

SPORT

'We haven't played good cricket so far'

AL-AMIN from Tauranga

Sabbir Rahman is not only the most attacking batsman in the Tigers' ranks; he is also the fittest player. Watching him fielding at the Bay Oval yesterday, one can easily identify him from the rest of the lot. He took five to six catches in the deep quite easily, attacked the ball and threw it right up to the waiting hands. He also had a gym session and was the last man to take his lunch.

This is something he has been religiously following ever since he made his way into the national team and his athleticism is as good as Shakib Al Hasan's and Soumya Sarker's.

A key component in the Bangladesh batting line-up, the right-hander from Rajshahi is also assertive when he talks.

"We have come here to play good cricket. We have misjudged two catches in the last game. Certainly we have not played good cricket so far. But that doesn't mean we are not capable of playing good cricket. We are very focused on our next two games here. We are having individual performances but we are not acting as a unit. If we can do that we still have a chance in the series," said Sabbir while talking to reporters ahead of Bangladesh's second T20I at the Bay Oval today.

In our previous four games at different venues we have got good batting wickets and hopefully it will be the same here. The ground may be a bit bigger here but that does not mean we can't hit them out. On such grounds our focus should be to run for twos, playing in the gaps," he added.

Sabbir has got starts in almost all the four previous games but failed to make it big. He was out to a full toss in the last game at Napier. When asked if that had anything to do with a lapse of concentration he said: "In the last game I was out to a full-toss ball. I did not expect it; it was a mistake and I should not have played it that way. I'm getting starts but yet to finish it. But I'm working very hard."

He also admitted that the fielding has so far not been good and dismissed the notion that Soumya and Imrul Kayes dropped two catches in the first T20I at the McLean Park on Tuesday.

"The catches were not dropped. It was misjudgment. We have not fielded well so far. We are working very hard to improve that because to win a game in the shorter version we will have to do well in every aspect. T20 is not just for batting. It's batting, bowling and fielding. We have taken them to 18 overs after scoring 140 only because we bowled very well. We will try to play well in all three disciplines and we are very focused on doing well in our next two games," said Sabbir.



Bangladesh batsman Sabbir Rahman admitted that the Tigers have had their shortcomings in their tour of New Zealand so far, but he remains hopeful that the team can put up better displays, starting with the second T20I at the Bay Oval tomorrow.

PHOTO: BCB

The many challenges of being Nurul

SPORTS REPORTER from Tauranga

Wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan is the most vocal player on the field. And he has been enjoying every bit of his time in the national team after coming in as a replacement for the injured Mushfiqur Rahim from the second ODI onwards.

Nurul has always been considered a technically sound player behind the wicket and he showed that in the three games he has played so far in the series against New

Zealand. The tall keeper has not spilled a catch and his reflexes down the leg side are also very good. He also scored a good 40 odd on his ODI debut at the Saxton Oval. Coupled with those attributes, he has also got a very good sense of humour.

He broke his bat while batting in the nets yesterday and when a camera zoomed in on his broken bat, he placed the two parts on the ground with the brand prominently displayed.

"I want to make sure you are

getting the names right there," he said with a smile on his face.

Someone who loves to take on challenges, the young cricketer almost decided to climb to the top of the hill behind the Saxton Oval in Hamilton because very high stakes were being offered by opener Tamim Iqbal, who said that he would give his Harrier to Nurul if he could complete the climb in two hours.

BAY OVAL: A THROWBACK TO SIMPLER TIMES

The Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui is not a famous venue in New Zealand. The 10,000 capacity ground has so far hosted four ODIs and a single T20I. It's more like the Hagley Oval in Christchurch and the Saxton Oval in Nelson, with beautiful grass banks accommodating the paying public. The only difference is that this is a bigger ground compared to Hagley and Saxton.

