

SPORT

'A new hurdle to overcome'

BISHWAJIT ROY

Tamim Iqbal is confident that he will be available for the one-day international series against Afghanistan and the left-hander is eagerly waiting to play a role in overcoming the Tigers' new challenge, which is to prove that even a long break from international cricket cannot break their rhythm. The opener believes that Bangladesh will pick up from where they left off.

"I'm not feeling any pain on my injured finger. A CT scan will be done tomorrow [Sunday] and I may take the bat after getting the report. I am hopeful that I will be available for the Afghanistan series," said Tamim -- who had sustained a fracture on the little finger of his left hand while fielding during practice in Mirpur on August 27 -- yesterday, a day before the Tigers return to business for the two upcoming home series against Afghanistan and England.

"We haven't played international cricket for a long time, so we are all excited about the coming two series. I am no exception. And we are going to play Tests after more than a year, so we can barely wait for that. It's very exciting. "As a team we were in great rhythm before such a long break, especially

from ODI and Test cricket. So we are now standing in front of a new challenge where we will need to prove that such a break cannot hamper our pace. I am confident that we will be able to prove it and ensure that we are growing as a strong team in world cricket," continued the veteran of 42 Tests, 153 ODIs and 52 T20Is.

"We can prove how good we are as a team," he added.

Having had a successful 2015 where the Tigers reached the World Cup quarterfinals before going on to beat Pakistan, India, South Africa and Zimbabwe in consecutive ODI series at home, Bangladesh will resume their ODI journey against Afghanistan and Tamim believes that nothing could be better than facing the ICC associates before a full series against England.

"I think Afghanistan is a good team and I must thank the board for arranging an ODI series against Afghanistan before the England series because nothing could have been better than that. England announced strong squads for the series and I think it will be a fantastic series," said Tamim.

There was a reason why Tamim has the belief that the new-look Bangladesh will be able to overcome the long break from international cricket and that is

their new-found work ethic and approach towards the game.

"Everybody did their work even in the absence of the foreign staff because they are all aware of what they need to do and how to do it. I think previously many of our coaches tried and gradually we have achieved it. This is a huge change. Now everybody wants to be honest in their effort, no matter whether success comes or not, but they want to question themselves in front of the mirror as to whether or not they did their job," he observed.

And how did that sentiment come about?

"In my opinion our success completely changed our approach. Success brought the thirst of bringing more success. Everybody is hungry and is giving their best. You see everyone working hard for the England series and now it's time for us to execute in the middle," said Tamim.

And that's why he was not too worried with the pace attack. "Look Mustafizur [Rahman] and Taskin [Ahmed] had big roles when they were in the team but we also won matches without them. This team proved several times that it has got the ability to play good cricket even without key players.

"And that's the beauty of this team."

Southee out of India Tests

REUTERS, Wellington

New Zealand fast bowler Tim Southee has been ruled out of the three-match test series in India with an ankle injury and will be replaced by pace-man Matt Henry.

Southee felt pain in his front foot while bowling in training and a scan had shown a ligament strain in his left ankle, New Zealand's cricket board said.

The 27-year-old, New Zealand's most experienced test bowler with 52 matches and 177 wickets, will return home for rest and rehab but was expected to be available for the one-day internationals starting mid-October.

"Tim has been working hard in preparation for this tour, so he's very disappointed to be ruled out of all three tests," New Zealand coach Mike Hesson said.

"The focus now is for Tim to give his ankle seven to 10 days rest, before slowly building his bowling loads back up ahead of the ODI series.

"We've got a replacement who is ready to go in Matt Henry and he'll join the team before the start of the first test."

The 24-year-old Henry has played just three more tests since his debut against England at Lord's last year.

Different paths to same destination

AL-AMIN



There is an interesting similarity between the two teams ever since their last meeting in a World Cup match in Adelaide in 2015. While Bangladesh went from strength to strength following that famous 15-run win -- making it to the quarterfinals and following it up with three home-series victories against Pakistan, India and South Africa -- England took a different route to lick the wound of being thrown out of the World Cup from the group stage.

