

Lapses cannot be overlooked

BISHWAJIT ROY



When the Bangladesh team flew to New Zealand after an expensive week-long camp in Sydney, hopes were high among the fans. There was much optimism, especially surrounding the limited-overs series as the Tigers have improved a lot in the shorter formats, but any avid cricket follower knew how tough the task was to carry the home form to conditions like New Zealand's.

So far, every early morning that the fans woke up, they woke up only to watch their beloved team's surrender to Kiwis. The end result was that the Mashrafe Bin Mortaza-led side lost all the limited-overs matches.

So what happened -- has Bangladesh suddenly become a bad team from a good team after the defeats in six matches? Certainly not.

For anyone aware of what happens to touring sides in different conditions around the world, the results of the Bangladesh team may not be shocking. Many were however surprised at the manner the Tigers played the three-match ODI and T20I series against the home side.

It was the team members and not any outsider who repeatedly said that they could not play collectively and they could not play their best cricket in the limited-over matches in demanding conditions.

Things got worse when they failed to capitalise on the opportunities they had created at certain periods of the matches in conditions that, except the higher bounce on offer, were not as awkward as some had expected in New Zealand.

Throughout the limited-overs series the question was not whether the Tigers lacked ability, but whether they could play as per their



potential. One has to look deep if a team fails to play their best cricket and to their potential throughout two series, because then it's not only the mere question of a team's struggles in foreign condition; instead there may be a deeper ailment.

Those who closely watched the Tigers' performances in the different venues in New Zealand are bound to believe that the thrust was missing among the players and there was something wrong somewhere.

It is natural that bad things come to the fore when a team starts losing matches one after the other. There was no exception with the Tigers

this time. But one cannot simply ignore the controversies surrounding some players' selection and team strategy. In particular, the selection of leg-spinner Tanbir Hayder gave a poor signal for future team selection. The way the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) boss made public statements regarding selection issues was especially unfortunate.

It seems that one party can say anything they believe or want but the other is restricted under the code of conduct and can only discharge their frustration through off-the-record conversations.

It is in no way a healthy atmosphere for a

team that has been gradually improving to put a strong footing on the world cricket map.

The signs were there that stamping out a proven selection system will not bring any good for Bangladesh cricket, so the incumbent BCB high-ups must rethink about an independent and strong selection committee rather than persist with the existing, peculiar two-tier system that involves so many people.

The world is not at an end for the Mashrafe's brigade following their defeats in the ODI and T20I series in New Zealand but it would be unwise to overlook the lapses.

'Hyderabad Test will go ahead'

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA from New Delhi



India's Hyderabad Cricket Association (HCA) today rubbished speculation that this association will not host the India-Bangladesh Test scheduled in the southern city of Hyderabad from February 13 due to a fund crunch.

"Let me set the record straight that HCA has never ever shown reluctance to host the Test. We are issuing tender notice for in-stadia advertisement today. Also, we are set to sign a deal with TCM (Twenty First Century Media) within a day or two. I don't know who spread all these rumours," HCA Secretary K John Manoj said.

Asked about the fund crunch, Manoj said, "Every Association needs clearance from the Supreme Court and everyone has got allocated funds cleared by the apex court. Did any of the Test matches stop? And let me tell you that we have organised for enough funds to host the Test match (with Bangladesh) which we will procure through in stadia rights."

Manoj also said that the HCA have made arrangements for Bangladesh to come a bit earlier as they would like to play a three-day warm up game.

"In fact, Bangladesh wants to come a week early for a practice match. We have enough funds for that also. Therefore, I believe it is some BCCI officials, who probably are disqualified, who want to spread baseless rumours. So I put it again: Hyderabad is hosting the Test match," Manoj said.

The Test will be played at the Rajiv Gandhi stadium in Hyderabad.

There were reports in a section of the Indian media that doubts remain if fund restrictions imposed by the court as part of a drive to clean up the Indian cricket board could hit the India-Bangladesh Test in February.

'Fizz wanted to return'

BCB boss rubbishes Mash retirement rumours; talks of the possibility of more series in 2017

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman wanted to return home in the middle of the New Zealand series, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon told reporters during a press conference yesterday.

