

SPORT



The biggest headache for Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha (2nd from L) ahead of the two-Test series against England will be striking a suitable bowling attack.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

'Winning is a bonus'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

The move from ODI cricket to Test cricket is a jarring one if just the technical and mental adjustments required are considered. It is all the more jarring when that move is made by a team that last collectively stepped out in whites around 15 months ago and one that has won only seven out of 93 matches since their elevation to the highest level.

Therefore, it was expected that head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, architect of Bangladesh's quantum leap in ODIs, did his best to water down expectations ahead of the Test series against England due to start at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium (ZACS) on Saturday.

"I think it is technical and mental adjustment. We haven't played longer version, even at the domestic level, for a long time," answered the Sri Lankan when, during Bangladesh's practice session at the ZACS yesterday, asked whether the technical or mental adjustment would be hardest. "The main players didn't get to play NCL this season as well. It is the challenge in international cricket where they play a lot of matches in different formats. Switching mindset between formats is what they have to get used to."

He stressed upon the importance of the start when they face off against the fourth-ranked side in the world. "How you get a start in a T20 is different to an ODI or Test match. If you start the game ready as a batsman, you can adapt quicker."

In the background, Mominul Haque, a Test specialist out in the wilderness for as long as Tigers' absence from the Test arena, was receiving throw-downs from batting coach Thilan Samaraweera. In another net Under-19 star Mehedi Hasan Miraz was putting a straight bat to the pacers. From the look of things, options in the batting department seemed plenty, but Bangladesh's woeful lack of wins is down to the other discipline -- bowling. It is rare that the newest Test nation are able to prise 20 wickets from quality opposition, an absolute necessity to win matches.

"We did well in one-day cricket because we got our players and combination right. We haven't got our right combination in Test cricket," the coach said. "I have been fighting to find bowlers who can get 20 wickets in Tests."

There was perhaps a hint of frustration at the lack of domestic and international longer-version matches. "We are actually trying players at the national level. This cannot happen. We have had lot of injuries and players lose form because we haven't played for a long time. We don't know where the fast bowlers are at this stage."

"You can't have plans if you don't have ammunition. You can manage what you have. We will keep developing a strategy in the long-term. Don't expect us to do miracles straight away," he added.

The most telling reply came when asked whether he was confident of winning the upcoming Test. "If you get what I have been saying, winning is a bonus."

A victim of the system?

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

It is natural that there will be some trepidation about Bangladesh's bowling resources in Test cricket, a format in which the Tigers have been victorious seven out of 93 times. So it is understandable that Bangladesh's 15-month absence from the format coupled with the dismal record would rankle a coach as proud as Chandika Hathurusingha.

"I have been fighting to find bowlers who can get 20 wickets in Tests," said Hathurusingha yesterday. "We were looking for a leg-spinner who can take wickets but he has faded away."

The man he is talking about is Jubair Hossain, a bowler who averages a respectable 30.81 in six Tests, got a fiver in his third and outfoxed someone like Virat Kohli.

"It is very disappointing. He had the skill, and we saw that at the start when he was on song. He won matches for us. In his second or third match, he took a five-for. In the India Test, he got two big wickets. Very disappointed that the time and energy we spent with him didn't come to fruition. It is frustrating," said Hathurusingha.

The frustration is well-founded, but quite why the 21-year-old seems to be consigned to the past is not clear. The frustration Hathurusingha feels is probably less Jubair's doing and more a failure of the system. He is a Test specialist, like batsman Mominul Haque, who does not get Test matches to play often. Unlike Mominul, however, domestic teams are often not willing to take the risk because leg-spinners sometimes prove expensive. This is borne out in the fact that he has played only 19 first-class games despite respectable figures.

It is only fair to keep the faith if you want results. Jubair does not seem to have been particularly fortunate in that regard.



Jubair Hossain

England feel the stifling heat

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

With the rain relenting on Friday and the early morning sunshine drying out the MA Aziz Stadium on the second day yesterday, the two-day practice match between the BCB XI and England XI saw one full day's play at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong. A two-day warm-up is short enough as it is, but with the first day's play being called off due to a wet outfield, there was just enough time on the second day for the visitors to feel the heat as BCB XI finished the day one run short of England XI's first-innings score of 137 for three in the 45-overs-a-side affair.

For Bangladesh, the main takeaway was Soumya Sarkar's relatively untroubled 33, during which he batted for 12 minutes short of two hours before retiring to give other batsmen a go. His 96-ball innings saw two fours and as many sixes so there was a nice mix of attack and defence on a belter of a pitch, on which he shared an 88-run opening stand with Shahriar Nafees (51 off 79 balls).

"The plan today was to bat for as long as possible. The outfield was slow so picking the runs wasn't easy. I think the batting still went well," Soumya said after the match. "Nafees batted quite well, and it didn't seem he had any problems. He played according to the merit of the ball. I tried to follow him, and stay at the non-striker's end."

But yesterday was more about England and how they dealt with the conditions.

Choosing to bat first under the beating sun in 30 degrees Celsius temperature and soaring humidity, newcomer 19-year-old Haseeb Hameed got his first outing in England whites and made a relatively good fist of it, batting for 100 minutes and 56 deliveries to score 16 before being caught behind off the leg-spin of Sabbir Rahman, who was also captain for this match.

Before that, opener Ben Duckett carried his fine form from the ODI series into the longer version, scoring 59 off 63 balls with the help of six boundaries. He retired on 59 to give their best batsman Joe Root a hit, but the right-hander was trapped in front for two to give Sabbir his first wicket.

