

SPORT

Tigers looking beyond mere parity

BISHWAJIT ROY

Is BCB's chief curator Gamini Silva under pressure? Immediately after the home brigade turned up at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday, ahead of Friday's second and final Test against England, almost everyone walked to the middle of the ground to have a look at the pitch.

Selectors Minhajul Abedin, Habibul Bashar and Sajjad Ahmed, head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, captain Mushfiqur Rahim, vice-captain Tamim Iqbal, senior players like Shakib Al Hasan and even Bangladesh ODI and T20I skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza were all examining the surface to gauge whether the Sri Lankan will be able to fulfil the desire of the home side like Zahid Reza did in Chittagong.

It is only natural that the pitch in Mirpur will garner more interest than usual as in the absorbing drama that was the Chittagong Test the pitch was one of the major actors. The question however remained whether it would be possible for Mirpur to offer something other than the bouncy wicket it usually provides; an even more important question is whether the Tigers will be able to continue their renaissance in the second Test regardless of the pitch.

If someone takes the words from vice-captain Tamim, one can understand the real sentiment and motive of the home side. Tamim made it clear that they will utilise the home advantage but when he added that they lost the Test in Chittagong despite the wicket being in their favour, it hinted at what they were actually looking for in the Mirpur Test.

While everybody was praising the Tigers' brilliant effort in the first Test on



The pitch that curator Gamini Silva (L) prepares is likely to be a central factor in coach Chandika Hathurusingha's (C) strategy for the second Test between Bangladesh and England, but home vice-captain Tamim Iqbal was eager to focus on the things they can control when they take the field tomorrow at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

their return to the five-day game after a 15-month break, the left-hander let the air out of that sentiment by saying that: "In the end we lost the match."

After spending 16 years in Test cricket, this generation of cricketers

seemed unwilling to pat themselves on their backs for merely playing good or competitive cricket; instead they want to win the next Test.

"Everyone is saying that we played well, but we have discussed as a team

that we cannot be so happy with so little. We should have won the game. We can take positives from the first Test, like competing for five days. We will try to win the next game and definitely we will go for the win, which is a

belief that is held by each and every cricketer who plays for Bangladesh," said a confident Tamim.

"I think the less we talk about the last game, the better. It was a good Test match, but we lost in the end. Five years from

now, it will read that we lost the game. We should stick to the processes and plan things that we have," he continued.

The experienced campaigner also hinted that a good team cannot just look to the pitch for favours; instead they have to adapt to different conditions like they did in the Chittagong Test. He was also not happy to hear much discussion about the home advantage by saying: "What I find amusing is that there's a lot of talk about the wicket when we are playing here. We cannot expect a spinner-friendly wicket in England. We know that there will be seaming conditions. I think we should get home advantage, but it is something that I don't want to elaborate on."

"We have to utilise the wicket, by playing well. We have to reduce our mistakes, and bowl according to the wicket. I think we are doing it that way, and we know that the wicket is out of our control. We are discussing more on what we can do with bat and ball, not on the wicket or the toss," he said.

Tamim also said that the long break from Test cricket will not be an issue for the second Test after they had played a very competitive match in Chittagong, which will help them be better prepared and more confident for the second game.

Bangladesh found their groove in the Chittagong Test and are now looking forward to carry it in the coming assignments. "We have a number of Tests in the next six months, so we want to use the rhythm from the Chittagong Test for the future," added Tamim.

Yesterday was all about the discussion of the pitch and the first Test batting blunder of Shakib, but some did not forget to point out the hovering clouds brought about by the depression in the Bay of Bengal.

'Sabbir's stomach pain not serious'

SPORTS REPORTER

Sabbir Rahman's participation in the second Test seems a lot more certain as Bangladesh physio Bayjidul Islam told reporters yesterday that Sabbir's stomach pain was not a serious issue and that he is confident that the batsman will be able to play in the second Test in Dhaka.

Speaking to reporters yesterday afternoon, Bayjidul said: "Sabbir had been complaining of stomach pain since the start of the first Test. He went through an endoscopy today [Wednesday] and the issue is a gastric-related one. The doctor gave him a few dietary measures. The good news is that the pain has reduced."

Since Sabbir did the endoscopy yesterday, he did not join the national team's training session in Mirpur. He will, however, join the camp today.

As a result of the uncertainty surrounding Sabbir, young Mosaddek Hossain was brought in to the squad as cover. However, it seems as though the batsman who has an average of 70 in first-class cricket does not have much of a chance to make his debut.

The chances of the other new entrant

in the squad, pacer Shubhashis Roy, to make his debut is more likely. Shubhashis came into the squad in place of Shaiful Islam and if Bangladesh play two pacers like in the first Test, he will definitely be playing.

However, it will not be a surprise if the team management decides to play just one pacer in the second Test. It is something that they had done in 2015 against India. The strategy did not work too well back then with India hammering 283 runs for the opening wicket.

If that is the case, then Shubhashis will have to fight for a place in the squad with Kamrul Islam Rabbi. In that event Bangladesh will think about including an extra spinner -- possibly Shuvagata Hom -- in the eleven. He has played seven Tests so far and has scalped eight wickets.

There have also been discussions about the wicket at Mirpur. The wickets at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium have traditionally been different to that of Chittagong with bowlers managing to extract more bounce. However, with the way Bangladesh performed in the last Test, it will not be a surprise if they get to see a turner once again.

Tour of India No Anderson for first Test

AFP, Dhaka

Fast bowler James Anderson was left out as England named an unchanged 16-man squad on Tuesday for their five-Test series against India.

