

SPORT



The Bangladesh players wait at the Auckland airport yesterday for their departure to Christchurch where they will play the first ODI against New Zealand on Monday. Before leaving, Taskin Ahmed (R) and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza roamed the streets of Auckland.

A chance to rewrite Boxing Day

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Nine years ago to the day, Bangladesh were getting ready for the first ODI on their tour of New Zealand which took place at Eden Park in Auckland. The Tigers were enjoying a good run by their standards at that point of time.

They had done well in the World Cup and then were relatively competitive against India and Sri Lanka in the following series.

And so it was a confident side that went into Eden Park on December 26, 2007. They did relatively well with Tamim Iqbal scoring 50 off 66 balls, Mohammad Ashraful hitting a beautiful 57-ball 70 and although they went on to post 201, New Zealand ran out comfortable winners in 42.4 overs with six wickets in hand.

In a sense, the above result reflects Bangladesh's disappointing run in New Zealand. There have been a few decent knocks for Bangladesh's players down under, but they have never managed to cross the line.

Away from home, Bangladesh have lost all seven of their ODIs and five Tests against New Zealand. The last time they played a bilateral series in New Zealand was back in 2010 when they lost the ODIs 3-0 and the Test series 1-0.

Nine years on, Bangladesh will be hoping they can improve the numbers. They are arguably at their peak and with Mustafizur Rahman up and running, they could not have asked for a better time to tour New Zealand.

The fact that a number of Bangladeshis have recorded their best numbers against New Zealand will only embolden them further.

Take for instance Mominul Haque. The left-hander averages a staggering 188 in two Tests against New Zealand and he has two centuries, including his highest score of 181, against them.

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's best bowling figures in a Test innings, seven for 36, was recorded against the Kiwis. Rubel Hossain has a hattrick against New Zealand in ODIs and has recorded figures of six for 26 against the Kiwis.

Mahmudullah Riyad has a century against the Kiwis in New Zealand and he will also be aware of the fact that just a year ago he had scored two centuries in the ICC World Cup that took place in Australia and New Zealand.

Nine years ago, Bangladesh's fans were at ease with the defeat to the Kiwis. After all, they had seen two of their batsmen score amazing half-centuries and back then that was satisfying enough.

Today, as Bangladesh reach Christchurch -- the venue for the first ODI -- everybody will know too well that a mere fight will not be enough to satisfy Bangladesh's fans. It is going to be a very difficult task to improve Bangladesh's numbers in New Zealand, but then again they way the Tigers have been acing improbable tasks in the past two years, nothing seems unlikely at the moment.

Clinical wins for Rajshahi, Rangpur

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WALTON LEDTV
18th National Cricket League 2016-17

Rajshahi and Rangpur posted high victories on the fourth and final day of the fourth-round National Cricket League (NCL) matches at different venues yesterday.

With the outright successes, both Rajshahi and Rangpur extended their tally to 46 points to secure the top two spots respectively in the tier-two competition.

Facing a daunting target of 330, Sylhet resumed their second innings on 28 for one and were ultimately bundled out for 178 to suffer a 151-run defeat at the Shaheed Chandra Stadium in Bogra.

Imtiaz Hossain and Zakir Hasan contin-

ued their second-wicket stand before left-arm spinner Saqlain Sajib removed Imtiaz to break the 61-run partnership and thereafter Sylhet lost wickets at regular intervals.

The only resistance came from veteran Rajin Saleh, who scored an unbeaten 75 off 126 deliveries.

At Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, Chittagong managed to avoid the innings defeat but Ariful Haque's four-wicket haul helped Rangpur to a 10-wicket victory.

Resuming the day on 149 for four, Chittagong were all out for 297 runs to set a 30-run winning target, which Rangpur achieved in 5.2 overs without any loss.

Almost all the Chittagong batsmen got starts in their second innings but they lacked a big knock or a good partnership.

