

SPORT

Tigers to warm up against India A

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh will play a two-day warm-up game against India A at the Gymkhana Ground in Secunderabad before their scheduled one-off Test against India next month.

While the dates and the venue of the Test, from February 9 to February 13 at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium in Hyderabad, were confirmed a while back, there was uncertainty surrounding the warm-up game. In fact, a warm-up game was supposed to take place initially. It was only added to the tour later on.

The squad for Bangladesh's tour is expected to be announced on February 1. The team will depart for Hyderabad the very next day and play the warm-up game from February 5 to 6. They are scheduled to return home on February 14.

This is the first time ever that Bangladesh will be playing a bilateral series in India.

India is the only Test nation not to have hosted Bangladesh since the Tigers got their Test status in 2000. Emotions are a little mixed among fans and pundits across the country with regards to this tour.

While many have deemed this series as historic, there are several who are disappointed at the fact that it will feature just a one-off Test.

Bangladesh will go into this series on the back of an 8-0 drubbing in New Zealand by the hosts across formats. While there were a few good performances there, they just could not manage to hold on to the momentum.

Changes in the squad are not likely. As of now, Bangladesh are focusing on retrieving their injured players. Skipper Mushfiqur Rahim, top order batsmen Imrul Kayes and Mominul Haque and pacer Mustafizur Rahman missed out on the second Test due to injury concerns. They are all under the scanner at the moment and are expected to give a fitness test, along with the other players of the team, on January 31.



Rafael Nadal unfurled his vintage best to stave off a stiff challenge from Grigor Dimitrov in the Australian Open semifinal in Melbourne yesterday to enter his first Grand Slam final since June 2014.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Chance to stake nat'l claims begins today

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), considered the country's premier four-day domestic competition, will begin today with Walton Central Zone taking on Islami Bank East Zone at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra and BCB North Zone playing against Prime Bank South Zone at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet.

The teams in the BCL are formed by the national selectors after observing the performances of the players in the National Cricket League, the oldest four-day cricket competition of the country. After the battle between the eight divisions, the top 80 players of the competition are then divided into four teams which are named as per their respective regions.

In essence, the BCL is the best opportunity for the players to impress the selectors and make a case for themselves to make it to the national team. From some of the more experienced players to the youngsters who have just started playing first-class cricket, a good performance in this league can help them go the distance.

While a majority of the national players have been rested for this competition, considering their month-long tour in New Zealand, there are however a couple of players from the New Zealand tour who will be playing in this competition. Taijul Islam -- who did not play a match on tour -- and Mosaddek Hossain, who did not play in the Tests, will be playing for South Zone and North Zone respectively.

However, this does not mean that they will not be selected for the one-off Test against India, which is scheduled to begin on February 9 in Hyderabad. According to selectors, the two players have been given a chance to play here because they did not get enough game-time in New Zealand.

There will also be a special focus on pace bowler Shafiqul Islam, playing for North Zone. Shafiqul was supposed to play in New Zealand before getting sidelined from the team due to injury. He is fully fit now and had also taken part in the last round of the NCL which ended last month. With Bangladesh's pace attack inexperienced as it is, it will not be surprising if Shafiqul finds a place in the squad for the India tour.



Walton Central Zone attend a practice session yesterday ahead of their match against Islami Bank East Zone at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra on the opening day of the Bangladesh Cricket League today. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Wade to lead Australia

AFP, Sydney



Australian wicketkeeper Matthew Wade has assumed captaincy duties for the upcoming New Zealand tour after injury ruled out Steve Smith, with youngster Sam Heazlett called up as his replacement, Cricket Australia said Friday.

Smith's deputy David Warner was already due to be rested for the three one-day games in New Zealand starting Monday.

Smith was fielding in the fifth one-day international against Pakistan at the Adelaide Oval on Thursday when he injured his left ankle, CA said.

"He came off the field and had his ankle strapped and was able to return to the field for the remainder of the match," sports science and sports medicine manager Alex Kountouris said in a statement.

"Following further assessment this morning we believe Steve has sustained a medial ligament injury to his ankle. He will return to Sydney today to undergo scans to confirm the diagnosis.

"Early indications suggest this will likely take seven to 10 days to recover, meaning Steve will be unable to (participate) in the Qantas Tour of New Zealand."

Wade said he was surprised but "very excited" to be chosen as

Australia's 24th ODI captain by the national selection panel.

