

SPORT

AFGHANS IN TIGERS' DEN



Ahead of the second ODI against Afghanistan today, Bangladesh's dashing left-handed opener Soumya Sarkar was afforded a special training session in the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium nets yesterday as the team management is hoping that the young southpaw will rediscover the form which led to his spectacular breakthrough into the national team in 2015.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

The hardest part is over: Mashrafe

BISHWAJIT ROY



The tough part has gone and the Tigers will now be looking to conjure up their best at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in today's second one day international against Afghanistan to confirm the series with a game in hand.

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza conveyed that sentiment while speaking at the pre-match press conference yesterday. A win will make a small piece of history as it will mark the Tigers' 100th ODI win. And who would not love to be a part of history?

"It will definitely be a big achievement for Bangladesh and we try to achieve it in the second match but to get there we will need to play good cricket," the Bangladesh skipper said.

However, the Mashrafe-led team has a bigger vision: to make the team a major force in world cricket and create a new cricket culture. So the Tigers may not only be satisfied with a win on way to making history, they will also be looking for a much-improved showing in the batting and fielding departments in the two coming matches against Afghanistan -- who tested the hosts' nerves in the first game on Sunday before eventually losing by seven runs -- and, most importantly, demonstrate the gap in quality between the home team and the ICC associate member country.

The win on Sunday's game -- the hosts' first ODI after almost a year -- provided relief for the Tigers and Mashrafe said that they were in good shape mentally.

"Honestly, even if we weren't coming off a break, the first match of any series or tournament is always important. You will be free if you win the first match. The first game against Afghanistan might not have been that big, but the tough part is gone. You cannot say anything or predict any game, but we will now be in much better shape mentally."

His foremost desire was a big score from the top-order.

"Tamim [Iqbal] and Riyad [Mahmudullah] both had chances to score a hundred in the first game and Shakib [Al Hasan] could have had a big fifty. To set big targets we will need big scores from the top order batsmen and if the wicket favours them, then we should score 300 runs. However, things become difficult if a set batsman doesn't convert his innings into a

big one."

However the most successful Bangladesh skipper believes that everything will be okay in the second match, including the fielding which was not at its best as they dropped few vital catches alongside conceding runs for misfielding.

"You cannot make excuses for poor fielding, not even the long break from cricket [is an excuse]. Fielding is an area where you can improve or show your best if you want. I think our body language was not right at all and it can happen. I hope everything will be okay in the second match," hoped Mashrafe.

He also said that the team had been discussing their mistakes in the first match a lot.

Mashrafe has been adding one feather after another to his cap, especially in his second stint as the national team captain and he says that he tries to be relaxed in any situation.



"I don't take anything critically; rather I always try to be normal in any situation. I do everything separately and that has become my habit. I have been leading the team for the last one or two years, so I need to be relaxed."

Mashrafe also added that Bangladesh showed character by winning the first game under pressure.

"When Australia, India or England play against us the pressure is on them and that's quite natural. What feels good is that the last match was almost ninety percent in their favour, but we bounced back from that position and showed character and if we can continue with that character then we can be consistent against the big teams also."

If in the first match Mashrafe's men showed character, then they will need to show a different side to their personality in the next two games -- their killer instinct against lower-ranked sides.

'Can get bigger crowds back home'

NAIMUL KARIM



Playing cricket in your room with a chair as the wicket and the walls as the boundary is a memory that almost anyone remotely associated with the game must have experienced.

Afghanistan's 18-year-old leg-spinner, Rashid Khan, is no different. From trying to beat his four brothers within the four walls of their room to gradually becoming the mainstay of his national side, Rashid has traversed quite a distance in a short period.

Rashid realised quite early that bowling mere straight deliveries would not help him come out on top of his older brothers and so he started turning them. He sometimes released the ball from the back of his hand and on other occasions he would just bowl the traditional leg-break.

"It helped me confuse my brothers a lot," he recalled with a smile while speaking to The Daily Star yesterday. "So you can say that my googly is a natural. I learnt it when I was really young. Nobody taught me," he adds.