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POINTS TABLE

Teams	Tier 1				Pts
	M	W	L	D	
Khulna	4	1	0	3	36
Dhaka	4	1	0	3	27
Barisal	4	0	1	3	26
Dhaka Metro	4	0	1	3	18
Tier 2					
	M	W	L	D	
Rajshahi	4	2	0	2	46
Rangpur	4	2	0	2	46
Sylhet	4	0	2	2	22
Chittagong	4	0	2	2	21

SCORES IN BRIEF

RAJSHAHI V SYLHET

RAJSHAHI: 204 and 344.

SYLHET: 219 and 178 all out in 61 overs (Imtiaz 32, Rajin 75 not out; Reza 2-60, Saqlain 3-45, Sunzamul 3-15).

Result: Rajshahi won by 151 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Forhad Hossain.

RANGPUR V CHITTAGONG

RANGPUR: 450 and 33-0 in 5.2 overs (Saymon 18, Liton 12).

CHITTAGONG: 182 and 297 all out in 99.3 overs (Pinak 45, Yasir 58, Saifuddin 43, Sajjad 43; Babu 2-51, Shuvro 2-50, Ariful 4-34).

Result: Rangpur won by 10 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Suhravardhi Shuvo.

'Need to play more patiently'

AGENCIES, Auckland



Far from believing Christmas had come early when he was recalled after being omitted from the Chappell-Hadlee Trophy series, Luke Ronchi showed the maturity normally associated with a 35-year-old cricketer when asked if he was relieved to be reinstated for the ODI series with Bangladesh.

"I'd had an extended run with the team and didn't do as well as I should have been doing. I was fine with the whole situation. I understood, it's cricket and you can only play 11 people and if there's people doing better, they deserve to play."

"It [getting dropped] was something that needed to happen," the wicketkeeper-batsman confessed as the squad started assembling on Friday. "It didn't bother me. I needed to be out of the team. You have to perform and if you're not performing then you can't expect to be given games all the time."

Ronchi, who resumes a 73-match ODI career in the first match of the three-game

series against Bangladesh at Hagley Oval on Boxing Day, was replaced by test gloveman BJ Watling in Australia.

However, Watling's underwhelming series and Ronchi's belligerence in the Twenty20 Super Smash produced a lifeline ahead of the return series with the world champions in January-February.

"I hadn't been making the runs [for New Zealand] so you just have to go back and get some confidence again playing for Wellington. That's been going well, so hopefully I can bring that back into this team."

Ronchi, a dasher by nature, was dropped after averaging 13.62 in his last nine innings for the Black Caps in 2016.

And although he has maintained an impressive strike rate in the Super Smash, Ronchi said a more restrained approach would be employed

against Bangladesh.

"I have to give myself more time to get in, that's what I've been doing recently," he said of his change of character. "I just need to realise you've got longer than what you think. And not try and do quite so much, even if it's five balls I don't need to get 30 runs off five balls. I just need to give myself a little more time."



LUKE RONCHI

Rixon hints at pressure on Smith

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Pakistan fielding coach Steve Rixon has lobbed a grenade at the Australian dressing room, suggesting the team's coaching staff is telling captain Steve Smith what fields to set.

Although he did not mention Darren Lehmann by name, his comments will be interpreted as a thinly veiled swipe over the influence he wields on the team.

Rixon believes Smith was being instructed to set defensive fields during the tense fifth day in Brisbane and said Pakistan's thrilling but unsuccessful run chase had exposed the second-year captain.

"I think there were lots of other people at the top there making him set the set of fields he probably was instructed to do," Rixon told Sky Sports radio.

"People talking about him and criticising him should have a closer look at the situation. It did expose his vulnerability as a new captain and that's fine, that's how you learn to get better. And he will only be stronger for it."

It's not the first time during Lehmann's reign there have been suggestions the coach and management have too much power within the Australian set-up.