"We got as much out of the conditions as we could. Coming to the ground this morning we weren't sure that this match was going to start because we've had a lot of rain for the past four days," said senior England paceman Stuart Broad, who went wicketless in his four overs yesterday. "It was like a football ground, it was quite boggy and quite sandy. We considered going into the game bowling 45 overs of spin, not risking the pacers where it was really wet through the run-up. But especially bowling second, the seamers saw the saw the ground dry up slightly."

"The thing about the heat, like it was today, it gets you in nick pretty quickly. You have got to adapt quickly. We know from experience there is no point trying to bowl 7-8 over spells in this sort of heat because you just tire too quickly."

It was hard work for England as the previous few days' rainfall meant a slow outfield where only the best hit shots travelled to the

ropes. Apart from Duckett, the three other batsmen -- Hameed, Moeen Ali and Gary Ballance -- who had spent time out in the middle managed only six boundaries between them. Instead, England were made to run 29 singles, 20 doubles and three triples.

Sabbir capped a good day with the ball by getting Moeen caught by Kamrul Islam Rabbi to end a 51-run third-wicket partnership.

Apart from Soumya and Nafees, both of whom retired, skipper Sabbir had a good outing with the bat, hitting a 45-ball 30 in

fading light with four boundaries and a six. For England, veteran spinner Gareth Batty got the two wickets to fall, dismissing Sabbir, and Mosaddek Hossain to signal the end of play with BCB XI on 136 after 44 overs.

"It was very much about getting a run out. We had a quick chat about adapting to the conditions and learning about the Bangladesh players and what style of cricket they like to play and what will suit us best coming into this series and heading into tomorrow [the second two-dayer on Sunday]," added Broad.



PHOTO: STAR

After a series of disappointing performances, one-day opener Soumya Sarkar got some sort of confidence in the rain-hit two-day tour match at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday, when the left-hander scored a compact 33 for BCB XI against England XI.



England one-day vice-captain Ben Stokes, whose all-round performances gave his side an exciting 2-1 series win against Bangladesh in the ODI series, is trying a different kind of skill during the two-day tour match at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Chandika rules Taskin out

SAKEB SUBHAN from Chittagong

"Has he played any four-day cricket?" was the slightly irritated answer from head coach Chandika Hathurusingha yesterday when asked whether young fast bowler Taskin Ahmed may feature in Bangladesh's Test squad for the series against England.

But he has played 10 first-class games, and the coach's point -- assuming it is that Taskin is not part of the Test conversation -- stands insofar that he has played the last of those three-and-a-half years ago.

Now if we were to nitpick and split hairs we would have to ask whether Hathurusingha was unaware that Taskin had played first-class cricket before. If that seems unlikely, is it possible that he was over-emphasising a point to drive home the idea that Taskin should not be playing Tests? If so, why?

"If you haven't played four-day cricket in your entire life, standing four days on the field and bowling 15 overs is entirely new for him. I don't want to destroy somebody's career," the coach said, ending discussion of Taskin's Test credentials for the time being.

It is not as if the speculation surrounding Taskin's role has emerged out of thin air. It has been barely two days since it was announced that he would be playing in the second two-day warm-up match against an England XI starting today. At that time there

was much talk about what an important prospect Taskin is for longer-version cricket.

To be fair there was not any discussion, when Taskin's involvement in the tour match was announced, about him being fit or ready for the Test starting on Thursday, but it seemed the door was not completely shut for the second Test in Dhaka, with a certain optimism being expressed about his readiness for the seam-friendly pitches of New Zealand.

It seemed a logical path to pursue because without the injured Mustafizur Rahman and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, the talismanic but injury-prone pacer whose Test days seem over, Bangladesh's longer-version pace reserves bear an alarmingly barren look. Yet the question elicited an answer as strong as 'I don't want to destroy somebody's career'.

One aspect that seems to have been lost in the euphoria of these shores seeing international cricket after a long time is the revamped selection panel, in which the coach, team manager and cricket operations chairman form a six-man panel along with the three-man selection panel. This discord between the apparent earmarking of Taskin for future Tests and the coach's wholesale rejection of the notion is a curious one. As a member of the process, was he not party to the decision?

After Hathurusingha's utterances yesterday, the party line became that Taskin was never considered for this series. All were singing from the same songbook; the question that will remain unanswered for the time being, it seems, is whose songbook that is.



23 players make U-19 skill camp

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) selected 23 players for the Bangladesh U-19 skill camp which will start from October 19 at BKSP for the U-19 Asia Cup in Sri Lanka in December this year.

The cricketers have been instructed to report to U-19 head coach Abdul Karim Jewel at BKSP on October 19.

SELECTED PLAYERS

- Openers:** Mohammed Saif Hasan, Shajibul Islam, Jalal Uddin Rumeed, Pinak Ghosh.
- Middle order batsmen:** Afif Hossain Dhurbo, Aminul Islam Biplob, Najmul Alom, Rayan Rafsan Rahman, Habibur Rahman Maruf and Mohammad Rakib.
- Wicketkeepers:** Mahidul Islam Ankon and Mohammad Akbar Ali.
- Spinners:** Nayeem Hasan, Shakawat Hossain Simon, Siddikur Rahman Shawon and Shahadat Hossain Ridoy.
- Pacers:** Qazi Onik Islam, Yasin Arfat Mishu, Mohammad Rony, Golam Rabbi Fahim, Monirul Islam Mughdho, Mohammad Abdul Halim and Hasan Mahmud.