

SPORT



While Tamim Iqbal (R) was looking on the bright side yesterday as he geared up for the final T20I at the Bay Oval today, saying that although Bangladesh had lost five games against New Zealand, creating opportunities to win those games showed how far the Tigers have come. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Time to stop the rot

AL-AMIN from Tauranga



It is a dead rubber in the context of the T20I series but for Bangladesh the third game at the Bay Oval against New Zealand today is one last opportunity for them to come out of that defeatist cycle going into a more demanding assignment -- the two-Test series.

Already 2-0 down in the three-match T20 series after a 3-0 whitewash in the ODI series, Bangladesh have so far failed to make it a match against the Black Caps in each of the last five games despite showing signs of being competitive in patches of each game.

Their biggest problem has so far been the failure of the senior players and the inability to play a big innings. There was a considerable partnership in each game but not a single batsman was able to carry his bat till the end. The good news is that Soumya Sarker has hit some sort of form in the last game and his partnership with Sabbir Rahman in the last game is something the Tigers would desperately want to see again if they are to put up a competitive total.

Although a lot has been said about the

trying conditions in New Zealand, the ground reality so far is that the wicket in the last five games was fantastic apart from that spongy bounce, while the weather was lo warmer than anticipated.

The wicket at the Bay Oval on Friday was an absolute belter. The only exception was the strong wind that the home side exploited very well. Besides that, while the Black Caps' spinners bowled intelligently, a high-profile Bangladesh spinner like Shakib Al Hasan was not in his usual element. He along with Mosaddek Hossain and Mahmudullah Riyad actually bowled to Colin Munro's strengths and the attacking left-hander gleefully accepted that on his way to a blazing hundred.

And with left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman likely to sit out the game as part of the team's policy of handling him with extreme care, Bangladesh's bowling needs to be more disciplined if they are to avoid chasing a score beyond 200.

If Mustafizur is rested, then Taskin Ahmed will return after missing out the first two T20Is.

However, the deciding factor for Bangladesh will be their top-order. It will have to click and someone must carry the bat till the end if they are to pull one game back against a ruthless home side.

'Finally creating chances'

AL-AMIN from Tauranga



Creating chances and losing opportunities are perhaps the two most popular slogans of the Bangladesh cricket team in their away series in New Zealand so far. Since the opening ODI at Christchurch till the second T20 international at Mount Maunganui on Friday, whoever spoke after the game or during a pre-match briefing these two phrases have dictated terms.

Opener Tamim Iqbal was no exception when he had his first media session of the tour after what was an optional training session at the Bay Oval yesterday. The left-hander, who has been starving for runs in the series, said that his personal form has left a lot to be desired.

"If we play well collectively, we win games. The worst part of the tour is that we have got starts in every game but could not finish. I'm also guilty of that. In five innings got starts but could not capitalise on them which is disappointing," Tamim told reporters.

But then he said the positive from

the five defeats was that they had created chances.

"We lost all the five games and in that context there is nothing positive to say. But I believe in every game we have created chances. There was a situation when he thought we could win games. We came here in 2010 or even before and we had not even created chances then. We have at least created a situation this time when a player or the fans think that we could win," added the left-hander.

He was also a bit philosophical about their first away series.

"There was a time when people told us we should start winning at home and then start thinking winning away from home. Now we are winning at home. This is our first proper overseas tour after our home dominance and we have created chances and we should all take it as a positive step forward. We should all be a bit patient and give us some time so that we can turn those chances into wins. We are fully committed," Tamim said.

But when asked whether the scenario in all the five games suggested a case of stagnation, he admitted that but at same time demanded some more time to overcome that barrier.

"The rhythm of the five games was almost the same. A good partnership and then we lost our way. Cricket is not a game where we can improve everything overnight. You have waited almost ten years to be successful at home. Away from home we might not be able to win a few more games but we should not be disheartened. We have the belief that we can win in overseas conditions. Our results are not backing our belief but I can tell you on behalf of 22 players that we never stopped dreaming to win games in overseas condition.

"When you are not winning, a thousand issues can be raised for the defeat. We could have been better in three departments, not just fielding. If we can correct those small mistakes either in batting, bowling or fielding, we will get different results," said Tamim.