The BCB president however advised the team management to provide Mustafizur with the best possible medical facilities in New Zealand and help him reach the peak of his fitness levels as soon as possible.

"Mustafizur wanted to come back to Bangladesh. He was in fact supposed to play in the third T20I. When I heard that he won't be playing, I spoke to him because I was concerned. He told me that he still felt some pain. That wasn't good news because we are thinking of playing him in the second Test as well.

"You all know that it's a bit difficult to communicate with him sometimes. So when I asked him what happened, he just said 'batha' [pain] and nothing else. I called the team management, I called Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza], Shakib [Al Hasan], the chief selector and everyone. I asked them to sit with him and find a solution," explained Papon.

"And then I called Bayjid[ul] Islam [former Bangladesh physio] and I made him talk to Mustafizur. Bayjid then told me that yes, he does have a problem, but it's not related to his shoulder [where he was operated upon] but his hip. Then I asked



Bayjid to convey the message to our physio [Dean Conway].

"He wanted to come back, but I asked them to give him the best possible treatment there and then return," he added.

Furthermore, the BCB president also said that the BCB would not allow Mustafizur to take part in the Indian Premier League, set to begin in April this year, even if there was the slightest chance for him to get injured.

"It's a big deal for a player when he gets a chance to play in the IPL. He got an award there last season. You also can't ignore the financial benefit from the IPL. However, one thing is clear. If he is not fully fit, BCB will not take even one per cent risk regarding him," said Papon.

Questions regarding Mashrafe's retirement from T20Is were also raised during the press meet. And the reason behind that was that a couple of media organisations ran news pieces in the last week stating that the skipper reportedly wanted to announce his retirement in New Zealand following the T20I series.

Papon, however, dismissed those claims. "I speak to Mashrafe every day. If he had to announce his retirement he would first have to tell me. I spoke to him regarding the issue and he said that he had no such desires. He hasn't told me anything about it, neither have I heard of anything like this from the team management," said Papon.

Furthermoe, Papon also said that Bangladesh might be involved in additional series this year. "It's still in the primary stages but the process has been okayed. We might play a tri-nation including two of Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India."

Bangladesh reach windy Wellington

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh team reached the windy city of Wellington yesterday afternoon to gear up for the Test leg of the tour of New Zealand. The 15-man Test squad flew in from Tauranga, where Bangladesh played the last two T20Is of their three-match series, via Auckland.

It was a particularly windy day in the Kiwi capital, which sits in the North Island's southern most point. It should give Mushfiqur Rahim and his team a fair idea of what awaits them at the Basin Oval, where the first Test gets underway from January 12.

It has been an unhappy tour for Bangladesh so far as they remain winless in New Zealand, having been blanked 3-0 in both the ODI and T20I series. It remains to be seen how they tackle the windy conditions on foreign pitches in a format they are weakest in.

The Bangladesh team are staying at Rydges Wellington hotel and will have a training session from 10:00am to 1:00pm today.

The tour, which started with the first ODI on December 26, will wrap up with the second Test in Christchurch from January 20.

DIFFERENT STRIPES

Given the 6-0 drubbing across the three-ODI and three-T20I series that the Tigers have suffered on tour in New Zealand, there is understandably not a lot of bright spots that jump out from the Tigers' stay so far. As has been repeated throughout the tour, the main shortcoming has been the failure to perform collectively. In that spirit, here is our pick of three cricketers who have kept their reputations intact and three who have let themselves down. We start with the positives.



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

ODIs: Three wickets at an economy rate of 5.40

When you think of Bangladesh's bowlers you expect the likes of Mustafizur Rahman, Shakib Al Hasan and Taskin Ahmed to control the proceedings. However, in the ODIs, it was Mashrafe's defiance that stood out. He recorded an impressive economy rate of 5.40. Only Mustafizur, who played two ODIs, recorded a better economy rate of 4.86. It was his consistency in the ODIs, especially the starts he gave, that helped Bangladesh get an edge at the start of each of the ODIs. Unfortunately, none of the games ended well.



RUBEL HOSSAIN

T20Is: Seven wickets at 15.85

Prior to this series, Rubel Hossain was down and out. He was not even selected in the preliminary squad of the New Zealand series. He got in as a replacement once the likes of Shafiqul Islam and Mohammad Shahid got injured. However, the 27-year-old displayed his experience in T20s by ending up as the highest wicket-taker of the series. He took two three-wicket hauls in the last two games and troubled the New Zealand batsmen with his clever changes of pace.