That was Rashid's first tryst with leg-break bowling. And from there on, based on an advice from Rashid's brother's friend, he started doing the same on the streets, where he and his brothers played with tennis balls.

"It started at home and then it went to the streets

and then one fine day I started playing with the hard ball. After seeing the way I turned the ball, my brothers told me to try cricket professionally," says Rashid, adding that he follows Pakistan's Shahid Afridi.

He is one of those Afghani cricketers who has been fast-tracked into the national team from the age-group levels. He was in fact a member of the Afghanistan under-19 team that won the Plate Cup in Bangladesh this year. And that experience is something he claims helped him do well against Bangladesh in the first ODI, where his leg-breaks and the wrong ones seriously troubled the hosts.

"I enjoyed playing the under-19 World Cup. The wickets here really help spinners," he says.

He then animatedly describes how one of his

turners, a googly, got the better of Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim in the first ODI.

"Mushfiqur Rahim plays slog sweeps very well and the captain told me that if I bowled him a googly, it would turn a lot and he would find it hard to hit it... so that's what I did," he says.

His accuracy and his numbers go on to justify his early promotion to the national side. He has been Afghanistan's second-highest wicket-taker in both T20Is and ODIs this year. He took 17 wickets in 12 T20Is, one less than Mohammad Nabi. He has taken 17 scalps in ODIs as well this year and boasts the best bowling average, 20.88, in his team.

So impressive have his performances been that Big Bash League franchisee Adelaide Strikers showed keen interest in him earlier this year.

An exciting character, whose youthful exuberance gushes out with every statement he makes, the youngster is aware of the difficult times that Afghanistan cricket has faced and at the same time is also optimistic of the days ahead.

"When I started playing cricket there were barely any facilities. It was difficult to get enough bats and there were not many grounds either. Today there are lots of academies and everything is fine," he says.

"People really love cricket back home. If an international team comes to Afghanistan today, you will see more crowds than this," he cheekily adds, while referring to the nearly-packed Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium during the first ODI.



RASHID KHAN

BPL at a glance

SPORTS REPORTER



The fourth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League is all set to begin, with the first match to take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on November 4. There will be 46 matches, including three play-off games and the final. They will be held in Dhaka and Chittagong and will run for over a month, with the final slated for December 9.

ICON PLAYERS

TEAM	ICON PLAYER
Barisal Bulls	Mushfiqur Rahim
Chittagong Vikings	Tamim Iqbal
Comilla Victorians	Mashrafe Bin Mortaza
Dhaka Dynamites	Shakib Al Hasan
Khulna Titans	Mahmudullah Riyad
Rajshahi Rockers	Sabbir Rahman
Rangpur Riders	Soumya Sarkar

The icon players were picked for a price between 40 and 55 lakhs.

PLAYERS' DRAFT: The Players' Draft will be held on the 30th of September. Each team must draft a minimum of eight and a maximum of 11 players must be selected from the draft. The two new BPL teams (Rajshahi and Khulna) will get the first pick from each category and the second pick from the B, C and D categories.

FOREIGN PLAYERS: A total of 168 foreign players have registered for the league. Each team must pick a minimum of three and a maximum of 12 foreign players, with four players present in the starting eleven of each match.

PLAYER RETENTION: Each franchise can choose to retain two local players from the previous edition, pending the approval of the BPL Technical Committee.

FOREIGN PLAYERS BOUGHT BY FRANCHISES

Barisal Bulls: Dilshan Munaweera, Chittagong Vikings: Chris Gayle, Dwayne Smith, Shoaib Malik,

Chaturanga De Silva, Mohammad Nabi.

Comilla Victorians: Sohail Tanvir, Imad Waseem, Ashar Zaidi, Nuwan Kulasekara, Thisara Perera.

Dhaka Dynamites: Kumar Sangakkara, Andre Russel, Mahela Jayawardene, Dwayne Bravo, Evin Lewis, Ravi Bopara.

Khulna Titans: Nicholas Pooran, Riki Wessels, Kevon Cooper, Mohammad Asghar, Benny Howell.

