

SPORT



Chittagong Vikings captain Tamim Iqbal (L) will be hoping for a change for the better in his side's fortunes as the tournament shifts to his hometown. However, the biggest challenge lies in the very first game of the leg today as they come up against league leaders Dhaka Dynamites, led by Shakib Al Hasan.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Carnival shifts to Chittagong

SPORTS REPORTER

The last time the country's cricketing fraternity shifted their focus from the home of cricket in Mirpur to the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium (ZACS) in Chittagong, they witnessed magnificence. The way England and Bangladesh battled neck and neck in the first Test, right up till the fifth day on a turning track, was an excellent display of Test cricket and it had the world hooked to their television sets.

A few weeks on and the port city is once again at the heart of the cricketing focus. This time

though it will be for the shortest format of the game. The Dhaka Dynamites, the Chittagong Vikings, the Rangpur Riders and the Barisal Bulls will begin the Chittagong leg of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at the ZACS today.

It is unfair to compare Test cricket to T20 cricket and it is even more unfair to compare the excitement that was generated from the first Test between England and Bangladesh to the BPL. However, Chittagong's fans, who don't get to see their heroes in town as often as Dhakaites, will want to make the most of this BPL leg. And for the sake of them, one hopes that the Chittagong leg provides plenty of excitement.

The BPL will kick-start at 1:00pm today with Shakib Al Hasan's Dhaka Dynamites taking on Tamim Iqbal's Chittagong Vikings. The fortunes of these two teams have been completely opposite so far. The Dynamites, save for a lone defeat at the hands of the Rajshahi Kings, have dominated the league. They have posted the highest score of the competition so far and are on top of the league with six points. The Vikings on the other hand are going through a rough patch, having managed just two points in four games with one win, and will be desperately hoping to do well on their home turf in order to come back in the competition.

Both the teams have big names, but the difference is that Dhaka's players have performed, whereas Chittagong's have not. Nasir Hossain, Mehedi Maruf and Mosaddek Hossain have been brilliant for Dhaka. So much so, that they have eclipsed Dhaka's star-studded foreign line-up.

Meanwhile, Chittagong been unable to click since their unexpected last over defeat to the Khulna Titans. While Tamim Iqbal has scored two half-centuries for the team, the rest of their batting order have failed to make mark. Their bowlers have also been leaking runs. For them to do well, they need to regroup as a team and their players need to regain their form and the momentum.

The evening game, which will begin at 5:45 pm, will see Naeem Islam's Rangpur Riders take on Mushfiqur Rahim's Barisal Bulls. Both of these teams have done well in Dhaka -- Barisal have won three out of their four games and Rangpur have won two out of their three games.

But at the moment, the Bulls seem to have the momentum as they come into the game having won three on the trot, while Rangpur received quite a thrashing from Dhaka in their last game.

The contest will boil down to Rangpur's spinners versus Barisal's batsmen. Rangpur's attack consists of Arafat Sunny, Shohag Gazi and Shahid Afridi and they will have to tackle the highest run-getters of the tournament so far: Mushfiqur Rahim and Shahriar Nafees.

PHOTO: STAR



Barisal Bulls captain Mushfiqur Rahim will be looking forward to continuing his team's fantastic form which has seen them win three games on the trot as they square up against the Rangpur Riders today.

Functional RCAs will be Papon's biggest triumph

AL-AMIN



Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hasan Papon last week celebrated three successful years in office with a Mezban for all stakeholders at the board headquarters in Mirpur. The BCB boss and his committee deserve to celebrate the achievements in those three years off the field, even more than those on it.

It was not just the men's team that played extraordinary cricket -- winning six home series on the trot after making it to the World Cup quarterfinals down under, scoring their first Test victory of substance in a magnificent series against England that will go down as the best series on Bangladesh soil. The Bangladesh Under-19 team also made it to the Youth World Cup semifinal before going down fighting against eventual winners West Indies. The women's team also made their mark on the international front.

Papon certainly deserves kudos for the transformation of the men's team from being an enigma to a unit that has finally translated its potential into success. And it all started in 2014 when the board, desperate to find a suitable coach for the Tigers after being snubbed by a few high-profile names, took the bold decision to appoint Sri Lankan Chandika Hathurusingha, whose biggest credential was his association with Australian domestic side New South Wales. At the same time Papon has also decided to split the captaincy and despite injury fears, appointed Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as skipper for shorter formats. The decision worked wonders and the Tigers not only became 2015's second-best team in terms of win percentage in the ODI format but also won enough rating points that year to seal their place in the ICC Champions Trophy.

