

SPORT

Sabbir ready to step up

SAKEB SUBHAN from Chittagong

Of all the changes made to Bangladesh's Test squad, exciting young batsman Sabbir Rahman's inclusion for the first Test against England starting on Thursday in Chittagong is the one that seems most like natural progression, or as much as the stop-start nature of Bangladeshi Test cricket can allow.

He is one of the few Bangladeshi cricketers in the country's 16-year Test history to be on the cusp of a Test debut after already establishing himself as a national star. With 25 ODIs and 26 T20s under his belt, he is very much a part of the national set-up, especially as -- with a near 15-month gap between Tests -- the two shorter formats garner more national attention.

"Having played so many international matches will give me a good back-up to play Tests," Sabbir said before the team left their Chittagong hotel for practice at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium (ZACS).

As part of the generation that has followed the heady exploits of Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, etc. against all comers, Sabbir comes across as unabashedly and quite organically aggressive.

A strike rate of 95 in ODI cricket is analysed, with sincerity, by the right-hander as the product of a mentality where he 'takes some time' to settle in. Despite coach Chandika Hathurusingha saying that they will try to find a way to fit Sabbir into the playing eleven come Thursday, it is still far from certain that he will make his debut with the top six of Tamim, Imrul Kayes, Mominul Haque, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mushfiqur and Shakib pretty much nailed on. But, in keeping with the natural self-

confidence of millennials, Sabbir does not have time for negatives.

"It was my dream to be a Test player, and my family are also very happy that I got the call-up. It was my wish from childhood that I will play Tests, but you cannot just suddenly start playing Tests," said Sabbir. "I played T20s first, playing one-dayers now, so hopefully I will continue in Tests in the same vein."

"I set myself up in different ways for each format. If it is a one-dayer, I tell myself that I should take some time and play. In Test matches, I will think about how to sacrifice deliveries, how to judge a ball. It is a mental thing really, everything depends on mentality." Even with talk of mental alterations, there probably will not be much difference in the way he approaches the innings. "I don't think there will be a lot of change. If I hit a six or a four, runs are runs. I will try to play to my strengths. There is also a matter of time here -- even if you play a lot of dot balls, there is no problem. There is also a mental satisfaction that there are no problems playing dot balls, as that will not create pressure on you like it would in ODIs or T20s."

If the ZACS does offer a turning wicket as expected, Sabbir's chances of a debut on Thursday will increase -- his leg breaks netted him three wickets in the first two-day warm-up between BCB XI and England XI. Moreover, Tanveer Haider's success with leg-spin yesterday in the second warm-up may tilt the scales further in Sabbir's favour.

"I am always interested to bowl, whether it is in Tests, ODIs or T20s. I am trying to improve as a bowler so that I can become a regular bowler. If the captain trusts me with the ball I will want to contribute as much as I can," he added.



Bangladesh Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim (L) will hope that both pacer Shafiqul Islam (C) and the new entrant of the Test side Sabbir Rahman, can make a difference in Bangladesh's first Test against England on Thursday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Will Hathuru extend his radar?

BISHWAJIT ROY



Miracles can happen. But the harsh reality is real and it's totally and completely under someone's control. Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha understandably goes with the second notion when it comes to the challenge of Test cricket. And that's why the Sri Lankan has asked everybody not to expect any miracle when the Tigers lock horns with a strong England in the two-match Test series.

The squad for the first Test exposed the team's weakness and the difficulties of picking up an ideal Test team.

Hathurusingha seemed to throw in a barren field in order to assemble the bowling attack. The team think-tank came up with a surprise by including four newcomers in the squad and one cannot blame them for so many new faces considering the fact that the Tigers will be looking for a fresh start in the Test arena as they are going to play the five-day game after a long break.

Unlike the ODIs Bangladesh don't have

enough opportunities to build up a good unit with very few Test series in their favour. Unfortunately the country does not have a competitive longer-version cricket in place in the domestic circuit either to make up for the deficit. The combination results in players struggling when challenge comes to the fore.

Whenever it comes to Test assignments, there's commotion everywhere; we would need a genuine off-spinner, we would need a leg-spinner, and we would need wicket-taking pace bowlers to make sure that we can pick up twenty wickets. How we can make a proper Test team without bowling units which can take 20 wickets? The questions often come from the team think-tank.

To solve all these problems we must go to the domestic field. But the amount of attention we give to our first-class cricket hardly gives someone any hope for a solution. When a country does not have a proper calendar and when it prefers to start or stop important competitions whenever they wish, when they even don't bother to give any time for any preparation before the tournaments and when the

board shows much more interest to arrange a T20 tournament ignoring the base of their cricket (which is four-day competition), one cannot expect much.

Hathurusingha, a man who is apparently calling all the shots when it comes to the planning an selection of the national team, seemed in deep water with his Test planning. The Sri Lankan is not only the head coach but also a selector. If he extends his work to the domestic level Bangladesh's local tournaments will gain a lot. When the Sri Lankan took over the charge, the Tigers had already started to put their strong foot in 50-over cricket and his shrewd planning and contribution brought more success to the team.