The experienced batsman also reminded the critics that winning away from home is difficult for even the best teams in the world.

"You are always comfortable at home. Any team playing away from home does not feel that same comfort. England are one of the best teams in Test cricket, but they were beaten 5-0 in

CSA assures safe BD trip for women

AGENCIES, Sydney

Cricket South Africa (CSA) has assured the female duo of Dane van Niekerk and Marizanne Kapp that they will be safe on the forthcoming tour of Bangladesh for a five-match ODI series.

Van Niekerk and Kapp depart for Bangladesh on Tuesday.

"We did speak to CSA and it has been really working hard with the security officers and stuff back home to make sure that it is safe to tour," van Niekerk said.

"Last year we pulled out but this year we've been told that it's safe and they've put in amazing security measures for us. We're quite excited to go, it's always nice to go to play in different conditions and Bangladesh is becoming a really good team and so giving them some game time too is good."



After suffering a hamstring injury in the first ODI of the Tigers' tour to New Zealand, Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim returned to the nets for the first time yesterday, perhaps signalling his availability for the upcoming Test series against the Kiwis. PHOTO: COLLECTED

End of the road for Misbah?

Aussies win by 220 runs to take series 3-0

AFP, Karachi

Former Pakistan cricket heavyweights on Saturday asked Misbahul Haq to call time on his illustrious career, blaming his poor batting and uninspired captaincy for a 3-0 whitewash to Australia.

Misbah capped a miserable series with a 220-run defeat in the third and final Test in Sydney on Saturday, his final score of 38 accounting for half of his entire run-tally (76).

It was Pakistan's fourth consecutive 3-0 whitewash in Australia since 1999, and their twelfth straight defeat.

After the loss Misbah said he would take this time to decide on the future -- a reversal of an announcement that he would quit following the defeat in the second match last week.

Since taking over the captaincy in the wake of the spot-fixing scandal in 2010, Misbah has led Pakistan in 53 Tests, winning 24 losing 18 and drawing 11.

He also briefly led his team to world number one Test rankings last year, despite playing no matches at home due to the prevailing insecurity. The feat earned him widespread acclaim throughout the cricketing world.

But former captain Ramiz Raja said it was now time for Misbah to move on.

"I think Misbah's time is up," he told AFP. "Every sportsman goes through this phase and captain Misbah has offered enough so it's time to move on."

"I think a captain can only give his best for five years and then his flow chart goes down."

"After that opponents know his strategies and Misbah has spent that in a glorious way. He has played his innings well to become Pakistan's most successful skipper," he added.

Raja's words were echoed by former paceman Wasim Akram.

"It's not my call but perhaps if I was in his place I would have quit at this point, having achieved so much," he told AFP.

"When I lost 3-0 in Australia in 1999 I was replaced as captain despite the fact we

Lynn finally has a look in

AFP, Sydney

Australia dropped George Bailey and Aaron Finch and called up newcomers Chris Lynn and Billy Stanlake in a 14-man squad Saturday for their five-game one-day international series against Pakistan starting next week.

Bailey and Finch along with all-rounder Hilton Cartwright were left out after playing in the Chappell-Hadlee ODI series against New Zealand last month.

Usman Khawaja, batsman Lynn and fast bowler Stanlake took their places.

"We believe this squad is an exciting combination that covers all bases for us over the course of the five matches against Pakistan," interim chief selector Trevor Hohns said.

"This is an extremely important series for us as we have the Chappell-Hadlee Series in New Zealand and in mid-year the ICC Champions Trophy, a tournament which we won in 2006 and 2009."

Hohns said the panel believed the time was right to bring Lynn into the national ODI team.

"Lynn is in superb form for the Brisbane Heat and although that is a different form of the game we believe it is right that we give him the chance to show whether he can convert his wonderful ball-striking ability to ODIs," he said.

SQUAD: Smith (capt), Warner, Cummins, Faulkner, Hazlewood, Head, Khawaja, Lynn, Marsh, Maxwell, Stanlake, Starc, Wade, Zampa.

