The new selection committee of which Akram Khan, the cricket operations committee chairman, is the convenor picked their

Premier League]. We want to see his fitness in the prolonged camp as we need a back-up opener for the national side.

"Rakibul is a good player for longer-version cricket and he has been performing well in the domestic competitions. Actually we recalled some older guys not only for their domestic performance but also to see how they take the opportunity during a long camp," said selection panel chairman Minhajul Abedin.

Nafees was very much aware of his fitness issues. "There had been complaints about my fitness while I was in the national side but I worked really hard with my fitness over the last few years. And definitely I will try my best to improve it in the national camp. I want to capitalise on this chance. The question is not whether I will ultimately get the chance but for me is about how I can ready myself to cash in on any chance," said Nafees.

"In the last one-and-a-half years I worked hard and scored runs with the only hope that it will revive my international career. Now the opportunity has come to me and I



SHAHRIAR NAFEEES



RAKIBUL HASAN

SQUAD

Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Imrul Kayes, Liton Das, Anamul Haque, Mosaddek Hossain, Mohammad Mithun, Shahriar Nafees, Rakibul Hasan, Mominul Haque, Shakib Al Hasan, Mahmudullah Riyad, Nasir Hossain, Mushfiqur Rahim, Nurul Hasan, Shuvagata Hom, Sabbir Rahman, Arafat Sunny, Tajjul Islam, Suhrawardi Shuvo, Jubair Hossain, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Muktar Ali, Kamrul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Al-Amin Hossain, Shaiful Islam, Mohammad Shahid, Taskin Ahmed and Rubel Hossain.

first team and there was no surprise except the recall of players like Nafees, Rakibul and left-arm spinner Suhrawardi Shuvo to the national fold. 28-year old Rakibul's last international match was a Test against West Indies in November 2011, 31-year old Nafees last played against Zimbabwe in April 2013 at Harare and Suhrawardi Shuvo in October 2011 against West Indies.

"We recalled Nafees considering his performances in this year's BCL [Bangladesh Cricket League] and DPL [Dhaka

need to capitalise on it," said Rakibul.

Minhajul however explained the reason behind the exclusion of Marshall Ayub, Shamsur Rahman, Abu Hider Rony and Saqlain Sajib even though they have had substantial performances in the domestic circuit as he said that they have been considered for the High-Performance training.

Meanwhile, England will arrive in Dhaka on September 30 to play two Tests and three ODIs against the Tigers in Dhaka and Chittagong.



Abahani midfielder Sheikh Mohammad Nannu (R) rides a challenge from a Dhaka Wanderers player during their Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey Super League match at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

MSC in a fix over Jimmy record

SPORTS REPORTER



Both Abahani and Mohammedan SC wrapped up their Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League campaign with wins but the scoring spree from both sides marred the Mohammedan SC-Bangladesh SC match at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Abahani handed a 4-2 defeat to Dhaka Wanderers Club to finish third in the league with 36 points

from 16 matches before Mohammedan SC beat Bangladesh SC 7-6 to finish behind Abahani with 35 points from 16 matches.

Mohammedan striker Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, who scored five goals against Usha KC on Wednesday, was once again in the limelight. He scored all seven goals for his side to take his tally in the league to 37 and apparently became the highest scorer in a single league, though former national striker Rafiqul Islam Kamal claims to have scored 40 goals in the premier league in 1996.

The veracity of the claim is open to question as it was made only after Jimmy had eclipsed the mark previously thought to be set at 35 by Kamal in 1996.

While Jimmy's feat was pleasing, some dirty play suddenly appeared as Mohammedan conceded one goal after another without any form of resistance with goalkeeper Rasel Khan Bappi enacting the drama under the post.

The final scoreline of 7-6 helped Bangladesh SC finish fifth, ahead of Wanderers by virtue of a better goal difference. They needed a maximum

of a one-goal difference in yesterday's match to finish ahead of Wanderers.

Wanderers vice-president Sadik Mahatab emerged in the press box to protest and condemned Mohammedan's shameful display of helping Bangladesh SC to fifth.

"Look, it is a fixed match because Mohammedan and Bangladesh SC took to the field with an arrangement that Jimmy would score as many as he needs to become the highest scorer, but Bangladesh SC would lose by a one-goal margin," said Mahatab during play between Mohammedan and Bangladesh SC.

Players want more T20s: FICA report

THE TELEGRAPH



The international cricketers' union has called for a reduction in the number of Test matches in favour of more Twenty20s after a survey of players revealed more than half would reject a central contract to become a free agent.