Anderson had already been ruled out of next month's opening Test in Rajkot as he is recovering from a shoulder problem.

The 34-year-old was forced to miss England's ongoing series in Bangladesh, but could join the squad for the remaining four Tests of the India tour.

England are also without pacer Mark Wood but they elected not to draft in another seamer, leaving the squad unchanged from the series with Bangladesh.

Stuart Broad, Chris Woakes, Ben Stokes, Steven Finn and Jake Ball are the pace bowlers in the squad, with Moeen Ali, Adil Rashid, Gareth Batty and Zafar Ansari supplying spin.

England begin their series against India on November 9.

'A potential all-time great'

AFP, Chittagong

England coach Trevor Bayliss has backed Ben Stokes to become one of cricket's all-time greats, joking that the combative all-rounder is likely to deck anyone who dares give him a rest.

With star pacer Jimmy Anderson currently sidelined, Stokes is emerging as one of the keys to England's chances on a tour of the sub-continent which will see them play five Tests in India after wrapping their tour of Bangladesh.

Stokes was named man of the match after Monday's dramatic finale to the first Test in Chittagong which saw England edge home by 22 runs.

In a match dominated by spin, Stokes took six wickets with a mixture of classic seam and reverse swing that underlined his growing intelligence as a bowler.

But he also scored 85 in the second innings in a sixth-wicket partnership with Jonny Bairstow worth 127 runs which effectively turned the game.

Bayliss said the 25-year-old had the potential to be an all-time great.

"It's going to be easier to judge the longer he goes. The potential of the guy -- he could be right up there with some of the all-time best all-rounders," Bayliss told reporters in Chittagong.

"Only time will tell, but certainly, the

strides he's made here on the subcontinent playing spin have been top-class. It wasn't all that long ago we were wondering how he might go on spin-friendly wickets, but he works hard in the nets."

Since Andrew Flintoff's retirement nearly a decade ago, England have been lacking a quality pace bowler who can also bat up the order and balance the side.

Stokes has shown his batting class but he had been seen as vulnerable to spin -- a facet of his game he has worked exhaustively to improve.

"I think it's his defence to spin that has improved out of sight," said Bayliss.

"We know that if he gets a bad ball, he can hit anything over the fence but you've got to be there to get that loose ball. He's a guy that in the past probably hasn't had a lot of footwork," he added.

"But as we saw in the one-dayers and this Test, he defended really well off the front foot, got right forward and smothered the ball before it had a chance to spin and jump past the outside edge."

Asked if Stokes could play all seven Tests, Bayliss responded: "I'm not sure we're game enough to drop him out anyway, might get a thump in the head," said Bayliss.



England coach Trevor Bayliss (L) is loath to even consider rotating out Ben Stokes (R) lest he get a 'thump on the head'.

PHOTO: STAR



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is not part of the Test squad anymore but it would be a treat to be a fly on the Mirpur grass blades to hear what, if anything, he had to say about Shakib Al Hasan's moment of madness on the third morning of the first Test.

PHOTO: STAR

NZ take series to decider

AFP, Ranchi

Fast bowlers Tim Southee and James Neesham ran through India's middle order to help New Zealand to a 19-run series-levelling win in the fourth one-day international Ranchi on Wednesday.

Southee (3-40) and Neesham (2-38) shared five wickets between them to bowl out India for 241 in 48.4 overs.

Earlier opener Martin Gupthill scored a gritty half-century to drive New Zealand to 260 for seven after electing to bat first.

Southee hurt India's reply with an early wicket but Ajinkya Rahane (57) and Virat Kohli (45) put on 79 runs for the second wicket to steady the chase.

Kohli dominated his stay at the crease with two fours and a six before his innings was cut short by leg-spinner Ish Sodhi who got the star batsman caught behind.

Neesham soon swung into action with two big wickets of Rahane and Mahendra Singh Dhoni as India's chase began to fall apart.

Rahane was setting a good pace after recording his 16th ODI half-century, but

failed to convert his solid start into a big score as he was adjudged lbw to a Neesham inswinger. Neesham got Dhoni bowled for 11 in his very next over.

But it was Southee's double strike in the 33rd over of the innings that completely derailed India's chase with the hosts slipping to 154 for six.

Southee got Manish Pandey (12) and Kedar Jadhav (0) off consecutive deliveries to be on hat-trick which was only averted by Hardik Pandya (9), who did not last long.

Earlier the visitors, started off well courtesy of a 96-run opening stand between Gupthill (72) and Tom Latham only to lose steam towards the end of the innings.

The action now shifts to Viskhapatnam for the deciding fifth and final match on Saturday.

Pak unchanged for 3rd Test

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan's selectors have named an unchanged squad for the third Test against the West Indies after another crushing victory in the second Test in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday.

Riding on a century by Younis Khan and another 10-wicket haul by leg-spinner Yasir Shah, the Pakistan team took an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

As such it was no surprise when the selectors today named an unchanged squad.

One selector said that two or three names would be added to the squad for the tours to New Zealand and Australia later this week.

A source told PTI that experienced but out of luck opener, Mohammad Hafeez was most likely to make the touring squad.

SCORES IN BRIEF
NEW ZEALAND: 260 for 7 (Gupthill 72, Williamson 41, Latham 39; Mishra 2-42)
INDIA: 241 all out in 48.4 overs (Rahane 57, Kohli 45, Patel 38; Southee 3-40, Boult 2-38)
Result: New Zealand won by 19 runs and level 5-match series 2-2
Player-of-the-match: Martin Gupthill