

SPORT

Watered-down pitch raises no eyebrows

AL-AMIN from Christchurch

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) media committee chairman Jalal Yunus yesterday confirmed that there was an issue with watering the side wickets of the Basin Reserve during the first Test involving Bangladesh and hosts New Zealand. He also said that the matter has been resolved after a meeting with ICC match referee Javagal Srinath.

"The ICC match referee Javagal Srinath and his officials, including Chris Brown, had a meeting with the Bangladesh team management. In the meeting Chris Brown has admitted the inadvertent mistake and he was apologetic. The Bangladesh team management accepted that in the true spirit of the game and the matter was resolved there," Yunus told this correspondent over phone yesterday.

He however said that he was not in a position to provide details of what actually happened after the fourth day's play when

Bangladesh were reduced to 66 for three in the second innings.

It was learnt that the ground staff watered the second-closest wicket up the slope of the pitch where the first Test was played, much to the dismay of Bangladesh team management including coach Chandika Hathurusingha. And surprisingly it took place in front of the fourth official of the game Chris Brown, who was well aware of the agreement between the two teams that the areas covering the two wickets either side of the pitch on which the game will be played cannot be watered during the whole course of the five days of the match.

It was also learnt that Bangladesh took the issue, a breach of agreement, to match referee and former India pace bowler Srinath after the fourth day's play.

Bangladesh came out to bat on the fifth day and were bundled out for 160 against a hostile home pace attack that extracted considerable bounce from the wicket. Bangladesh actually played badly in their second innings and eventually lost the game by seven wickets despite

scoring a massive first innings total of 595 for eight declared.

Although poor shot selection coupled with injury to two key players -- opener Imrul Kayes and skipper Mushfiqur Rahim -- played a big part in Bangladesh's stunning defeat, the watering issue has certainly added a bit of spice in a tense Test marked by excessive short-pitched deliveries from both sides, especially from New Zealand pace bowler Neil Wagner.

We are not sure whether it helped the bowling team in any way on the fifth morning, but the argument behind that was protecting the pitch from any infiltration of water underneath it.

This is something not new in cricket but had it happened with a top team in the world it would have created a lot of noise and the match referee and his associates would have been under fire for not adhering to the standard procedure for which they are being paid.

The role of the BCB is also too soft in such a serious issue. Nobody had expected them to make a lot of hue and cry but total silence on their part is inexplicable.



With the possibility of the injured Mushfiqur Rahim and Imrul Kayes not taking part in the second Test against New Zealand, wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan may get the chance to make his Test debut in Christchurch. PHOTO: BCB

Aus hire spin gurus ahead of India tour

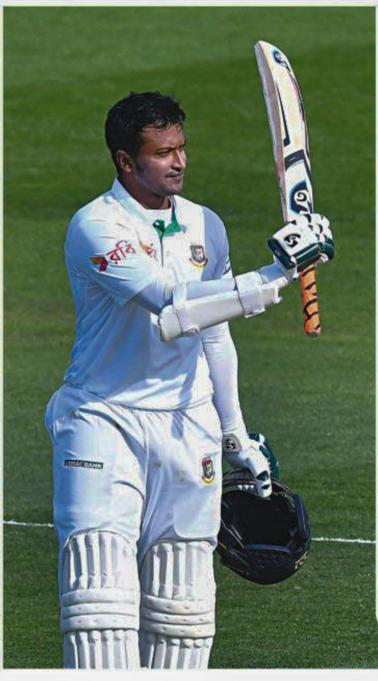
AFP, Sydney

Former Indian bowler Sriram Sridharan will work with Australia as a "spin consultant" on the upcoming tour of India, Cricket Australia announced Tuesday.

"He knows our players very well and has a wealth of knowledge on the conditions that our players will face in India," said team performance manager Pat Howard.

Australia have named four spinners in the squad to take on top-ranked India in the series that begins in Pune on February 23.