The Federation of International Cricketers' Associations (FICA) has released a structural review of the game and joined calls for the introduction of Test and one-day leagues to give context to 50 over and Test cricket.

Tony Irish, the chief executive of FICA, presented his report to the International Cricket Council (ICC) in Edinburgh at the board's annual general meeting where structural change is being discussed. The FICA report reveals massive disparity in wages between playing bilateral Test and one-day series and the sums players can earn from being a Twenty20 freelance.

The report estimates that a New Zealand player, for example, can earn around 171,000 pounds from a central contract playing 70 days of international cricket but about 380,000 pounds by playing 32 days in three Twenty20 leagues. It warns free agency will rise unless international cricket has a better structure so players do not have to choose between playing for their country or signing for a T20 franchise, and that international cricket needs context to survive.

FICA also urges the ICC to reduce the amount of Test and one-day cricket to play more T20 to grow the game. "There are multiple markets and choices open to them [players] and their loyalty to their countries, and to the traditions of the game, is being tested like never before," states the report. "Test cricket and ODI cricket are rapidly losing spectator appeal in many countries and consequently their commercial value is under severe threat. We understand that many of the game's host broadcasters hold similar views."

FICA suggests scrapping the current system of bilateral tours and introducing a Test championship with a structured fixture list while also allowing icon series such as the Ashes to continue alongside. The union also recommends limiting 50 over series to those played in a one-day league and the introduction of a Twenty20 international league. Results would impact on qualification and seedings for World Cups.

A more structured fixture list would then allow national boards to schedule their own domestic Twenty20 tournaments freeing players to play for their country and sign T20 deals. A survey of its 129 players from seven countries revealed 49 per cent would consider rejecting a national contract if they could earn "significantly" more to be a free agent. The number rose to 58.6 per cent in countries such as New Zealand and South Africa but drops to 39.3 per cent for players from England and Australia who earn up to four times more from central contracts.

FICA believes the current schedule of reciprocal series is confusing and states 30 different types of tours (differing numbers of matches and formats) are scheduled between 2015-2018. A total of 72 per cent of the respondents to its survey said they do not understand how the ICC Test, ODI and T20 rankings work.

"There is a conflict within players around the world under the current structure. The game has a great opportunity to provide clear global direction in relation to its structure, and must find a way to give meaning to each game. Every match must matter," said Graeme Smith, the former South Africa captain.

Ruthless Murray in Rd 3

AGENCIES, London



Andy Murray maintained his challenge for a second Wimbledon title as the world number two crushed Taiwan's Lu Yen-Hsun 6-3, 6-2, 6-1 in the second round on Thursday.

Murray had dismissed fellow Brit Liam Broady in ruthless fashion in his opening match and the 2013 Wimbledon champion was in equally dominant mood against the out-classed Lu.

He hit 31 winners and served six aces in a Centre Court masterclass lasting just over 90 minutes and will face Australian world number 67 John Millman for a place in the last 16.

Earlier, Japan's Kei Nishikori came from behind to down France's Julien Benneteau to book his place in the third round.

Nishikori, the world number six, won 4-6, 6-4, 6-2 on Centre Court in two hours and 36 minutes.

The 2014 US Open finalist looked briefly troubled when he lost the first set but turned it around.

He faces Russia's Andrey Kuznetsov in the third round.

Milos Raonic equalled the fastest serve seen at Wimbledon this year as the Canadian sixth seed blasted past Italian Andreas Seppi 7-6(5) 6-4 6-2 to reach the third round.

Swiss seventh seed Belinda Bencic

became the highest-ranked casualty at Wimbledon when she retired from her second round match against American qualifier Julia Boserup.

Bencic was 6-4, 1-0 down on Court Three to the world number 225 who is making her Grand Slam debut.

Venus Williams ignored her exile to Wimbledon's unglamorous Court 18 as the five-time champion defeated Greek qualifier Maria Sakkari 7-5, 4-6, 6-3.

Williams, seeded eighth, was a surprise choice to play on one of Wimbledon's smaller outside courts.

For a while, it seemed she might come to curse the decision of the All England Club schedule makers.

Daniel Evans insists he doesn't want to be reduced to a figure of fun when he follows in Marcus Willis's footsteps against Wimbledon legend Roger Federer.