But his real challenge lies in making a good Test team and to achieve the goal it is of paramount importance that he spends more time watching domestic cricket in order to at least to bring his desired players in the team.

Who knows, if he extends his radar in domestic cricket it may encourage the country's incumbent cricket authority to give first-class cricket the highest priority.



Pakistan leg-spinner Yasir Shah is ecstatic after having taken the crucial wicket of Darren Bravo and effectively ending the West Indies fightback in Dubai yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Heartbreak for Windies

AFP, Dubai

Despite a fighting hundred by Darren Bravo Pakistan pulled off a tension-packed 56-run victory against West Indies in the first day-night Test in Dubai on Monday.

It was a tensed finish which saw the momentum of the game shift from one end to the other. For a moment it seemed as though Pakistan had almost given it away. However, at the end of the day it all depended upon one wicket and Pakistan got that crucial breakthrough in the last session and changed the events of the game.

Bravo kept Pakistan's victory bid on hold during his resistance-filled 410-minute long 116 and it needed leg-spinner Yasir Shah to make a stunning two-handed catch to end his innings.

West Indies were finally bowled for 289 with just 12 over left in the match. Bravo lingered on his haunches at the crease for a minute before trudging back to the pavilion, disappointed at his dismissal after bringing so close a draw or an upset win.

Bravo's eighth Test hundred spiced with ten boundaries and a six had brought West Indies within 83 runs of victory and 27 overs to bat for a draw after they were set a daunting 346 runs to win.

Left-armer Mohammad Nawaz trapped Devendra Bishoo while Miguel Cummins and last man Shannon Gabriel were run out to

spark a celebration amongst Pakistan players.

Paceman Mohammad Amir finished with 3-63 and Shah took 2-113.

The match was a good advertisement for Test cricket as it had a triple hundred (302 not out) by Azhar Ali, 8-49 by leg-spinner Bishoo and two fighting knocks by Bravo.

Pakistan had never hoped to strive that much after getting an important wicket of Marlon Samuels with the first ball of the day but Bravo left them frustrated and near to capitulation.

This was Test cricket's second ever day-night Test played with a pink ball after Australia and New Zealand featured in the first at Adelaide in November last year.

The win is more memorable for Pakistan as the match marked their 400th Test since they began the five-day format in 1952.

Bravo first added 77 for the fifth wicket with Roston Chase (35) and then another 69 for the seventh with skipper Jason Holder who made 40 not out.

Pakistan had taken the second new ball with West Indies 224-6 and Bravo needing four for hundred. Bravo smashed an uppish drive off Amir's first ball to backward point boundary to complete his magnificent hundred after 329-minutes of defiance.

Bravo and Holder took the West Indies within 100 of victory in 41 overs after they reached dinner at 232-6.

Chase, famous for his 137 not out

at Jamaica which helped West Indies draw a Test against India in July this year, gave full support to Bravo as the duo frustrated Pakistan.

Pakistan's hopes rested on Shah who was not at his best despite the good turn on offer. He finally got his first wicket when he bowled Chase from across his feet.

Paceman Wahab Riaz then dismissed Shane Dowrich for nought to leave West Indies at 194-6.

West Indies had resumed at 95-2 and were instantly in trouble when Amir had Samuels caught behind for four with the first ball of the day.

Jermaine Blackwood (15) helped Bravo take the total to 116 when left-arm spinner Mohammad Nawaz trapped him leg-before, a decision Pakistan only got on referral.

Pakistan did not get what was expected from Shah in the first session as he bowled faster rather than giving flight to the ball.

The remaining two Tests will be played in Abu Dhabi (October 21-25) and Sharjah (October 30-November 3).

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: First innings 579-3 decl
WEST INDIES: First innings 357
PAKISTAN: Second innings 123
WEST INDIES: Second innings 289 all out in 109 overs (Bravo 116, Johnson 47, Holder 40 not out; Amir 3-63, Yasir 2-113, Nawaz 2-32)
Result: Pakistan won by 56 runs and led the three-match series 1-0.
Player of the match: Azhar Ali

'There's no pressure on me'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong



Being a wicketkeeper is a pretty hard ask in cricket. It is a thankless job, and very often a keeper only gets noticed when he makes a mistake like dropping a crucial catch or missing a stumping chance. To top it off, more often than not, the position of wicketkeeper in an international team has the lowest turnover -- once a player makes it his own and is performing with both gloves and bat, the position is his for as long as he wants it.

That is the reality facing Nurul Hasan in what should be his happiest time as a cricketer. The 22-year-old Khulna lad was on Sunday selected in the Bangladesh squad for the first Test against England on Thursday, but more than his three fellow new entrants, he knows that the chances of a debut are not great. The established Bangladesh wicketkeeper is Mushfiqur Rahim, who is not only also a vital batsman but the captain of the team.

