

SPORT

BFF's latest U-turn

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Less than 24 hours after having claimed that 'Bangladesh was close to hosting Nepal for two friendly matches', the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday made a complete U-turn and cancelled the proposed friendly matches without providing a satisfactory answer.

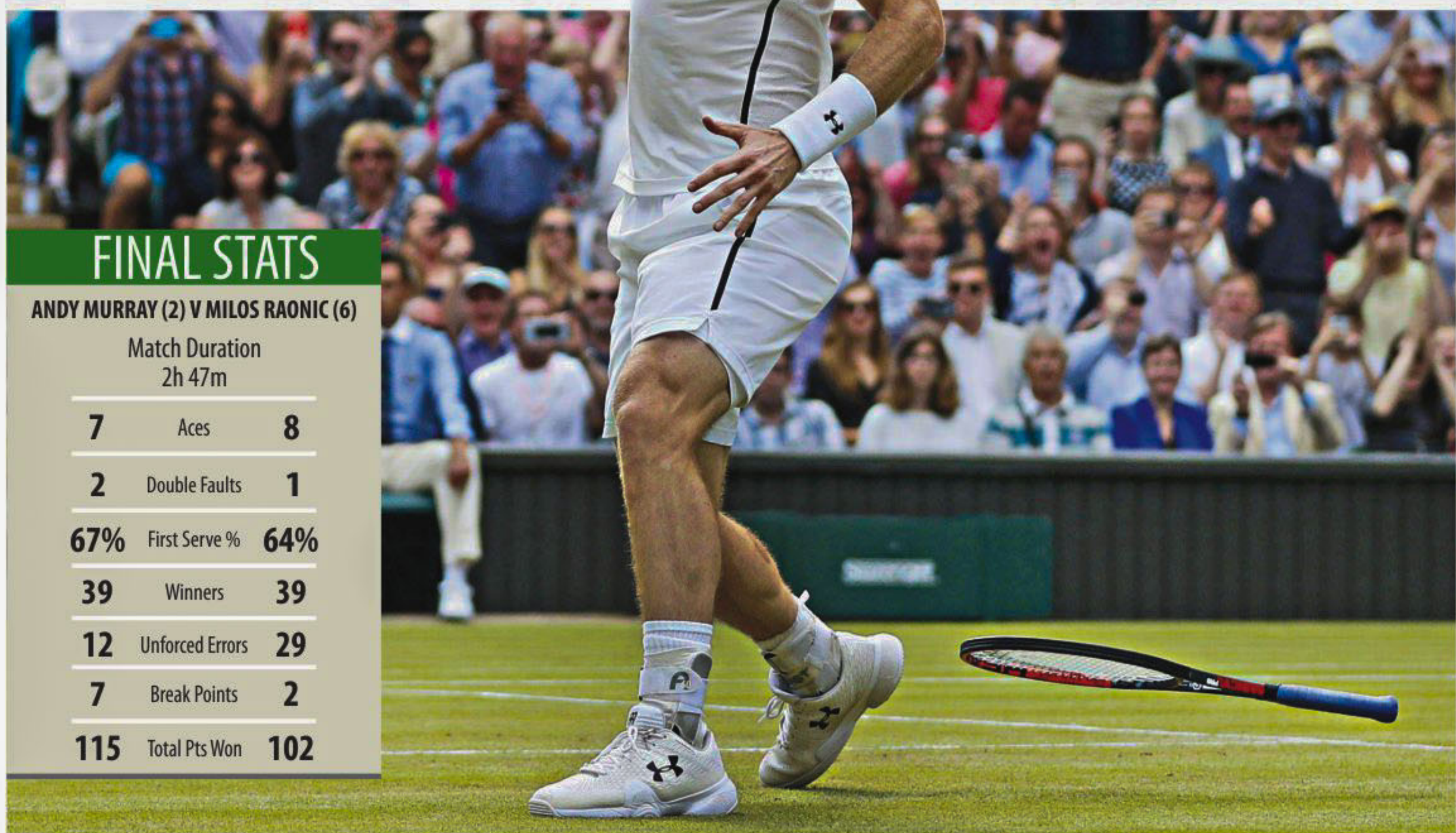
After Nepalese media had reported that the All Nepal Football Association had announced a 21-member squad was already training for the two matches on July 15 and 17 in Dhaka, the BFF spokesman admitted to local media here on Saturday that there was substantial agreement on principle between the two federations regarding the matches, and that all that was left a final approval from the National Teams Committee.