Papon's struggle off the field was no less challenging. He actually took over the hot seat of Bangladesh's richest sports body when it was going through troubled waters. His predecessor had almost dragged the Tigers to tour Pakistan against the world order and left the fixing-tainted BPL in a state of shambles with the world media also deploring the non-payment issue of the players. It was also a time when the 'Big Three' were invading the game's ruling body ICC. But despite his limited experience in top-level cricket, the BCB boss guided the ship with aplomb. He not only averted that Pakistan tour with his cricket diplomacy despite threats from Pakistan, but also mended the relationship of the two boards by allowing the women's team to tour Pakistan instead. He also formed a judicial committee to probe the fixing scandal in the BPL and has also solved the non-payment issues of the players judiciously. He even revived the money-spinning domestic T20 competition after a gap of one year, mending those loopholes in the BPL governing council.

The most telling contribution of Papon is his uncompromising approach to uphold

discipline and his decision to punish premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan for disciplinary breaches in mid-2014 played a big role in creating harmony in the team. Being the CEO of one of the big business houses in the country, Papon also tried to restore financial discipline in the board.

Is there anything to be critical of Papon's three odd years in office? Not much. But he must feel that he could have done better on the domestic front; particularly his failure to commit to a set domestic calendar. Besides that, his decision to reorganise the selection committee, which has been doing well, has certainly come as a disappointment for many who believe it may eventually become a recipe for disaster in the long run.

Papon is already winding up his first term in office with a fresh election due next year. He will definitely go for a second term and as part of that campaign he has already promised to fulfil one long-unfulfilled demand -- the formation of the Regional Cricket Association (RCA). The draft RCA has already been endorsed in the board and it will be tabled in the next AGM for approval.

The formation of the RCA, which was a commitment from BCB when it applied for Test status, will open the door for decentralisation of Bangladesh cricket. The idea is that cricket will no longer be solely Dhaka-centric. There are seven regional cricket associations in the draft which means each region will flourish as independent cricket centres equipped with all the necessary infrastructure, grounds, manpower and patrons. It is also the right time for the BCB to realistically launch the RCAs because the board has now got the financial muscle to nurture them.

But to make the RCAs truly functional and more importantly autonomous, the BCB also needs to change its own constitution. As it stands at the moment, if the amended 2012 BCB constitution is followed for the formation of the BCB General Council and also the formation of the Executive Board, the RCA will be more an eyewash than a serious effort in the path to decentralisation.

Without going into the complicated jargon associated with any constitution, what we understand at the moment as laymen is that if the BCB general council is still formed with a set of councillors (members) from divisions, districts, clubs, educational institutions (as defined in the amended 2012 BCB constitution) who are already part of RCAs and have gone through an electoral process, isn't it akin to voters who have elected members of parliament from their constituencies still having to vote for the formation of the cabinet and also a prime minister?

We believe this is a serious threat to continuity of a process and it is up to the board to decide whether it will form the RCA to fulfil a commitment to the ICC or really give it a try to make it truly functional. We want to remind ourselves that our cricket has reached this far mainly because we have always taken the right decision for the greater interest of the game.

Easy win for Windies

AFP, Harare

Superb bowling allowed the West Indies to overcome the absence of several key players as they beat Sri Lanka by 62 runs in the second one-day international in Harare on Wednesday.

After managing just 227 all out with the bat, Ashley Nurse and Shannon Gabriel grabbed three wickets apiece and captain Jason Holder picked up two as Sri Lanka were bowled out for 165 inside 44 overs.

As a result the West Indies also picked up a bonus point, putting them level on five points with Sri Lanka, who beat Zimbabwe in Monday's series opener in the triangular series.

SCORES IN BRIEF
WEST INDIES: 227 all out in 49.2 overs (Lewis 27, Hope 47, Carter 54, Powell 44; Kulasekara 2-37, Lakmal 2-45, Pradeep 2-55)
SRI LANKA: 165 all out in 43.1 overs (Dickwella 28, Gunaratne 18, Jayasuriya 31, Pathirana 45, Kulasekara 16; Gabriel 3-31, Holder 2-16, Nurse 3-46)
Result: West Indies won by 62 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Jason Holder.