Sitting not far away from the Harbour Bridge that connects Tauranga and Mount Maunganui, this venue has got a members' stand. This is also a venue where there is no permanent structure for journalists covering the games. A makeshift



NURUL HASAN

tent is all that it offers for a strong contingent of Bangladeshi journalists, which has overwhelmingly outnumbered the few home reporters in the series so far.

Bangladesh Betar, which is providing live commentary of the series from New Zealand, is perhaps facing more difficulties. The commentary team of the state-run radio station had to sit under the open sky while doing live commentary from the Hagley Oval and the Saxton Oval. They will have to keep doing the same at the Bay Oval and pray that rain stays away.

Khulna romp to fifth title

Razzak prefers winter matches for NCL

SPORTS REPORTER



Al-Amin Hossain fired up with a six-wicket haul as Khulna crushed Dhaka Metropolis inside three days to retain the National Cricket League Tier-1 title at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

With a massive 398-run win, Khulna took an unassailable 58 points lead after the final-round match as second-placed Dhaka Division can only go up to 54 points even if they beat Barisal in Sylhet.

"Tushar Imran was outstanding with the bat as Anamul Haque showed brilliant consistency, Al-Amin Hossain showed his ability as a longer-version bowler and overall our team effort was fantastic as we could come back strongly after rain ruined two rounds initially," said an excited Khulna captain Abdur Razzak, adding that winning a first-class tournament is always a special feeling.

The experienced campaigner, who chipped in with three wickets to help his side demolish Dhaka Metro in their second innings, was excited with the fact that after the tournament resumed it was played in great and suitable conditions.

"The level of competitiveness definitely increased. The players are highly motivated to perform well because everybody understands the value of a first-class tournament. And I must say the weather condition was perfect when this tournament resumed after a two-month break," he observed.

"In June-July, the weather remains hot

and most of the time you get flat wickets but around this time the wickets are fresh. Except for Sylhet, all the venues have had sporting surfaces; you see for a change our pace bowlers did well in the tournament while there was little chance for them to bowl earlier," Razzak continued.

It was Khulna's fifth title win, which helped them equal Rajshahi Division, who have not won the trophy since 2011-12.

Back to the match, after Anamul Haque, veteran Tushar Imran slammed yet another hundred on the third day as Khulna declared their second innings on 423 for five to set a 509-run target for Metro to win.

Tushar hit 138 off 169 balls -- his third century of the season and 20th in his career. In reply, Metro were nowhere near challenging Khulna as they lost wickets like ninepins before being bowled out for 110.

In the other Tier-1 match, Shahriar Nafees slammed a hundred but still Barisal were struggling to save the innings defeat at Sylhet.

In a tier-2 match at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra, Mysshukur Rahman hit an unbeaten 149 as Rajshahi came back strongly in their second innings to take a 153-run lead with seven wickets in hand as they scored 313 for three in their second essay against Rangpur.

In the other tier-2 game at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong, Sylhet extended their lead to 371 runs with five wickets in hand as they scored 136 for five in their second innings after wrapping up Chittagong for 320 runs. Nafis Iqbal missed a hundred by just one run for Chittagong.

Boult wary of fighting Tigers

STAR SPORT DESK



The Bangladesh cricket team left for New Zealand bearing great expectations from their countrymen and much of the cricketing fraternity. Whether it was easing

past the visiting Afghanistan side or giving England a run for their money, the Tigers seemed to have reached a level that they could have only dreamt of a few years prior. However, as things turned out Bangladesh were handily beaten in each of the first three ODIs before slumping to a six-wicket defeat in the first T20I. Heading into the second game at Mount Maunganui today, the Tigers will be hoping for some sort of redemption.

And Kiwi bowler Trent Boult is still wary of the misfiring outfit, despite their struggles in the ongoing tour.

"I think they're a quality side," Boult said of Bangladesh. "They're obviously very strong at home, and they're becoming even stronger away from home as well. I'd imagine it must be quite different to come to places like this with a bit of grass on the wicket and see the ball carry like it does."