Former captain Michael Clarke wrote in his book that he was unhappy with the "sweeping change" performance boss and former Wallaby Pat Howard had made to the system.

Hosts exact revenge

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh handed Nepal a straight 3-0 sets defeat in their second fixture of the Bangabandhu Senior Asian Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The home side came into the match on the back of a 3-1 sets win over Afghanistan but faced tough challenge from visitors Nepal in each set before ultimately posting 25-21, 25-20, 25-23 points win.

The third set proved more competitive as the men in red and green trailed 22-23 at one point but they bounced back to take the set 25-23 and exact revenge for their defeat against the same opposition in the South Asian Games earlier this year, which had ended their campaign.

Bangladesh have a great opportunity to finish among the top two teams who will play in the final.

"We were upset after losing to Nepal during the South Asian Games because we led by 2-0 sets at one stage," Bangladesh captain and man-of-the-match Saeed Al Jabir said. "But this time our coach [Ali Pour Arosi] inspired and motivated us and spread belief among the players that we can beat Nepal."

"Nepal are a good team and we came out of pressure to beat them in the third set following brilliant blocks in the latter stages of the set after it was locked at 23-23. Sometimes one point is very crucial in volleyball and it may be the game's turning point."

Bangladesh are set to play their third match against tournament favourites Kyrgyzstan on Sunday.



Bangladesh players celebrate their straight sets victory over Nepal in their Bangabandhu Senior Asian Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship fixture at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Security hiked at MCG

Melbourne terror arrests raise alarm

AP, Melbourne

Security has been increased at the Melbourne Cricket Ground for Monday's Test between Australia and Pakistan following the arrest of seven people over a terror-related plot in the city.

Those charged were allegedly planning to attack Melbourne's Flinders Street train station on Christmas.

Chief police commissioner Graham Ashton said while they are confident the terror plot had been contained, extra police will be deployed at major events.

"We know there's lots of events on over the next several days across our state, including the Boxing Day Test," he said. "There is no intelligence to suggest there is any threat whatsoever to any of those events. However we're just making sure we're taking those extra precautions," he added.

Victoria Police and Cricket Australia were liaising over the appropriate security level.

Black bat coming back?

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Andre Russell's controversial black bat could be making a surprise Big Bash comeback. The striking black and hot pink bat was a social media sensation when the Jamaican strode out for the opening match of this KFC Big Bash League season.

However, the bat left black marks on the white ball used in the match, prompting the permission for its use to be revoked.

But after some quick improvements the black bat could be back in action for the Thunder's next game on December 28.

Pakistan say they have the momentum heading into the Boxing Day Melbourne Test after giving Australia a mighty fright during an epic run-chase in the opening clash of the series.

The tourists fell just 39 short of a mammoth 490-run target on the fifth and final day of the Gabba Test, led by a magnificent 137 from Asad Shafiq.

Steve Smith was a relieved captain as his Australia team fell over the line after the last five Pakistan wickets piled on 230 runs to get within sight of a world-record Test run chase.

The gruelling 145-over fourth innings has taken its toll on the Australian bowlers with selectors adding bowler Hilton Cartwright to the squad as a precaution while their recovery is assessed.

Pakistan target weary Aussies

AAP, Melbourne

The tourists' batting coach, Gary Flower, said the Australians can expect another hard slog on a drop-in MCG wicket in expected sweltering conditions as Pakistan fight to level the three-match series.

"The confidence they have gained since that last innings and that momentum will definitely help carry them on into this Test," former Zimbabwean Test batsman Flower said.

"It's going to be hard work for the bowlers, but if we can get into them early and if the ball starts reversing then I'm sure we've got a good chance of making some things happen."

Australia dominated the first-day Brisbane Test up until late on the fourth day, when signs of anxiety crept in as Pakistan edged closer to a miraculous victory before Shafiq was dismissed.

"I saw a lot of very nervous campers all of a sudden for the first time," Pakistan assistant coach Steve Rixon said.