

SPORT

Fizz bowls over journos

SPORTS REPORTER

Reporters started to gather like any other day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, well before the Tigers started their practice from 4pm yesterday. As usual there was a demand for a player to be served up to furnish the scribes with quotes that would make the story for the day. With no player from the camp available to speak, media manager Rabeed Imam raised hopes by saying that Mustafizur Rahman might fill in.

The long wait was over as the young pace sensation -- currently as popular a Tiger as any -- appeared with a smile, still recovering from shoulder surgery. Having spent more than a year in international cricket, Mustafizur is no more a shy boy. He shared some light moments with the journalists and before appearing in front of the microphones he consulted with the media manager and reminded him that it would be a 'two-minute affair'. He however talked for nearly four minutes, drawing pleasure at giving short answers to tall questions.



When asked for his impressions on the national team's practice as an outsider, he said: "I am too young, so I have no answer."

His jocular mood was further on display when he was asked about Courtney Walsh. "Difficult question, I don't have any answer."

He however made it clear that he will miss the two home series against Afghanistan and England and that he was coping well with the rehab.

He then left, letting out a mirthful sigh at having kept his PR duties to the bare minimum as his teammates sweated it out behind him, while the reporters were left searching for what sound bites they could possibly use.



Bangladesh cricket's brains trust -- skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L), his deputy Shakib Al Hasan and coach Chandika Hathurusingha (C) -- enjoy a light moment while discussing team selection during the Tigers' practice session in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

BCB net lucrative deal

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has awarded its title sponsorship and in-stadia sponsorship rights to Impress Matra Consortium for a period of two years starting from September 1, 2016 to August 31, 2018.

"Initially 12 companies showed their interest and from them we chose three best companies from where Impress Matra got the rights as the highest bidder. As our team is doing well, we have got better amount this time and which is 40 percent higher from last two years deal though we have less home matches in the coming years," said Kazi Inam Ahmed, BCB director and chairman of the marketing and commercial committee.

According to sources, BCB has got nearly Tk 17 crore from the deal.

Afridi farewell's fate on Sept 26

SPORTS REPORTER

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief operating officer Subhan Ahmed said on Monday a decision on whether to give former Twenty20 captain Shahid Afridi and off-spinner Saeed Ajmal a farewell match in the upcoming T20 series against West Indies would be taken at a meeting on September 26.

There were reports the PCB's selection committee headed by former captain Inzamam-ul-Haq wanted to give Afridi a swansong match, but the move was opposed by other officials.

Afridi stepped down as Twenty20 captain following Pakistan's first-round exit in the World Twenty20 in India in April. He vowed to continue as a player but has not been picked since. Ahmed also said the PCB had not ruled out picking ex-captain Salman Butt, one of three players punished for spot-fixing in 2010.

Butt, Mohammad Asif and Mohammad Amir had their bans lifted in September last year. But so far only Amir has staged an international comeback.

Butt's remarkable form since his return -- scoring 536 in seven one-day cup matches last year and 350 in eight Twenty20 games -- has put him back in the running.

"There is no bar on Butt's selection," said Ahmed. "Our selection committee can select any player."

Sarfraz Ahmed will lead the side in the three-match Twenty20 series starting in Dubai on Friday.

That will be followed by three one-day matches with Azhar as captain and as many Tests -- all in the United Arab Emirates.

Tigers in fine-tune mode

SPORTS REPORTER

Taskin Ahmed was bowling at full tilt against his teammates into the net placed around the centre wicket of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday during practice with bowling coach Courtney Walsh watching him closely. Pacers Al-Amin Hossain, Shafiqul Islam and other bowlers were also bowling in the nets. The legendary Walsh seemed from time to time to be giving tips to Taskin, who is waiting for his action to be cleared by the International Cricket Council (ICC) in order to be available for selection for the upcoming series against Afghanistan and England.

The result of the bowling action review test, which took place in Brisbane on September 8, is expected by September 22. Left-handed opener Tamim Iqbal -- given the go-ahead on Sunday to bat after recovering from a finger fracture -- batted in his usual manner, indicating that he would be available for selection for the three-match ODI series against Afghanistan starting from September 25.

