



Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed (L) was hard at work at practice yesterday in his bid for a dream debut today, while Test specialist Mominul Haque -- who averages 188 against the Kiwis, albeit in home conditions so far -- was eagerly anticipating his turn to perform ahead of the first Test against New Zealand at the Basin Reserve in Wellington.



PHOTOS: BCB

Pakistan on Tigers' trail

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan will begin their five-match ODI series against Australia in Brisbane tomorrow with the prospects of going level with Bangladesh in the ICC ODI Rankings and boosting their hopes of securing direct qualification into the 2019 ICC World Cup in England.

Pakistan are currently in eighth position with 89 points, two points behind Bangladesh and two ahead of the West Indies.

Hosts England and the seven highest-ranked sides on 30 September 2017 will qualify directly for the tournament.

To at least maintain its pre-series ranking points, Pakistan will need to win at least one match, while victories in more than one match will earn them crucial points, according to the ICC.

If Pakistan win two matches, they will join Bangladesh on 91 points but will be ranked behind their Asian rivals by a fraction. In the scenario of Pakistan winning the series, they will move ahead of Bangladesh and will bolster their chances of qualifying directly for the event it won in Australia in 1992.

SA-SL third Test starts today

APP, Johannesburg

South African captain Faf du Plessis admitted on Wednesday that Kyle Abbott's Kolpak defection had been a disruption ahead of the third and final Test against Sri Lanka starting at the Wanderers Stadium on Thursday.

But, he said, the team had "moved on" and were fully focused on completing a clean sweep in the series.

"It's definitely had an effect," said Du Plessis. "It's taken a bit of the shine off our Test series win but it's time to move on and build a new bowling attack."

Du Plessis said South Africa had failed to take an opportunity for a clean sweep in Australia last month.

"In cricket you have a lot of tough times. You don't get opportunities like this very often. It is an opportunity to do it now."

Du Plessis said left-arm seamer Wayne Parnell would replace Abbott but Du Plessis did not rule out a first cap for Duanne Olivier, 24.

"It's the first time I've seen him bowl but there's something there," he said. Du Plessis praised Hashim Amla, who will make his 100th Test appearance and said he was not concerned about Amla's recent string of low scores.

"He has been the rock of our batting. Together with Jacques Kallis he has probably been the most consistent player we have ever had."

Tamim to play despite pain

SPORTS REPORTER from Wellington

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal will play the opening Test that starts at the Basin Reserve in Wellington today.

The left-hander had a scan on his injured left thumb in the morning and the report suggested no fracture, which means he is cleared to play. But he still feels pain and the swelling is still there.

"I'm playing. I'm feeling a bit of pain but that's okay," Tamim told this reporter while heading for a net session at the Basin Reserve yesterday.

With Tamim playing the batting

order appears a done deal for the Tigers with Imrul Kayes, who has also recovered from a knee bruise that he sustained in the third T20I at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui, opening the innings with Tamim. Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Shakib Al Hasan and Sabbir Rahman will form the tall batting line-up.

Bangladesh will field three pacers on the green top at the windy venue. Taskin and Subhashis Roy are set to make Test debuts. But who from Rubel Hossain, who bowled impressively in the T20Is, to play as the third pace bowler in the team and Kamrul Islam Rabbi will make the cut is something the team management is yet to decide. There is a strong possibility that Rubel will play considering

his experience.

Mehedi Hasan Miraz is set to play as the lone spinner apart from Shakib after his magnificent exploits at home that fashioned Bangladesh's historic Test victory against England in Dhaka two months ago. But the conditions here in New Zealand will not be as kind to him as it was in Dhaka.

However, he can still be a good option against a team packed with so many left-handers. Besides, his ability to bowl on a consistent line and length can be very handy in a bowling line-up featuring a very inexperienced pace attack. Bangladesh still can think of an extreme option of fielding a fourth seamer in an attempt to accommodate one more batsman. In that case Soumya Sarker might come in place of Miraz.