India spinners under the pump

2nd Test against Eng starts today

AFP, Visakhapatnam

India's much-hyped spin attack are under pressure to deliver in the second Test at Visakhapatnam starting Thursday against an England side high on confidence and boasting new teenage sensation Haseeb Hameed.

Nineteen-year-old Hameed, dubbed "Baby Boycott" for his unflappable style akin to batting great Geoffrey Boycott, scored 31 and 82 on debut during last week's drawn first Test, the latter the highest by a teenager for England.

He shared a 180-run second innings opening stand -- a record for England in India -- with captain Alastair Cook, who made 130, as the home side's spinners endured a torrid start to the five-Test series.

India's spin trio of Ravichandran Ashwin, the world's top-ranked bowler, Ravindra Jadeja and Amit Mishra had been expected to rip through England's batting line-up but wilted in the Rajkot heat.

The tourists sparked with four centuries -- from Cook, Joe Root, Moeen Ali and Ben Stokes -- as the hosts clung on for a tense draw, losing six wickets on the final afternoon after being set a notional 310 to win.

There had been questions marks over the quality of England's slow bowlers before the game but they outperformed their Indian counterparts with leg-spinner Adil Rashid taking seven wickets.

"Our batters played well against their spinners, and our spinners and seamers all bowled well. The way the guys played in this Test should give us plenty of confidence," said England coach Trevor Bayliss after the first match finished on Sunday.

England's strong showing against the top-ranked Indians banished memories of last month's defeat to Bangladesh when they were undone by rookie spinner Mehedi Hasan.

'I'm not a child out to prove myself'

SPORTS REPORTER



It is something of a mystery that all-rounder Nasir Hossain failed to make the cut for the national team. Questions arose when the 24-year old all-rounder was not considered for the preparatory camp in Australia for the upcoming New Zealand tour.

At a time when Nasir has been proving his worth as a utility all-rounder by scoring runs at number three, taking wickets and grabbing a few good catches for Dhaka Dynamites in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), it has to be asked if he is trying to prove something.

"To me every match is important. There is nothing to prove. I am not a child that I would need to prove myself. My duty is to score runs and win matches for my team," Nasir responded yesterday ahead of his team's clash against the Chittagong Vikings in Chittagong today.

He further added that he was enjoying batting higher up the order.

"Yes, it feels good. It always feels good when you score runs no matter what position [you play in]. I batted at number three and got runs and it was a suitable position for me."

On the other hand, another out-of-favour performer, Shahriar Nafees, was focused solely on his hard work and was not thinking beyond that.

"My target is to continue working hard and performing for my team. I am only concentrating and planning on the BPL. Regarding the national team, everything depends on the selection committee and team management. It's not in my hands. As I got a chance to play in the BPL, I will try to play well here and fully concentrate on this tournament," said the in-form Barisal Bulls left-hander ahead of his side's first Chittagong-leg



While the all-rounder has failed to make it into the national team in recent series, Nasir Hossain (L) remains undeterred and has turned in fabulous performances for the Dhaka Dynamites. PHOTO: STAR

match against Rangpur Riders.

The experienced left-hander was also lavish in his praise for captain Mushfiqur Rahim.

"Mushfiqur is a tremendous cricketer. He has been doing a good job for Bangladesh for a long while. It's not good to raise questions after failures in one or two games. He is performing well in this tournament and I hope he will continue. I will also try to contribute as much as possible."

Everyone will be looking forward to seeing whether Chittagong will offer truer wickets after the dull Dhaka leg, but Nafees predicted that there would be good batting wickets despite the fact that a spin-friendly pitch had provided excitement during the first Test match between Bangladesh and England.

"Bangladesh played on a spinning track against

England because we planned to do something different and we were successful in our plan. But from what I have seen during practice, I am hoping there will be a run-fest in these conditions. I'm guessing the batsmen will be favoured," hoped Nafees.

Chittagong Vikings opener Anamul Haque echoed Nafees's sentiments.

"I believe the track will be batting-friendly and the batsmen will get the advantage. The bowlers will need to bowl in the right areas and get turn to be successful."

The right-hander also blamed luck behind his failures in the Dhaka-leg, saying: "Overall I was unlucky. I was run-out in two matches, but I still have a chance as there are eight more matches to play. I will try my best."