Left-arm spinner Mosharraf Hossain got enough opportunities to bowl. Leg-spinner Noor Hossain Munna, brought into the camp to give the batsmen some batting practice against leg-spin as Afghanistan has two leg-spinners and England also has one.

Against the backdrop of the vibrant practice session, the three selectors -- Minhajul Abedin, head coach exclusively.

All were in a jovial mood. The reason might be that there were not many issues to think about the team selection; possible contentious issues were backup options if Taskin is not cleared and picking a spinner among Mosharraf, Taijul Islam and Mehedi Hasan Miraz. The Tigers' performance over the last two years in their favoured ODI format has lent the team some solidity, so no major changes are expected when the selectors pick the final squad from the 20-member practice squad.

Some interest surrounds whether the think-tank will spring a surprise by bringing in Mosaddek Hossain, the most promising contender for the national side.

The selectors will however take time to name the squad, which is expected to be when the team is scheduled to check in to the team hotel on September 23.

Before that, although it may not have much impact, the selectors will keep an eye on the practice match on September 21. It will be contested between the players already in the camp and five or six more players who will join the camp tomorrow to play the match along with leg-spinner Munna.

Habibul Bashar and Sajjad Ahmed -- were busy discussing the selection of the final 14-member team. They first talked to captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza before vice-captain Shakib Al Hasan and head coach Chandika Hathurusingha joined the conversation, and finally they talked with the

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Zim players end protest

ESPNCRICINFO

Zimbabwe's players have ended their protest over non-payment of match fees and will return to training on Monday after being given an assurance by Wildfred Mukondiwa, the Zimbabwe Cricket chairman, that their monies will be paid. The players have also received certainty over contracts, although the specifics are not yet known.

The Harare-based players -- after refusing to practise in a camp ahead of matches against Pakistan A until given certainty over their unpaid money and contracts -- demanded a meeting with Mukondiwa, which took place on Friday.

Sources revealed that Mukondiwa informed them he was working on a payment plan for their match fees. Some players had not been paid for matches dating back to July last year. ZC was making payments in batches, with the final one due in July this year which went unpaid.



The members of the under-16 national women's team were all smiles as they were accorded a reception at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel by the Bangladesh Football Federation yesterday. [INSET] The girls were accompanied to the programme by their parents.

PHOTOS: STAR

Under-16 women's team rewarded

SPORTS REPORTER

The under-16 national women's football team have expressed their gratitude towards the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) and the corporate houses after being accorded a reception at a city hotel where each of the 23 players received monetary rewards.

Krishna Rani Sarkar, the captain of the side which emerged champions of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers earlier this month to book a place among the final eight, said they are grateful for the reception and felt that this reward would motivate them to take their football forward.

"We are all from poor families, so this money will help. We feel good that girls have earned this much money from football for the first time," Krishna expressed.

"We thank the BFF for according us and our parents this reception. We are happy to have done something for the country. The responsibility is bigger now as we have to do well to keep earning respect," she added.

Krishna was accompanied by her father who often travels from Tangail to attend her matches.

Each player was accompanied by a mother or father, if not both, who in turn were immensely proud to see their daughter's achievements receive recognition.

"I want my daughter to grow more, both

in football and studies. I hope she will play for 8-10 years more," Basudeb Chandra Sarkar, father of Krishna, told reporters.

"I'm glad that the federation have taken responsibility over these girls' studies and everything else for the next one year. This is a very good initiative and so I hope for a good future of my daughter," Basudeb further said.

The event was attended by ministers, sports officials, corporate owners and football officials among others. The girls were each handed a Tk 1.25 lakh award -- provided by Gemcon Group, Caldwell Development Company Limited and Saif Global Sports Limited -- while SS Solutions pledged to provide monthly allowances to the girls for the period of a year.

The head coach of the team, Golam Rabbani Chhoton, and two assistant coaches were also given monetary rewards during the programme.

Kazi Salahuddin, president of the BFF, extended his best wishes to the team and pledged every measure of support possible to the players so that they can compete against the best Asian teams in the final round.

"Now your responsibility has become bigger. Now everyone will want to see what you do, everyone will want to know what your results are," said Salahuddin during his speech.

Bangladesh will play Australia, Japan, China, South Korea, North Korea, Thailand and Laos in the final round, which will be held in Thailand during September next year.