

SPORT

Is Soumya on the brink?

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha does not generally give away a lot during press conferences. He is someone who tries to speak as little as possible about his team's preparation, especially during a series, in order to give the opponents no chance whatsoever to delve into Bangladesh's strategies.

However, when he does decide to openly discuss an issue, he can be quite direct and critical. For the first time since 2015, Hathurusingha had something negative to say about Soumya Sarkar yesterday.

When asked about Soumya's lack of form in a press conference in Nelson yesterday, he said: "Anyone who is not scoring runs has got a limited lifespan. He is hitting into his time, so it's a matter of time... if he does not score, we have to look for someone."

The last year has been terrible for Soumya. Despite his bad run, the team management tried every possible step to help revive the left-hander. From giving him enough opportunities to playing him in different positions and giving him different roles, the coach and the selectors desperately wanted him to get back to form.

Hathurusingha's statement yesterday might finally put Soumya on the waiting list. It has been learnt that Soumya might just be replaced by Tanbir Hayder for the second game today.

However, the question as to whether the team management and the selectors have left Soumya's exclusion a bit too late will arise.

It is an open secret that coach Hathurusingha has a role to play in keeping Soumya in the side and so his statement yesterday was all the more shocking.

According to sources, the national selectors wanted Soumya to take part in the National Cricket League instead of the New Zealand series. They had also reportedly pitched the idea of including Mominul Haque in the 15-man ODI squad for the New Zealand series.

The left-hander, who is a regular at number three in Tests, was left out of the ODI team despite having an average of close to 30 while batting at number three. Soumya's poor patch however, has been going on for nearly one and a half years now. With the coach having finally expressed his dissatisfaction, it will be interesting to see what path lies ahead for the 23-year-old lad from Satkhira.



CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA

Nasir continues good run with ton

SPORTS REPORTER



All eight teams in the ongoing National Cricket League seem to be on par with each other following the second day of the NCL's fifth-round matches yesterday. It was a day that saw both youngsters and out-of-favour seniors perform successfully.

Saif Hassan, the current under-19 skipper, scored his maiden first-class century yesterday for Dhaka in the tier-1 match against Khulna.

Starting the day with an overnight score of 89 at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium, he added 10 more runs before eventually getting caught behind off Al-Amin Hossain. The century will give the 18-year-old plenty of confidence, something that he and his under-19 team will need in the coming months.

Eventually Dhaka, after starting the day on 303 for four, were bundled out for just 366 in 103.3 overs. After Saif fell, the rest of the batsmen crumbled.

While the veteran Abdur Razzak finished with figures of five for 103, Al-Amin scalped three wickets.

With the momentum on their side, Khulna finished the day on a healthy 195 for five. Tushar Imran, who seems to be in supreme touch, scored an unbeaten 71 with eleven fours to lead Khulna's reply. With half the match over, both sides still have a chance to win this game.

The other tier -1 game between Dhaka Metro and Barisal at the BKSP is also hanging in the balance.

Beginning the day on 255 for seven,

Metro, courtesy of a fighting performance from the tail -- which saw Elias Sunny score a 77-ball 30 -- ended up being bowled out for 292 in 115.5 overs. Monir Hossain, with figures of five for 51 was the chief destroyer.

After the exchange, Monir put in a brilliant performance with the bat to help revive Barisal from 99 for five. A half-century stand between Mohammad Al-Amin and Monir changed the complexion of the game. While Al-Amin was unbeaten on 45, Monir smashed two sixes and five fours to score 40 off 39.

Meanwhile, national discard Nasir Hossain continued his good run as he



NASIR HOSSAIN ... 105 not out

scored a brilliant century -- 105 off 160 balls -- to rescue Rangpur from 29 for four after Sylhet were bundled out for 272 in their tier-2 match at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. Rangpur ended the day on 175 for five with Nasir unbeaten.

In the other tier-2 game at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong, Rajshahi collapsed after a 143-run stand for the second wicket between Junaid Siddiqui (62) and Jahurul Islam (90) to finish the day on 223 in reply to Chittagong's 315.