They transformed that pain into strength and played a kind of one-day cricket refreshingly different from that age-old calculative cricket. They played fearless and aggressive cricket which is similar to Bangladesh. Pakistan was the last team that bore the brunt of England's fury, conceding the highest ODI score of 443 in the third match at Nottingham.

So, when they two most attractive one-day units renew their rivalry at the home of Bangladesh cricket in Mirpur on October 7, there will be little to separate the two teams who are not afraid of expressing themselves.

It's true that England will be without their regular captain Eoin Morgan, who snubbed the Bangladesh trip on security concerns. They will also miss the services of exciting opening batsman Alex Hales and their most impactful batsman Joe Root, who will not feature in the three-match one-day series but will be available for the two-Test series.

But according to Bangladesh selector Habibul Bashar England are still the most balanced team with almost perfect replacements.

"[Joe] Root is the best England player

across all formats. I do agree that he will be missed a bit. But apart from that, the other replacements are very good. They always pick teams considering the conditions and strength of the opposition. And if you look at the team for the Bangladesh series you will understand how well they planned for both the ODIs and Tests," Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked how disappointed he was to not have Mustafizur Rahman in the England series due to injury, he said this was an area where Bangladesh had improved a lot.

"We have a lot key players now and Mustafizur is perhaps the most important of them all. But the most heartening aspect of this team is that it has got the ability to prosper without a Shakib, a Tamim or even without a Mustafizur. This team has proved it time and again," said a confident former Bangladesh skipper.

Bangladesh understandably hold a poor head-to-head record against England, who have won 13 of 16 games. But the Tigers have shown marked improvement in the recent past, winning three of their last four games against England since their historic 15-run success in Bristol in 2010.

However Bashar considers this one-day series a completely different one compared to their previous series against England.

"Before we wanted to play good cricket and win, but now things have changed and this is a series we want to win," added the selector.

Still, he refused to comment on whether Bangladesh would play to their strengths, which is their impressive pace attack, or revert to spin, something the English are not very good at handling in a typical sub-continent wicket.



Bangladesh have enjoyed many successes in the recent past, but once they return to training under lights today after a long break, head coach Chandika Hathurusingha will have to think of ways to overcome the upcoming challenges. PHOTO: STAR FILE

Afghan ODIs to start at 2:30pm

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) have confirmed that the three ODIs between Bangladesh and Afghanistan will be day-night encounters and are to commence at 2:30 pm. Afghanistan, who are scheduled to arrive this week, will play the three ODIs on September 25, 28 and October 1.

Until yesterday the timing of the matches was not known. However, BCB director Jalal Yunus confirmed that the games would in fact be day-night affairs. This series will be Bangladesh's first ODI series of the year.

The BCB's decision also means that Tigers will play a total of six day-night matches at home within the next two months as the ODI series against England is set to begin on October 7.

Yunus also said that the BCB would take strict security measures during the matches, similar to the ones put in place for the Under-19 World Cup in Bangladesh in January.

"We are obviously taking the security issue very seriously. For the Afghanistan series the screenings will take place not just within the BCB's parameters but also outside of it," said Yunus.

During the Under-19 World Cup checkpoints were set up at various junctions around the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

He also said that the security level provided to the Afghanistan team would be VVIP.

"We are confident that we will be able to host the two series successfully. We have handled such situations before. In 2014, the Sri Lanka series, the T20 World Cup and the Asia Cup took place and we barely had any gap in between. But we organised those events successfully. We are confident," said Yunus.

The board director further added that tickets for the Afghanistan series would be launched soon: "As far as I know the tickets have already been printed and are ready to go on sale."

Azhar stays as skipper

DAWN

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has once again put its faith in Azhar Ali's leadership as the right-handed batsman has been retained as ODI skipper for the series against the West Indies in the UAE.

The three-match series starts on Sept 30 in Sharjah.