Old faces star in long NCL

SPORTS REPORTER



The National Cricket League (NCL), one of the two four-day domestic cricket competitions in Bangladesh, whizzed by this season almost unnoticed. And the reason behind that was that this competition was scheduled at a time when the Bangladesh Cricket Board was involved in more attractive series.

For starters there was the Afghanistan series and that was immediately followed by the England series. While some of the national players did play the initial rounds of the NCL, a majority of them were busy with the international games.

After the England series came the Bangladesh Premier League, the country's premier T20 competition, and the NCL was stopped for a month-and-a-half. Upon its resumption it once again missed the players from the national team since they were all getting ready for

the New Zealand series in a camp in Sydney. In fact, most of the NCL's final leg was overshadowed by the national team's performance in New Zealand.

However, in the midst of all this, there were a few fine performances. The batting card was ruled by former national players with Alok Kapali topping the runs column with 598 runs from six matches. The batsman of the tournament though was Tushar Imran, who scored 518 runs at an average of 86.33, finishing the tournament with three centuries in his last three games.

Pacer Abu Jayed capped off a fine season by scalping 29 wickets and finishing in pole position in the NCL. Aside from doing well in the NCL, Jayed also proved to be quite handy for the Dhaka Dynamites as well.

Al-Amin Hossain, who scalped a six-wicket haul in his last game to help Khulna retain the championship, put on a good show with 23 wickets in just four matches.

| HIGHEST RUN-GETTERS | | | | |
|---------------------|-----|------|-----|-------|
| Player | Mat | Runs | HS | Avg |
| Alok Kapali | 6 | 598 | 200 | 66.44 |
| Yasir Ali | 6 | 585 | 105 | 58.55 |
| Junaidd Siddique | 6 | 568 | 126 | 63.11 |
| Tushar Imran | 6 | 518 | 141 | 86.33 |

| HIGHEST WICKET-TAKERS | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----|------|-------|-------|
| Player | Mat | Wkts | BBM | Avg |
| Abu Jayed | 6 | 29 | 9-125 | 18.20 |
| Monir Hossain | 6 | 24 | 8-116 | 26.41 |
| Sohrawadi Shuvo | 6 | 23 | 8-91 | 19.04 |
| Al-Amin Hossain | 4 | 23 | 9-80 | 19.13 |



ABU JAYED ALOK KAPALI



The Aussies are all smiles as they celebrate with the trophy after handing Pakistan their fourth consecutive whitewash in Australia. PHOTO: REUTERS

MSD saved Kohli from axe!

IANS, New Delhi

Paying rich tributes to his predecessor Mahendra Singh Dhoni, newly-appointed skipper Virat Kohli on Saturday revealed that the Ranchi wicketkeeper-batsman saved him on numerous occasions from getting dropped from the national cricket team.

The 28-year-old said 35-year-old Dhoni guided him during his initial phase in international cricket, while conceding that he has big shoes to fill.

"He will always be the person who guided me initially and gave me opportunities. He gave me ample time and space to grow as a cricketer, saved me from getting dropped from the team many a times and that is why we have a great amount of mutual respect," Kohli was quoted as saying by bcci.tv.

"Obviously, these are massive shoes to fill. You think of MS Dhoni and the first word that comes to mind is captain!"

"You don't relate MS Dhoni in any other way. For me, he is always going to be my captain because I started my career under him," he added.

Kohli now wants Dhoni to bat higher up the order in his trademark aggressive style.

"I know the kind of person he is. If I will ask him that where do you want to bat he will tell me where ever you will want me to bat but I would love to see him bat higher up," he said.

"I want that he totally enjoys his cricket, if he enjoys his cricket and play the way he has in his initial years then the team is going be in very solid space," he added.

Kohli said he believed in leading by example. "Added responsibility has always worked for me in the sense that you have no room to be complacent or relax at any stage."

PCB mulls age cap

PTI, Karachi

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is mulling an age-cap for officials similar to the one the Indian Supreme Court directed the Indian cricket board to implement.

The PCB is currently headed by 82-year-old Shaharyar Khan. Officials are also thinking of not giving assignments to officials who will cross that age-cap.

"The board has now drawn up a shortlist of potential candidates, all former Test players, who will be given assignments with the teams in future," a source told PTI.