SCORES IN BRIEF

DHAKA METRO VS BARISAL DHAKA METRO: 293 all out in 115.5 overs (Mehrab Jr 61, Mehedi 56; Monir 5-51) BARISAL: 165 for 5 (Al-Amin 45 not out, Monir 40 not out; Elias 2-36, Hider 2-48) DHAKA VS KHULNA DHAKA: 366 all out in 103.3 overs (Rakibul 111, Saif 109; Razzak 5-103, Al-Amin 3-92) KHULNA: 195 for 5 (Tushar 71; Dewan 2-26, Nazmul 2-54)	CHITTAGONG VS RAJSHAHI CHITTAGONG: 315 all out in 103.2 overs (Tasamul 104, Irfan 90; Saqlain 5-54, Forhad 3-72) v RAJSHAHI: 223 for 8 (Jahurul 90, Junaid 62; Kazi Kamrul 3-69, Iftekhar 2-19) SYLHET VS RANGPUR SYLHET: 272 all out in 115 overs (Jaker 88, Rahatul 36; Shuvo 3-72, Saddam 2-49) v RANGPUR: 175 for 5 (Nasir 105 not out; Khaled 4-37)
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Nurul Hasan (L), who is expected to replace the injured Mushfiquur Rahim in the second ODI today, seems to be pondering his bat of choice for the game at Nelson, while ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan seems to be listening intently to his younger colleague.

PHOTO: BCB

Merry Ovals of greenery

AL-AMIN from Nelson



Bangladesh have got purpose-built cricket venues in almost every divisional headquarters. The most popular of them is understandably the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. The unique feature of the venue is perhaps the fantastic drainage system and of course the deafening roars from loyal fans. It has also got a very accommodative press box for the touring journalists.

But after being part of the first ODI at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch on Monday and having spent some time at the Saxton

Oval in Nelson yesterday, one can easily feel that cricket venues have a greater contributing impact for the paying fans than just accommodating them.

The Hagley Oval ground is small compared to the giant concrete structure in Mirpur. It accommodates roughly two-thirds of the 25,000-capacity Mirpur offers. But it is a cricket ground in the true sense in the garden city of New Zealand. The ground may be small, but it is located inside a park (1800 hectares of land) which is probably bigger than the whole Mirpur area. The entertainment value it offers is multi-faceted. The grass banks provide additional value for collective festivity. If you are coming with children you can have inflated amusement parks to enter-

tain them.

The Saxton Oval is also set to offer the same sort of amusement for fans flocking for a full day of entertainment. The Saxton ground, facing the Tasman bay and with spectacular green hills in the background, is a spectators' delight. Its state-of-the-art players' lounge gives you a feeling that you are about to enter a tube station.

Bangladesh have one venue in Cox's Bazar that can match the beauty of the two venues in New Zealand. But as far as Bangladesh's fascination for concrete structures is concerned, coupled with the growing pressure of complementary guest requests, the idea of a green Sheikh Kamal International Stadium is still to get its desired shape.

Cricket is not just entertainment.

It also opens the front for tourism.

In New Zealand people keep the cricket fixtures as part of their package of their vacation plan. This is also no exception for Bangladeshi expats. We have come across three young Bangladeshis living in Melbourne who have come to watch the one-day part of the series before heading to Queenstown as part of their 15-day vacation plan. Nelson is a city where hardly any Bangladesh expats reside. But you will not be surprised to see a couple of hundred of them in the mix of the home fans in the Saxton double-header. The growing popularity of Bangladesh cricket can also open a new avenue for tourism. But it will not be promoted through those concrete structures.

Kawran Bazar exact revenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Kawran Bazar Pragati Sangha exacted revenge for their first-leg defeat in the Marcel Bangladesh Championship League with a 2-0 win over Agrani Bank at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

After a barren first half, Elias broke the deadlock for Kawran Bazar PS in the 48th minute. Mashud Rana then doubled the lead from a spot-kick in the 66th minute as Kawran Bazar avenged their 0-1 defeat against Agrani Bank in the first leg.