MOSADDEK HOSSAIN

ODIs: 64 runs at 32 (one 50). T20Is: Two wickets at 29

Mosaddek may not have done anything out of the ordinary on this tour, but the grit that he has shown in his first ever international tour outside Bangladesh suggests that this youngster has a big heart. Some of his powerful drives through cover and his impeccable cuts through point were delightful to watch. With the ball, he bowled during tense situations in the T20Is and did not fail to make a mark. Give him some more time and he could be a crucial player for Bangladesh in the Champions Trophy.

Wiese swaps SA for Sussex

AFP, London

South African all-rounder David Wiese has followed the lead of countrymen Kyle Abbott and Rilee Rossouw after English county Sussex announced his arrival on a three-year contract on Monday.

Abbott and Rossouw effectively ended their international careers by signing for Hampshire last week and Wiese has followed suit. The 31-year-old has played six ODIs and 20 Twenty20s for South Africa.

"I am very excited to be joining Sussex on a long-term deal," Wiese said in a Sussex press release. "I would like to thank CSA for giving me the opportunity of fulfilling my lifelong dream of representing my country in the sport I love."

BHF accepts Kurtz picks

Names 28-member squad for HWL Round-2

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) yesterday announced a 28-member preliminary squad for the Hockey World League Round-2 with the inclusion of 10 young players.

The selection committee pinned hopes on the 18-member squad which last month retained the AHF Cup while picking 10 players from the national U-18 team which recently finished runners-up in the Youth Asia Cup in Dhaka.

German coach Oliver Kurtz, who is yet to sign an agreement with the game's governing body since his short contract with a BHF vice-president expired in November last year, conducted a five-day training camp in Dhaka and Savar last month. The selection committee basically followed the instruction of the coach, who is supposed to arrive here today.

"As far as I know the selection committee has picked all the players according to recommendation of Kurtz. 18 of the players have experience of representing Bangladesh at international level while the remaining 10 players were once in training camp of the national team," local coach Mahbub Harun said, adding that they have a plan for a three-week training camp in South Africa next month.

Biplob, Naeem, Arshad, Emon, Mahbub, Sabuj, Shishir and Rakin are the mentionable names among the young players who had a brilliant domestic season last year.

The Hockey World league Round-2, a phase that Bangladesh never got past in two previous attempts, will be held in Dhaka from March 4 to 12 where the top two teams will advance into the 20-team semifinal round.

Bangladesh have been pitted against Canada, Oman and Fiji in Pool A while Pool B features China, Egypt, Ghana and Sri Lanka.

DISAPPOINTMENTS



MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD

ODIs: 4 runs at 1.33. T20Is: 89 runs at 29.66

Scores of zero, one and three in the ODI series was least expected from the man who hit back-to-back tons in the ICC World Cup in Australia and New Zealand in 2015 - the second one against New Zealand in New Zealand. Instead, he seemed to struggle against the pace of Lockie Ferguson and surrendered his wickets in the ODIs.

His class came through in the T20Is but it was too little too late and he faltered in the format most likely to deliver a win.



TAMIM IQBAL

ODIs: 113 runs at 37.66. T20Is: 48 runs at 16

Although he was the second-highest run-scorer in the ODIs, as the best batsman in the side he is held to a higher standard. In all the matches, even during his innings of 59 in the third ODI, Bangladesh suffered from his failure to do what he has become known for doing in recent times -- making up for sedate starts with a big score with a rapid end. He got the sedate start right, but not much else.



TASKIN AHMED

ODIs: 4 wickets at 39 and 61rps. T20Is: Econ. rate of 9.25

Much was expected of Taskin on tour, as his pace was thought to be perfect for conditions in New Zealand. But, especially in the first ODI and in his only T20I (the third), the ball came off the bat faster than he bowled it. In the first ODI, he was guilty of not adjusting his plans even when Tom Latham and Colin Munro were routinely hitting his short balls for six. In the third T20I, he was one of the bowlers responsible for letting

New Zealand off the hook.