KIWI KALEIDOSCOPE

AL-AMIN from Wellington

Preservation at the Basin Reserve

When we are in any cricket ground outside Bangladesh the first impression we get is not the beauty of it but the wise thinking behind it. The Basin Reserve, for instance, is not as imposing as Bangladesh's home of cricket in Mirpur.

It is small in size. But it has got something that makes the venue more complete for a cricket aficionado. There is a small museum just beside the member's stand. And if you

move around inside that small cubicle you will get enough information about this very ground and history of New Zealand cricket dating back to the 1750s.

And then, if you enter the member's stand, a three-storey structure, your eyes will invariably be drawn to a small wooden-board with the heading 'Basin Reserve Test Matches'. It is a simple log of all the 58 Test matches played on this ground so far, including Bangladesh's two games. It did not cost that much or will cost even less to update it after the completion of the Test starting today. This simple thing

not only adds enormous value but also speaks of a rich cricketing culture. We do not know how much it will cost the Bangladesh Cricket Board to have such a simple yet basic ornament in its imposing structure. It might be less than a refreshments bill on a busy day in the board office. Actually it has nothing to do with money, but a desire with a purpose.

Blame it on the Cook

Wellington is a windy city. And the wind is so strong that sometimes you cannot even feel a mild tremor if you are walking along the street. A 5.1 magnitude earthquake, which is an aftershock of the November Kaikoura quake that rattled the south island, hit the city at 1.19pm. I was actually walking along the street and could hardly feel it while struggling my way against the strong wind. Besides, I have also not noticed people behaving differently on the busy street.

Ask anyone, he or she will blame the Cook Strait. It is through this strait that the sea breeze funnels into the Wellington Harbour. But to feel the full fury of the wind one must drive to the top of Mount Victoria, a 643-foot high hill east of Wellington. When you are on the deck atop the hill you can not only feel the fury of the wind but also get the opportunity to have a 360 degree view of the bustling Wellington city including the harbour, the runway and the Basin Reserve. The wind, accompanied by the clouds, is colder and it varies with the speed of the wind. If the wind speed is 10 knots, a 10-degree temperature will come down to 9; if the wind speed is 20 knots it will come down to 3 and if the wind speed is 30 knots it will turn zero.



A view of the Basin Reserve from atop Mount Victoria.

PHOTO: AL-AMIN

Kane hoping for pace and bounce

SPORTS REPORTER

The bright green pitch at the Basin Reserve compelled a number of Bangladesh's members to repeatedly have a look at the wicket prior to the start of the first Test yesterday.

The pitch is one that is bound to test the skills of both the Bangladeshi batsmen and bowlers as they are not used to playing on such kinds of wickets. The batsmen will need to adjust to the swing and bounce, while the bowlers will need to use the swing and bounce properly. On top of that, they have not had the chance to play a practice match ahead of the two-match Test series.

The conditions, combined with the fact that Bangladesh have gone winless throughout the tour in their stronger formats, puts the Black Caps in a far better position than the visitors. However, New Zealand skipper Kane Williamson was not taking

anything for granted.

"Certainly throughout the white ball format, Bangladesh put us under pressure in every game and we were able to come through that and get the victories," Williamson said during the pre-match press briefing.

"We're certainly expecting that again. They're an experienced side, have played all round the world. We know they will provide a stiff challenge so it is important we look to hit our straps early tomorrow."

Williamson was hoping that there would be plenty of pace and bounce in the wicket, attributes that would certainly work against the Bangladeshi batsmen. "It's looks fairly similar [to past Basin Reserve pitches]. Hopefully there's pace and bounce and obviously [it will] do a bit early. It's got that green tinge which is normal here at the Basin. It looks [like a] good surface," he said.

He also hinted that New Zealand would make no changes to the Test eleven.

Can the Tigers exorcise the Wellington devil?