But in a perplexing announcement on Sunday, both the BFF spokesman and the federation's president claimed that the

matches have been cancelled owing to lack of preparation time after the Eid holidays. The reasoning is that the amount of fitness the vacationing players have lost during the holidays could not be gained back in three days of training. While the argument is quite valid, it only shows the lack of wisdom on the part of the game's governing body, provided that the dates of the matches were agreed in principle during the Eid holidays.

While this is the official version, there are quite a few theories being thrown around as to the reason for cancelling the matches. One of those theories is that Bangladesh Premier League clubs are reluctant to release their players for the time being just ahead of the league, and the other theory is the inability to make security arrangements within a short time in the wake of the Gulshan attacks.

However, if the other theories are waved aside and the feeble excuse of fitness is to be believed, the incident only goes to show the lack of professionalism of the game's governing body in handling these issues, making itself and the whole of the media



Scotland's Andy Murray lets his emotions flow after winning his second Wimbledon title by defeating Canada's Milos Raonic in straight sets at the All England Lawn Tennis Club yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

FINAL STATS

ANDY MURRAY (2) V MILOS RAONIC (6)

Match Duration
2h 47m

7	Aces	8
2	Double Faults	1
67%	First Serve %	64%
39	Winners	39
12	Unforced Errors	29
7	Break Points	2
115	Total Pts Won	102

Age of Serena going strong

AFP, London

With a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title wrapped up, Serena Williams insists she will never get bored of winning and that is bad news for her flagging rivals.

The 34-year-old American wrapped up her seventh Wimbledon with a straight sets win over Angelique Kerber on Saturday to take her level with Steffi Graf's Open Era record of 22 Slams.

Next on the shopping list is Margaret Court's all-time record of 24 Slams.

"Serena is someone who beats records and not just equals them," said her French coach Patrick Mouratoglou.

"We will keep going. I think she will go far because she wants to do it."

Graf set her record with the tenacious Monica Seles constantly on her shoulders. Between 1988 and 1993, the pair won 21 of 24 Slams.

Fast forward two decades and Williams, despite the occasional blip, is ruthlessly seeing off all-comers.

Of active players, Maria Sharapova is the only other woman to have won more than two majors.

Nepal ties cancelled

Focus shifts to camp for Bhutan matches

SPORTS REPORTER



Citing a lack of fitness of the players, Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) decided yesterday to cancel the proposed friendly matches between Bangladesh and Nepal.

The game's governing body made the U-turn after initially stating on Saturday that it had 'agreed in principle' with its Nepalese counterparts to host the two friendlies in Dhaka on July 15 and 17 after receiving the proposal during the Eid holidays.

However, BFF officials claim they will try to reschedule the matches to late August, just before the home fixture of the Asian Cup qualifying playoffs against Bhutan.

"The players were out of action for some time due to Eid holidays and hence the fitness level of the players will not be up to the mark," BFF president Kazi Salahuddin told reporters yesterday as he explained the reason behind cancelling friendlies.

"It would be really tough for the players to play their natural game with only three days of preparation. So we thought it would more effective if we play the matches a few days before the Bhutan matches," added Salahuddin.

The All Nepal Football Association (ANFA) was informed of the news yesterday afternoon.

"According to the letter received from Bangladesh Football Federation today, the federation suggested that they are not able to host the game in given time and have proposed a friendly for late August instead," as the ANFA was quoted saying by the

Himalayan Times.

Nepal had already announced a 21-member squad for the two matches and the players were already in preparations.

Meanwhile, the BFF also released a 32-member preliminary squad yesterday for the matches against Bhutan, which will be held on September 6 and October 10.

The 32-man squad features two new faces -- Arambagh's attacking duo of Zafar Iqbal and Mohammad Abdullah.

Veteran Abahani midfielder Pranotosh Kumar and Muktiyoddha Sanghad forward Towhidul Alam Towhid made comebacks after a long gap.

Winger Zahid Hossain, who was released during the Bangabandhu Gold Cup earlier this year for disciplinary issues, was also included in the preliminary list while midfielder Hemanta Vincent Biswas and Brothers Union midfielder Kawsar Ahmed Rabby returned to the squad after recovering from injuries.