Monty Panesar, the former England spinner, who played three Test tours of India for 28 wickets, has also been recruited by Australia to impart his wisdom.



Shakib hits rating high

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has a recorded his highest total of rating points in the ICC Test all-rounders' rankings after his imperious performance in the first Test against New Zealand at the Basin Reserve in Wellington.

Shakib, who is currently in second position behind India's Ravichandran Ashwin, now has 436 rating points. In December 2011, when he was the world's leading all-rounder in the format, he had only 404 rating points.

The left-hander made the highest individual score by a Bangladeshi in the recently concluded Test, scoring 217 runs in the first innings. He also scalped two wickets, but Bangladesh eventually collapsed and lost by seven wickets.

Shakib is also the leading all-rounder in the ODI format with 377 rating points, 42 points ahead of the second-placed Sri Lankan, Angelo Mathews.

In the T20I rankings he is the second-best all-rounder, 39 points behind Australia's Glen Maxwell.

The stance behind Kohli's dominance

STAR SPORT DESK

Virat Kohli has enjoyed tremendous success over the past few years, but the once noticeable blight on his record remains India's tour of England in 2014.

India had gone on a two-month tour with five Tests, as many ODIs and one T20I but they had a tough time, losing the Test series 3-1 with Kohli averaging just 13.40.

India would go on to win the ODI series by the same margin, but Kohli was once again lacking, scoring 54 runs in four matches, with 40 in one innings heavily skewing the below-par average of 13.

Speaking to former England captain Nasser Hussain on bcci.tv, the India captain said that the reason he did not perform on that tour was because of his mindset and his batting stance.

"I put too much pressure on myself before going to England. I don't know why sub-continent players are given different benchmarks that we have to perform in certain countries and if you don't do that, you are not considered a good player," said Kohli.

"Technique is important, but even people with not that strong a technique have been able to score well there because of a good mindset. The problem with me was that I was expecting in-swingers too much and opened up my hip a lot more than I should have done. I was constantly looking for the in-swing and was in no position to counter the out-swing," said Kohli.

He added: "I used to stand at two-leg [middle stump] and my stance was pretty closed. Then I figured out that after initial movement my toe wasn't going towards point. Rather, it was towards cover-point, so anyway my hip was opening up initially.

"So to get the feel of the ball, I had to open up my hip as I was too side-on. Anyway, I had too much of a bottom-hand grip and I didn't have too much room for my shoulder, to adjust to the line of the ball, so it was getting too late when it swung in front of my eyes."

KOHLI SINCE ENGLAND TOUR			
Mat	Runs	Avg	100s
In Tests			
24	2354	63.62	9
In ODIs			

In order to adjust his batting stance, Kohli did drills and had someone record him, ensuring that his toes would be towards point rather than cover. That helped him to get some room and a new, wider stance meant he would have better balance if he came forward.

"This change has become easy now, but it was not so at the beginning. I was batting three hours a day. I had cramps in my forearms by the end of the week. I did that for about 10 days. You know in golf they say you have to hit a shot 400-500 times before you can perfect that shot. So it was more about precise practice as I wanted to tune my head to play that way. I wasn't used to forward pressing as I was waiting for the ball to clip it off my leg or waiting for a short ball."

The new method seems to be working wonders for Kohli. Since that tour to England, he has batted in 24 Tests at an average of 63.62, with nine scores of 100 or higher to his name. He also boasts a similar average in ODIs at 60.72 over 39 matches since that fateful tour.



Tigresses hope to draw level

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will take on South Africa at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar today in a must-win encounter for the hosts. Having lost the first two ODIs, Bangladesh came back into the five-match series with an intense 10-run win in the last ODI. With two more ODIs to go, the hosts will need to win today in order to stay in contention.

The main difference between the first two ODIs and the third ODI was the wicket. While the first two ODIs produced plenty of runs, the third ODI was played on a wicket that offered a lot more to the turners and the hosts grasped that opportunity. The fourth ODI between two national women's teams is likely to take place on a similar wicket just as the third.