Rajshahi Rockers: Darren Sammy, Mohammad Sami.

Rangpur Riders: Shahid Afridi, Sharjeel Khan, Babar Azam, Mohammad Shahzad, Dasun Shanaka, Gidron Damien Pope, Richard James Gleeson.

DRAFT PRICE

LOCAL PLAYERS		FOREIGN PLAYERS	
GRADE	PRICE (lakhs)	GRADE	PRICE (USD)
A	25	A	70,000
B	18	B	50,000
C	12	C	40,000
D	5	D	30,000



Bangladesh's ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan stole the show in the first ODI, but he was still hard at work during training yesterday, receiving advice on spin bowling from long-term mentor Mohammad Salahuddin. PHOTO: STAR



The Afghans seemed in high spirits ahead of the second ODI against Bangladesh. Right-handed opener Mohammad Shahzad (R) was seen sharing a light moment with match referee Richie Richardson at training in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Duckett honoured

AFP, London

Northamptonshire batsman Ben Duckett was voted the 2016 Cricket Writers' Club (CWC) Young Player of the Year on Tuesday to cap a meteoric rise that includes a recent England call-up.

Duckett will travel with England to Bangladesh this week on his first full international tour after a prolific campaign in county cricket.

The 21-year-old left-hander's excellence helped Northamptonshire win the Twenty20 Blast and he also amassed 1,338 runs in the County Championship Second Division.

Razzak puts Khulna in command

SPORTS REPORTER



He might not have any room in the national team at the moment, but that will not stop him from making headlines.

Veteran slow left-arter Abdur Razzak put in yet another vital performance for his home division Khulna when he smacked an 83-ball 97 on the third day of the National Cricket League against Barisal at home. This comes after he scalped three wickets in the game.

His three sixes and eight fours towards the end helped Khulna take a 163-run lead in the first innings after they posted 424 in 99.3 overs. He was ably supported by Mehedi Hasasn Miraz's 73. In reply, Barisal rode on Shahriar Nafees's 72 and finished the day on 122 for 3. Khulna now lead by 41 runs and with just one

more day to go, they have a realistic chance of winning the game.

The game at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium between Chittagong and Rangpur may also witness a result. In reply to Chittagong's 368 in the first innings, Rangpur, led by Tanveer Haider's 97 and Dhiman Ghosh's 86, posted a strong 355. Tall medium pacer Yasir Arafat Mishu, only 17, scalped a five-wicket haul. Unfortunately for Rangpur they had to play without the injured Liton Das who hurt his shoulder while diving on the field. He couldn't be a part of the game and returned to Dhaka.

After the exchange, they reduced Chittagong to 151 for 5 by stumps. Chittagong rode on Mominul Haque's 62 and Mahbulul Karim's 56.

The other two games -- Dhaka versus Dhaka Metro and Rajshahi against Sylhet -- were affected by rain are

headed for draws. While the Dhaka derby did not witness any play for the second consecutive day, several wickets fell during the match between Rajshahi and Sylhet. Rajshahi were bundled out for 199 and after that Sylhet were reduced to 57 for 5 by stumps with spinner Saqlain Sajib and pacer Muktar Ali taking two wickets each. Imtiaz Salim of Sylhet top-scored with 25 runs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BARISAL: 261 and 122 for 3 (Nafees 72; Miraz 1-36) v **KHULNA:** 424 all out in 99.3 overs (Razzak 97, Miraz 73; Golam 3-32, Gazi 3-104)

RAJSHAHI: 199 v **SYLHET:** 57 for 5 (Imtiaz 25; Saqlain 2-6, Muktar 2-21)

CHITTAGONG: 368 and 151 for 5 (Mominul 62, Mahbulul 56; Shuvo 3-35, Babu 1-25) v **RANGPUR:** 355 all out in 103.2 overs (Tanveer 97, Dhiman 86; Yasir 5-65, Tasamul 3-109)

DHAKA METRO: 47 for 2 v **DHAKA**