Belgian coach Tom Saintfiet will arrive tomorrow and work with these 32 players for five days before the players return to their respective clubs for the Bangladesh Premier League, scheduled to kick off on July 24.

SQUAD:

GOALKEEPERS: Rana, Liton, Himel, Sohel
DEFENDERS: Rayhan, Nasiruddin, Topu, Yeamin, Mamun, Shakil, Ariful, Rezaul, Waly
MIDFIELDERS: Mamunul, Jamal, Pranotosh, Zafar, Sohel, Raju, Shahed Sr, Shahed Jr, Johnny, Emon, Hemanta, RABBI, Zahid, Abdullah
FORWARDS: Towhid, Jewel, Rubel, Jibon, Turzo

Murray roars to Wimbledon summit

AFP, London



Milos Raonic of Canada 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7/2).

The 29-year-old world number two added the 2016 trophy to his 2013 triumph at the All England Club and his 2012 US Open breakthrough.

Appearing in his 11th final at the majors, but his first against an opponent other than Novak Djokovic and Roger Federer, the Scot put on a Centre Court masterclass.

Murray buried his head in his towel and wept in the moments after victory.

"It's the most important tournament for me every year. I've had some great moments and tough losses. I played some really good stuff today," Murray said.

"The wins feel extra special because of the tough losses. I'm proud to have my hands on the trophy again."

Murray faced just two break points in the two hour 48 minute encounter while 25-year-old Raonic, who had clobbered 137 aces going into the final, managed just eight on Sunday.

"It's a difficult challenge. Andy has been playing great and he deserved to win, congratulations to him," Raonic said.

"This one is going to sting. I'm going to make sure I do everything I can to be back here for another chance."

Victory for Murray helped make up for the disappointment of losing the Australian and French Open finals to Djokovic this year.

It also illustrated the master-stroke he pulled off in tempting Ivan Lendl back into his coaching corner.

Raonic was attempting to become the first Canadian to win a Slam title but he was thwarted by Murray's tough-as-teak defence and inspired return game.

In the final analysis, his 29 unforced errors compared to Murray's miserly 12 proved fatal in a match where serve was broken just once.

Victory preserved the iron-grip on the majors of the sport's 'Big Four' with Lleyton Hewitt the last man outside of Murray, Djokovic, Federer and Rafael Nadal to win Wimbledon back in 2002.

Fittingly for such an occasion, the Centre Court Royal Box was packed with sporting and celebrity star power.

Prince William and wife Kate were joined by former champions Bjorn Borg, Boris Becker and Stefan Edberg as well as Hollywood actors Bradley Cooper, Benedict Cumberbatch and Hugh Grant.

Murray had won all four of the pair's meetings in 2016, including the Australian Open semi-finals and in the final at Queen's Club.

The second seed was unable to convert his first break point in the seventh game but deservedly edged ahead at 4-3.

In a rush of blood to the head, Raonic came to the net off a weak approach and Murray gleefully fired back the ball to induce the crucial error.

It was only the sixth time the 25-year-old Canadian, who had stunned Federer in a five-set semi-final, had dropped serve in the tournament.

Murray backed up the break for 5-3 before Raonic took the ninth game in which he fired his first ace of the tournament.

He had gone into the match having hit 137 aces in the previous six rounds.

A straightforward volley allowed Murray to claim the opener 6-4 with Raonic having hit just nine winners.

Raonic remained under siege, saving another break point in the first game of the second set, one more in the seventh and two more in the ninth as he clung on although his escape was aided by two Murray backhand errors.

Raonic unleashed a serve of 147mph in that game but his opponent still won the point -- a dispiriting snapshot of his afternoon.

Murray remained in cruise control, breezing through the tie-break for a two sets lead.

He still hadn't faced a break point in the final while Murray's unforced error count was just six.

Contador quits Tour de France

AFP, Andorra Arcalis

Two-time champion Alberto Contador sensationally quit the Tour de France on Sunday after succumbing to injuries and illness.

The 33-year-old Spaniard climbed off his bike with just over 100km to ride on Sunday's ninth stage from Spain to Andorra.

Contador was injured down his right side after crashing on both of the opening two stages and his Tinkoff team said he was also suffering from illness on Sunday morning.

"Alberto had a bit of fever this morning. He told us at the beginning of the race that he wasn't feeling super and it's obvious," Tinkoff sports director Sean Yates told French television.