Azhar's captaincy came under scrutiny following his side's 1-4 thrashing in England, with rumours suggesting that the 31-year-old would either resign or be removed as captain in the 50-over format.

Earlier, PCB chairman Shaharyar Khan had also said that they would discuss Azhar's position as the captain of the ODI side once the team returns back home.

The PCB official, however, confirmed that nothing is going to change and Azhar would continue to lead the team against the Caribbean side, the ANI news agency reported.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Hafeez has been dropped from the 22-member preliminary list handed to the PCB by former captain Inzamam-ul-Haq led selection committee.

Test opener Sami Aslam and veteran paceman Umar Gul have also failed to make it to the preliminary list, following their poor performance against England in the ODI series while Umar Akmal and young left-arm pacer Rumman Raees have been included in the list.

5TH ASIAN BEACH GAMES BD officials not dreaming of medals

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will send a 23-member team to take part in five different disciplines of the 5th Asian Beach Games, scheduled to start next week, but the sports authorities see no hope of any medals this time.

The Bangladesh athletes will compete in women's kabaddi, women's handball, men's volleyball, men's basketball and athletics events of the games, which will be held in Danang, Vietnam from September 24 to October 3.

Having participated in every edition since the introduction of these games in 2008, Bangladesh have so far won only two medals -- bronze for men's kabaddi in the inaugural meet in Bali and another bronze medal for women's kabaddi in Phuket, Bangladesh failed to win a single medal.

All 23 athletes of the Bangladesh contingent have trained for the last two months with financial assistance from the Bangladesh Olympic Association, but the BOA officials are not optimistic about the athletes' chances.

"I'm personally not too happy with the preparation because we have failed to provide the facilities that the athletes need," BOA's deputy secretary general Ashkur Rahman Miku, who is also chairman of its training and development committee, rued.

"We are yet to get any financial support from the government, so we bore the expense of the training camp from our own coffers, and it was not enough."

The Bangladesh basketball team reached the semifinals of the last edition, which encouraged the BOA to give another chance to the cagers while the volleyball team's 12th place finish in the previous edition was also deemed good enough for them to get another shout.

The women's kabaddi team, which was supposed to be one of the medal hopefuls, will participate without regular player Masura Pervin who decided to retire from the sport to continue her football career with the under-16 football team.

Bangladesh Handball Federation's general secretary Asaduzzaman Kohinur claimed that the women's team's preparations are going well, however, none of the officials in any discipline was optimistic about a medal.

Del Potro outlasts Murray

AP, Glasgow

Argentina was in sight of a first Davis Cup final since 2011 after taking a 2-0 lead over titleholder Britain thanks to singles wins by Juan Martin del Potro and Guido Pella in the semifinal.

Del Potro ended Andy Murray's 14-match winning streak in the Davis Cup, coming through 6-4, 5-7, 6-7 (5), 6-3, 6-4 in 5 hours, 7 minutes to gain a measure of revenge after losing the Olympic final to Murray last month. It was the longest match of both players' careers.

Pella beat Kyle Edmund 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-3, 6-2, meaning the Argentines can clinch victory with a day to spare in Glasgow if they win the doubles on Saturday. Federico Delbonis and Leonardo Mayer are scheduled to play the Murray brothers, Andy and Jamie.

Whether Andy Murray plays is open to question.

"I'm very proud of how I fought, I did fantastic," Murray said. "I fought for every point, tried as best as I could. That's all you can do."

"It was very fine margins. That happens in tennis and sport sometimes. It could have gone either way." Del Potro gained the crucial break in the fifth set at the third opportunity, reaching Murray's angled volley with a forehand winner down the line to go 4-3 ahead, and he served out for the match, clinching victory with an ace and a big growl.



With prosthetic limbs on both legs, Regas Woods of the United States takes a giant leap during the long jump final of the Paralympics at the Olympic Stadium in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on Saturday. The Olympics for the physically challenged will be wrapped up today, with China leading the medals tally thus far.

PHOTO: AFP