AL-AMIN from Wellington



As the Bangladesh team members were gathering at the lobby of Rydges Wellington to go out for a team dinner on Wednesday coach Chandika Hathurusingha was in a chipry mood. Wearing a white short-sleeve shirt and a sky-blue trouser, he happily partook in a chinwag with a couple of reporters.

Watching Taskin Ahmed in a spectacular suit, he quipped that his charges were really smart. The Sri Lankan even extended that smartness to the cricketing perspective and on a serious note observed that this generation of Bangladesh cricketers are smarter than their predecessors.

And how smart they are will be tested to the limit when they play the opening Test on the green top of the Basin Reserve from today. The prospect after a 6-0 whitewash in the limited-overs series may look bleak, but this is also the time for the Tigers to stand up and make their presence felt against the Black Caps.

The wicket is a devil. Not really, if you are not thinking about the green top at the back of your mind. It is the deliveries you are facing that count and given the nature of this wicket, if you can withstand the first session of the opening day, you will not only feel a bit of ease out in the middle but more importantly can give the much-needed confidence to the rest of the batting line-up on a track that has on occasions produced more than 600 runs and a triple century.

The onus will certainly be on Tamim Iqbal to give that confidence and the history suggests that the left-hander has all the ingredients to do that. Bangladesh have packed the team with as many as eight batsmen understandably in an attempt to score as many runs as possible if not out-bat their opposition. This is a good ploy considering the limited arsenal it has got in the bowling. Two debutant pacers and a couple who have just entered the demanding five-day format is a line-up from which not a lot can be expected.

But the batting must show its true potential because it's the more experienced of the two departments.



The pitch for the first Test at the Basin Reserve in Wellington had so much grass on it that one would find it difficult to differentiate it from the outfield.

PHOTO: BCB

Tigresses start South Africa series today

SPORTS REPORTER



Amidst the hue and cry of Bangladesh's tour of New Zealand, the women's team, in a comparatively quiet manner, will begin their five-match ODI series against South Africa today at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar.

The tour is finally taking place after being postponed twice due to security concerns. It was initially supposed to be held in October 2015, but was pushed back a month before being postponed again. More than a year later, the tour is taking place after Bangladesh managed to host England and the Bangladesh Premier League successfully.

While South Africa are a far stronger side than Bangladesh, skipper Rumana Ahmed believes that her side can give the visitors a good fight. The last time South Africa were in Bangladesh was in 2012 and the hosts had managed to win one of the three ODIs.

"Compared to T20s, we are a far better side in this format. We can take our time and play here. It's good that we are playing South Africa right before the World Cup Qualifying round. This series will help us prepare for that competition," Rumana told reporters yesterday.

"We have done quite well in home series in the past. Even though South Africa are a good side, we won't be behind in this series. We will do our best," she added.

Bangladesh lost their last two series, which took place away from home. They lost to Ireland 1-0 in 2016 and 2-0 to Pakistan in 2015. However, Bangladesh did beat Pakistan 2-0 in ODIs in March 2014 in Cox's Bazar.

Regardless of the results, the fact that the Bangladesh Women's cricket team is getting to play a series could itself be considered a sign of progress. In the last three years, they have just played three series.

The rest of the ODIs will take place in the same venue on January 14, 16, 18 and 20 respectively.

Adams named WI director of cricket

APP, St. John's

West Indies turned to former batsman Jimmy Adams to help rebuild the side as he was named their new director of cricket on Tuesday after signing a three-year deal.

Adams played 54 Test matches for the Caribbean side and will be able to draw upon a wealth of experience as he turns his focus to overseeing the development of West Indies cricket at all levels.

The 49-year-old returned to Jamaica after ending a five-year spell as head coach of English county side Kent last October.

"I am very excited to be directly involved in Caribbean cricket once again, and I look forward to working with all those committed to moving the game forward in the West Indies," Adams said in a West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) statement.

However, the West Indies are still without a head coach after the departure of Phil Simmons in September.



Bangladesh women's team captain Rumana Ahmed exuded confidence ahead of her team's five-match ODI series against South Africa, starting today.

PHOTO: STAR