Four times on Sunday, Contador was seen dropping back from the peloton to speak to his team car.

It was clear that he was suffering on what was a baking hot day in the Pyrenees with temperatures reaching 35 degrees Celsius.

He was sitting 20th overall at more than three minutes off race leader Chris Froome at the start of the day.

Saintfiet linked with Nigeria job!

SPORTS REPORTER



According to several media reports, including AFP and BBC, Tom Saintfiet, the coach-in-waiting for the Bangladesh national football team, is in a three-man shortlist for the post of Nigeria national team's head coach.

The 42-year-old Belgian has yet to strike a deal with Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) but is expected to arrive in Dhaka tomorrow to conduct a five-day camp for the national team. However, he is reportedly in the running for a permanent Nigeria job alongside former Cameroon coach Paul Le Guen and Nigeria's interim coach Salisu Yusuf.

Saintfiet is believed to have been considered for the position of Nigeria coach because of his extensive experience in Africa, having coached Namibia, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Malawi and Togo.

Reports now suggest that the trio will be interviewed on July 18 and the name of the next Super Eagles coach will immediately be announced afterwards.

BFF, however, said that it has no information regarding Saintfiet's Nigeria offer and that they are in regular contact with the Belgian.

"Tom Saintfiet is arriving on Tuesday morning and I've been talking with him today [Sunday] over phone to inform him of the flight details," BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said. "He didn't say anything about

BCB CEO optimistic about England's tour

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury has expressed optimism with regards to England's scheduled tour of Bangladesh this October. He hoped that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), which had earlier expressed

concerns regarding the tour following the terrorist attack in Gulshan on July 1, base their final decision on Bangladesh's 'good track record' in terms of hosting cricket events.

"We have successfully hosted big tournaments such as the ICC under-19 World Cup recently with the support from the government and the law enforcement agencies. We are confident that we will get similar support from the government for the upcoming tournaments as well," Nizamuddin told reporters at Mirpur yesterday.

"Whenever there is an international tour in Bangladesh, we provide special security and take special measures. We have hosted a number of tournaments successfully despite problems. For instance, there were a few problems when we had to host the under-19 World Cup in Bangladesh. But everything went well.

"Despite the challenges, England did send their under-19 team here. We received maximum help from them the last time and we hope their response will be similar this time as well," added Nizamuddin.

Cricket Australia was the only board that decided against sending its under-19 team to the World Cup in January 2016

based on safety concerns. It had also postponed a bilateral series between the senior sides which was supposed to take place in October last year on the same grounds.

England's ODI skipper Eoin Morgan had expressed safety concerns with regards to the tour earlier this month and he also indicated that the England team would not mind playing the series in a neutral venue.

Nizamuddin however said that the BCB are against such an arrangement.

"Stopping cricket in a country is not the solution. That can never be a solution. We will try our best to ensure that the FTP [Future Tours Programme] commitment is fulfilled," said the BCB CEO.

Furthermore, Chowdhury said that the BCB and ECB are in touch and are constantly communicating regarding the issue. As per the pre-series preparations, the ECB is expected to send a security team to Bangladesh soon in order to assess the security conditions in Bangladesh.

"The security delegation was supposed to arrive last month. But since England will be touring India and Bangladesh simultaneously, they are likely to send a delegation for both the tours together and are therefore yet to confirm their schedule," said Nizamuddin.

Meanwhile, the BCB CEO also revealed that the board will soon have a meeting with government officials with regards to the security measures.

"Whenever we organise a tour, there is an inter-ministerial meeting that is organised by the government. We have spoken to the authorities and we are likely to have that meeting soon," informed Nizamuddin.

Buttler out with thumb fracture

AFP, Manchester

England wicketkeeper-batsman Jos Buttler is set for a stint on the sidelines after suffering a fractured thumb, his county side Lancashire said on Sunday.

It is not known how long Buttler will be out of action, but having been overlooked by England for the first Test of a four-match series against Pakistan, he will be hoping to return for the limited-overs games in August.

The 25-year-old was struck by the bat of Worcestershire opponent Ben Cox while keeping during Lancashire's T20 Blast win on Friday.

Despite that Buttler, who has scored England's three fastest one-day international hundreds ever, went on to score a match-winning 50 from just 20 balls, the quickest in Lancashire Twenty20 history.

"X-rays later revealed he sustained a small stable fracture which will be managed conservatively," Lancashire said in a statement.