After world number 772 Willis became an overnight sensation with his run through qualifying to a memorable second round defeat against Federer this week, it's Evans' turn to take on the Swiss star following a 7-6 (8/6), 6-4, 6-1 victory against Ukrainian 30th seed Alexandr Dolgopopolov.

Evans, until now known mostly for landing himself in trouble with his off-court antics, will be playing in the All England Club third round for the first time when he faces seven-time Wimbledon champion Federer.



Canada's Milos Raonic was in fine fettle as he brushed aside Italy's Andreas Seppi to move into the third round of Wimbledon at the All England Lawn Tennis Club yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Mariners gunning for maiden title

Face Usha KC in decider today

SPORTS REPORTER



Dhaka Mariners Youngs Club will be hoping to end their trophy drought in top-flight hockey when they take on reigning champions Usha Krira Chakra in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League's final Super Six match at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium today.

Dhaka Mariners Youngs have been a familiar name in the country's sports fraternity since their debut in top-flight hockey in 1989, but the Motijheel-based outfit have never claimed any title or trophy at the top level, always playing second fiddle to powerhouses like Abahani, Mohammedan or Usha.

The Mariners' best finishes came in 2006 and 2010, when they finished second after joint champions were declared. Abahani and Mohammedan shared the title in 2006 and Abahani and Usha in 2010.

This time around however they are real contenders, putting in scintillating performances and showing no mercy or hesitation in dispatching their opponents.

With two old foes Abahani and Mohammedan crashing out of the title race, Usha are the only team that stand between Mariners and a coveted maiden premier hockey league title.

The in-form Mariners will go into the match with 40 points from 15 matches, boasting a two-point lead over their opponents, which means they will need only a draw to ensure the prestigious title, while five-time champions Usha have no choice but to go for the jugular.

Under the guidance of German coach Peter Gerhard, the Mariners had a frustrating start in the 12-team league, securing only four points from their first three outings. Since then, they have been consistent and recovered the deficit to maintain pole position heading into the decider today.

"In hockey, you can't play for a draw because it is always possible to concede two or three goals from penalty corners in the span of a few minutes. So you must play for the win and we will go for it tomorrow [Friday]," said Gerhard yesterday.

Although the Mariners have been in good form and are billed as favourites, Gerhard placed Usha ahead of them despite Usha's 3-5 defeat to Mohammedan in the round's penultimate match.

On the other hand, Usha are confident of turning things around after two frustrating matches: a 1-1 draw against Abahani and the loss to Mohammedan.

"It is a do-or-die match for us and we have only strategy; win the match," said Usha KC coach Mamunur Rashid, who is comparatively less worried because his side is not up against Abahani or Mohammedan in the decider.

"Although we beat them 4-1 in the first meeting, they have gained more strength as the league progressed and we are taking this match very seriously," said Rashid, who believes that Usha must be wary of defensive lapses such as the ones seen against Mohammedan. He also opined that special performances would be needed from his trio of strikers -- Pushkor Khisa Mimo, Krishna Kumar and Hasan Jubair Niloy.

Sussex sign Kulasekara

CRICBUZZ

Sri Lankan fast bowler Nuwan Kulasekara has been roped in by Sussex as a short-term replacement for Mustafizur Rahman.

Mustafizur is currently undergoing rehabilitation for hamstring and ankle injuries he sustained during the Indian Premier League 2016, where he missed just one of the 17 fixtures.

Kulasekara has been brought in to feature in the next three T20 Blast matches.

Sussex are still in the race to make it to the quarterfinals of the T20 tournament. They are placed fourth in the points table, three points behind leaders Glamorgan.

Roy-powered Eng take series

AFP, London

Jason Roy was left with a bitter-sweet taste after his spectacular match-winning 162 clinched a one-day series win over Sri Lanka on Thursday.

The Surrey star would have loved to have set a new individual highest ODI score by an England batsman on his home ground The Oval. But he fell five agonising runs short of Robin Smith's 23-year record 167, which he made against Australia at Edgbaston.

The 25-year-old, whose man of the match display helped England to a six-wicket win and an unassailable 2-0 lead with just one game left, was annoyed for getting out so close to the end of the game.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SRI LANKA: 305 for 5 in 42 overs (Mendis 77, Chandimal 63, Matthews 67 not out; Willey 2-58)
ENGLAND: 309 for 4 in 40.1 overs (Roy 162, Root 65; Pradeep 2-78)
Result: England won by 6 wickets (D/L method).
Player-of-the-match: J Roy.