The second win in 11 matches helped Kawran Bazar climb up to fifth position on the table with 13 points. Agrani Bank, on the other hand, stayed at third position with 17 points, three less than leaders Saif SC.

Mustafizur likely to sit out

SPORTS REPORTER from Nelson



Bangladesh's trump card, pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman, is likely

to sit out today's second ODI against New Zealand at the Saxton Oval in Nelson, according to advice from the team physio Dean Conway.

Mustafizur is still in the recovery process after undergoing surgery on his shoulder in August, but was deemed fit enough to play the first of three ODIs at Christchurch on Monday. Bangladesh lost that match by 77 runs and will lose the series if that result is repeated today.

According to team sources, it was part of the plan before the series started that the left-arm pacer will be rested for one of the three ODIs, with the debate surrounding which of the three ODIs he will sit out.



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

Till yesterday, it was thought that Rubel Hossain may replace Mustafizur if the latter is rested, but it was learnt that the head coach Chandika Hathurusingha is leaning towards giving the uncapped Subhashis Roy to see how he fares.

The 15-man squad, named for the first ODI, sees just one enforced change for the second match with Nurul Hasan coming in for the injured Mushfiquur Rahim. The team may also see another change as Hathurusingha finally seemed to pull the rug out from underneath a non-performing Soumya Sarkar's feet when he

said yesterday that it was about time they look for someone else.

However, the sources maintained that given the importance of the match, all the aforementioned decisions may change depending on the coach's wishes on the morning of the match.

Solid reply from Aus

AFP, Melbourne



A run-a-ball hundred from David Warner gave Australia an outside chance of forcing a result after Azhar Ali posted a double-century for Pakistan in the second Test in Melbourne on Wednesday.

Warner smashed 144 off 143 balls in a pulsating 198-run stand with Usman Khawaja to cut Pakistan's lead to just 165 runs with two days to play.

Azhar posted the highest score by a Pakistan batsman in Australia with an unbeaten 205 before a declara-

tion at 443 for nine just after lunch on the third day.

By stumps, the home side had given themselves a chance of getting a lead to put the pressure back on the Pakistanis after rain disrupted the opening two days.

Usman Khawaja was gunning for a century on 95 with skipper Steve Smith not out 10 as Australia reached 278 for two in reply off just 58 overs.

Warner plundered his maiden century in a Boxing Day Test at the MCG and his 17th Test hundred overall.

Warner's innings contained 17 fours and a six gave his team an outside chance of forcing a result.



Australia opener David Warner leaps in the air to celebrate his century against Pakistan in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: First innings 443 for 9 decl (Azhar 205 not out, Azam 23, Shafiq 50, Amir 29, Sohail 65;	Hazlewood 3-50, Bird 3-113)
AUSTRALIA: First innings 278 for 2 (Warner 144, Khawaja 95 not out; Riaz 1-77)	

Cook ton puts SA on top

REUTERS, Port Elizabeth

Opener Stephen Cook scored a career-high century to help South Africa build a massive 432-run lead over Sri Lanka despite rain delays on the third day of the first test at St George's Park on Wednesday.

South Africa were 351 for five at the close and in a commanding position to seal victory.

Cook reached his century off 152 balls and went on to score 117 before being caught behind, trying to tickle a ball down to third man but only getting a faint edge to Dushmantha Chameera's delivery.

Cook shared a 116-run opening partnership with Dean Elgar, who scored 52, and another 105-run stand with Hashim Amla, who was out for 48 off 53 balls.

JP Duminy and Temba Bavuma were the other batsmen out with captain Faf du Plessis (41) and Quinton de Kock (42) unbeaten at the end of the day's play.

It was not a day to remember for Sri Lanka as earlier Vernon Philander completed a five-wicket haul, taking two wickets in the opening over of the day to help dismiss the touring side for 205, leaving them 81 runs adrift of South Africa's first innings score.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 286

SRI LANKA: First innings 205 (Mathews 39, Chandimal 28, De Silva 43; Philander 5-45, Abbott 3-63)

SOUTH AFRICA: Second for 5 (Cook 117, Elgar 52, Amla 48; De Silva 2-74)