"I only briefly watched a bit of the T20 the other night, but you could tell they were up for the fight. Our motivation is still extremely high. There's a series on the line and we all know that we're playing a quality side. We need to put our best team on the park and put our best performance behind it," said Boult, who was rested for the final ODI and the opening T20I. New Zealand suffered a blow yesterday when in-form batsman Neil Broom was ruled out of the remaining T20Is. He has been replaced by George Worker.



Taylor back for Tests

AFP, Wellington

Ross Taylor completed rehabilitation from eye surgery to be named Thursday in the New Zealand squad for the two-Test series against Bangladesh starting next week.

Taylor had a small, benign growth removed from his left eye following the series against Pakistan in late November, in which he ended a run of low scores with a century in the second and final Test.

Four weeks after the operation he was playing domestic cricket again, and New Zealand selector Gavin Larsen said he had earned his return.

"It's great to have Ross back. He has a phenomenal record that speaks for itself and he's coming off a terrific hundred in his last Test," Larsen said.

"He's obviously been an essential part of our Test side for a long time and brings invaluable experience and knowledge to the group."

The first Test starts in Wellington on January 12. **SQUAD:** Williamson (capt), Boult, Brownlie, de Grandhomme, Henry, Latham, Nicholls, Raval, Santner, Southee, Taylor, Wagner, Watling.

Taskin set for Test debut

SPORTS REPORTER from Tauranga



Pace bowler Taskin Ahmed is all set to make his Test debut after he was drafted in the Bangladesh squad for the two-match series against New Zealand. The 22-year-old right-arm quick has been in the one-day side for quite some time -- he has played 23 ODIs and has taken 35 wickets at an average of 27.8. But his introduction to the ultimate format of the game has been delayed mainly because of the uncertainty surrounding his ability to sustain in the longer version of the game. He has played only 10 first-class matches.

He has not complained of any stress-related issue in the domestic cricket for over six months -- featuring in the one-day competition for Abahani and then playing the BPL before embarking on the New Zealand trip. "It has always been a dream for me to play Test cricket. This is the ultimate for a player," quipped the tall pace bowler as he was heading to the dressing room after bowling in the nets at the Bay Oval in Mt Maunganui.

Taskin played all the three ODI's against New Zealand. But he was rested in the first T20I against the Black Caps at McLean Park on Tuesday.

Considering the conditions in New Zealand, where pace bowlers rule the roost, Taskin could not have asked for a better place to make his Test debut. He will definitely be a part of the four-pronged pace attack when the opening Test starts at the windy Basin Reserve in Wellington on January 12.

Five players including skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will return home after the T20 series. Three others are Ibadat Hossain, leg-spinner Tanbir Hayder and off-spinner Shuvagata Hom. The team management however is still in a dilemma over two players. There is a strong possibility for Soumya Sarkar to return home and off-spinning all-rounder Mosaddek Hossain to stay back.



Khulna successfully defended their National Cricket League title with a win over Dhaka Division yesterday as they secured their fifth title in the first-class tournament. PHOTO: STAR

SCORES IN BRIEF

KHULNA: 207 and 423-5 in 80 overs (Anamul 122, Tushar 138)	DHAKA: 588-6 dec.	RANGPUR: 351.
DHAKA METRO: 122 and 110 all out in 39 overs (Marshall 29; Al-Amin 6-41, Razzak 3-42).	BARISAL: 189 all out in 39.5 overs (Salman 47; Shahadat 4-53, Mosharraf 3-46) and 259-4 in 70 overs (Nafees 104)	SYLHET: 555 and 136-5 in 21.5 overs (Ruman 68; Sajjad 2-34)
Result: Khulna won by 398 runs	RAJSHAHI: 191 and 313-3 in 72 overs (Myshukur 149 not out, Junaed 68)	CHITTAGONG: 320 all out in 100.5 overs (Nafis 99, Tasamul 60, Saifuddin 59; Jayed 5-63, Rahatul 3-101)
Player-of-the-match: Al-Amin Hossain and Anamul Haque.		