When naming the team, head selector Minhajul Abedin had said that Nurul was the second wicketkeeper. Coach Chandika Hathurusingha added that Mushfiqur is the keeper 'at this stage' while crediting Nurul as being one of the best wicketkeepers in the country. Signs therefore point to Mushfiqur as the keeper although, as many seem to think, the pressure on the captain to keep and lead

may lead to a chance for his understudy in the near future.

"There is no pressure; in fact it can be taken as a show of respect," said Nurul, speaking after the BCB XI-England XI warm-up match yesterday, said when asked whether his inclusion brings pressure to fight for a difficult position or whether he sees it as reward for domestic performances. "Mushfiqur bhai has been playing for a long time. He is trying to play well for the team, the country. There is no thought of replacing him here. That he is playing well for Bangladesh is the more important thing."

Nurul has played six T20s in national colours, all this year, but he knows that should he get a chance to play in the Test, the demands will be different.

"There is of course a difference. Even so, if I take too much pressure then the difference will become even greater. The trick is to not take the pressure and reconcile the differences," he added.

He has impressed with his batting in the warm-up match, scoring 39 on Sunday before keeping safely all day yesterday with the catch to

dismiss Joe Root to show for it. "I have no special plans regarding my batting," said Nurul, who has a highest score of 182 not out in first-class cricket, where he averages just short of 42. "Hopefully if I get a chance I will try to play the way I am playing, I will try to play my natural game."



NURUL HASAN

Eng openers shine

SAKEB SUBHAN from Chittagong



TOUR MATCH

England's final dress rehearsal for the first Test against Bangladesh on Thursday ended with a draw in the second two-day warm-up against BCB XI at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

Responding to BCB XI's first innings score of 294 all out, an innings powered by Abdul Mazid's glittering 106 on Sunday, England XI were bowled out for 258 in 80 overs of batting, with Tanveer Haider picking up four for 58.

Openers Ben Duckett and the 19-year-old Hasib Hameed put their names in the mix, in their contrasting styles, to be skipper Alastair Cook's opening partner in the absence of Alex Hales, who chose to sit the tour out because of security concerns. The two put on 90 without loss in the morning session with Duckett hitting 60 off 101 balls with 10 boundaries. The left-hander, who also played a starring role in England's 2-1 ODI series win over the hosts, retired over the lunch break to give other batsmen a go.

"It's nice to get out in the middle and play a game as opposed to playing in the nets," Duckett said after the match. "The main thing was spending some time out in the middle and getting used to conditions."

Duckett's natural aggression was at odds with Hameed's. While Duckett needed one session to score 60, Hameed batted out two sessions to score 57 off 117 and retired during the tea interval, which England XI reached with

the score on 178 for the loss of Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow and Jos Buttler -- all claimed by the part-time leg-spin of Haider.

His four hours of batting revealed a player who plays within the limits of an organised playbook and one who can bat on and on once he gets in. This quality, coupled with the long sleeves he was wearing in stifling conditions, made him seem from a different age.

"We are teammates at the end of the day, so it's not necessarily competition" Duckett said when asked about his younger teammate. "Whoever plays surely deserves it. Like he did today, Haseeb can bat for days. That's the way we play, we are different players. Whoever they want to pick."

There were also reasonable outings for Ben Stokes before he was bowled for 25 by Subhashis Roy two overs after tea, and Gary Ballance, who remained not out on 36 off 75 balls. Moeen Ali was bowled by Mosaddek Hossain for 15, before Haider claimed his fourth wicket by bowling Chris Woakes. Taskin Ahmed then brought an end to the proceedings by bowling last man Gareth Batty with a Yorker 10 minutes before the close of play.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BCB XI: First innings 294
ENGLAND XI: First innings 256 all out (Hameed rtd out 57, Duckett rtd out 60, Root 24, Stokes 25, Ballance 36 not out, Woakes 23; Tanveer 4-53, Taskin 1-46, Subashis 1-26, Mosaddek 1-38)
Result: Match drawn.

KABADDI WORLD CUP B'desh thrash Australia

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh notched a massive 80-8 win over Australia, and also created a record, in their penultimate match of the Kabaddi World Cup in Ahmedabad yesterday.

The South Asians got their opponents out seven times in the match yesterday and created the record by surpassing Iran's six.

Bangladesh, who came into their fourth match on the back of shocking 32-35 defeat to South Korea, that shattered their hopes of a semifinal berth, dominated Australia from the outset to the end the first half 36-2 with 'three creditable lonas.'

After resumption, Bangladesh looked more serious and aggressive and went on to add 44 more points in the second half with 'four lonas' and led to post a 72-point win.

Bangladesh's slim chance to move into the semifinals depends on India's result against England. In addition Bangladesh also has to win Argentina on Wednesday.