So far right arm off-spinner Khadija Tul Kubra with eight wickets in three matches including figures of 4 for 33 in the last game, is the highest wicket-taker of the tournament. South Africa's Lizelle Lee with 203 runs in three games is the highest run-getter.

Root ready to captain

AFP, New Delhi

England's Joe Root has said he is ready to take on the mantle of Test skipper should Alastair Cook decide to relinquish the captaincy.

Root, part of the England limited-overs squad currently in India, has been widely tipped to take over the Test reins if Cook decides to stand down after five years at the helm.

Calls for a change of leadership gained ground after England suffered a 4-0 drubbing in the Test series against India at the end of last year, with Cook going on to say that Root was "ready" for the job.

"I'd like to think so," Root told the English media in Pune when asked whether he was ready to captain England in Tests.

"I've got a lot of experience behind me now in Test cricket, and I feel that I would have something to offer. But hopefully it won't come to that. Cooky's a great leader. We'll see what happens," said Root.

The 26-year-old batsman has represented England in 53 Test matches, scoring 4,594 runs at an average of 52.80.

Cook, 32, is to meet England's director of cricket Andrew Strauss on Friday but he is unlikely to make an immediate call on his future as the team's next Test assignment is not until July when they play South Africa.

Root, who was England's highest run-getter in the five Tests against India, said he had spoken to Cook after the tour but only regarding parenting after he also became a new father.

"I've spoken to Cooky a couple of times but it's been about how the baby is doing and whether we needed any help so he's been good in that respect," said Root.

"I'm clueless as to what's going on and I just hope he makes a decision he's happy with. He needs space.

"As a player I really would like to see him continue as captain because he's a great leader and he can take this team forward," he added.

Root top-scored for England with 78 in the first ODI on Sunday.



The Tigresses pulled off a surprise in the last game against their South African counterparts when they beat them by 10 runs. They will hope they can repeat the result today and level the series at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar. PHOTO: STAR

De Villiers skips NZ Tests

AFP, Johannesburg

South African batting star AB de Villiers said on Tuesday he had decided not to make himself available for a Test series in New Zealand in March but stressed that he had not retired from Test cricket.

De Villiers, who turns 33 next month, said his main goal for the rest of his career was to lead South Africa at the 2019 Cricket World Cup in England.

"We haven't won a World Cup yet," said De Villiers, who is captain of the South African one-day team. "For me, for now the most important thing is the 2019 World Cup. I want to make sure we get there. I want to make sure we lift that trophy. I feel that if I play all formats all the time, then mentally and physically I won't be at my best."

Speaking at a launch for a one-day series against Sri Lanka, De Villiers said he was available for five one-day games in New Zealand next month but would return home before the first of three Tests starts on March 8.

De Villiers is recovering from a long-term elbow injury which has kept him out of action since July.

He is due to make a low-key comeback in a one-day match for the Northern provincial team on Sunday.

But he said he had recovered fully and would play in the third of three Twenty20 internationals against Sri Lanka in Cape Town on January 25 before captaining South Africa in a five-match one-day series against the Sri Lankans.

"I am really excited to get going," he said.

Haroon Lorgat, chief executive of Cricket South Africa, said he hoped De Villiers would be available for four Test matches in England starting in July.

"I've been engaged with him for some time and we've given him the latitude of taking time off and setting himself for the 2019 World Cup," said Lorgat.

"We're taking it one series at a time. I'm confident that by the time we get towards looking at England and the Champions Trophy (in June), he'll be fully fit and raring to go. His appetite would have returned because then it would be a fair amount of time he has had. I'm confident England is a kind of series that he would want to be available for."

De Villiers, who has made 8074 runs in 106 Tests at an average of 50.46, was named as Test captain after the resignation of Hashim Amla last January.

But after his injury kept him out of series against New Zealand, Australia and Sri Lanka, he gave up the Test captaincy in favour of former school-mate Faf du Plessis.