"With Steve Smith and David Warner absent it's an opportunity for me to captain the side for three matches," Wade said.

"But I'm not about to change too much and it's a case of trying to continue the disciplines that have earned us success in the recent past."

Heazlett, 21, is a left-handed batsman who has played for Brisbane Heat in this season's Twenty20 Big Bash League.

"Sam showed last summer what a talented player he is by averaging over 40 in his debut season at first-class level," CA interim selector Trevor Hohns said.

Fighting Nadal sets up Federer classic

AFP, Melbourne



Rafael Nadal set up an Australian Open final against his great rival Roger Federer after edging Grigor Dimitrov in a classic five-set semi-final which stretched for nearly five hours on Friday.

The 14-time Grand Slam champion pulled off one of his toughest victories in denying Bulgaria's Dimitrov, 6-3, 5-7, 7-6 (7/5), 6-7 (4/7), 6-4 in four hours and 56 minutes in front of a rocking Rod Laver Arena crowd.

Nadal showed his incredible fighting qualities to claw back from behind in the ninth game of the final set and break Dimitrov's serve, making two tremendous chases to put away the winning volley.

In scenes of high tension, Dimitrov bravely saved two match points as Nadal served for the match before the gutsy Spaniard finally clinched victory, sinking to his knees in relief and jubilation.

"It's special to play with Roger again in a final of a Grand Slam. I cannot lie, it's great," said Nadal, after setting up his ninth major final against his old rival.

"It's exciting for me and for both of us that we are still there and we still fighting for important events. So that's important

for us, I think.

He added: "I hope to be ready to compete well again. I need to go back to the hotel, to rest well, and to recover from now."

Nadal, who downed Federer in the 2009 final, is now into his fourth Australian Open decider and his 21st Grand Slam title match. He leads Federer 6-2 in their major finals.

Nadal, 30, has been out of the Grand Slam

FINALS OF THE ALL-TIMERS

PLAYED: 21

Nadal 14: 2006 Dubai, 2006 Monte Carlo, 2006 Rome, 2006 French Open, 2007 Monte Carlo, 2007 French Open, 2008 Monte Carlo, 2008 Hamburg, 2008 French Open, 2008 Wimbledon, 2009 Australian Open, 2010 Madrid, 2011 French Open, 2013 Rome

Federer 7: 2005 Miami, 2006 Wimbledon, 2007 Hamburg, 2007 Wimbledon, 2009 Madrid, 2010 World

limelight since his last title success at Roland Garros in 2014, as injuries sidetracked his glorious career.

On Sunday, he can win his second Australian Open title and become the first man in the Open era -- and only the third man in history -- to win each of the four Grand Slam titles twice.

He is no stranger to marathon matches at the Australian Open, including his record, five-hour, 53-minute struggle against Djokovic in the 2012 final.

Nadal broke in the fourth game and cruised to the opening set, but he was given a time violation warning for slow serving and was broken for the first time in game four of the second set.

Dimitrov gave back the break with a double fault in the seventh game, before Nadal fought off four set points in a titanic 10 minute-plus game to stay in the set.

But the Spaniard came under attack in his next service game and Dimitrov levelled the match when Nadal's forehand sailed over the baseline, ending a 63-minute set.

Nadal broke Dimitrov early in the third but Dimitrov broke back and it went to a tiebreaker, when the Bulgarian paid for a poor, netted forehand on set point to go 2-1 down on sets.

There were no break points in the fourth set and Dimitrov played a masterful tiebreaker to take it to a fifth set as excitement grew in the stadium.

Both players fought off break points but Nadal got the winning break in the ninth game with two lung-busting chases to the net, and then clinched it in the following game.

U-16s play 3 matches today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh U-16 women's team will begin their J-Green Sakai Lady's Football Festival campaign today in Osaka, Japan as part of their preparation for September's AFC U-16 Women's Championship in Thailand.

Fresh from a 2-1 win over Sakai Academy in the lone practice match, the Bangladesh team will take on AC Imbari in their opening match of Group D, which includes five teams. The girls in red and green will then play their second match against Cerizo at the same venue before taking on NGU Nagoya FC Ladies in their final match of the day. There is an hour's rest in between the matches which are 40-minute affairs.

It is the first time that Bangladeshi girls will be playing matches against Japanese teams, thought to be far better in quality. Bangladesh had previously played against teams like Uzbekistan and Thailand in Olympic Qualification.

The tour began on a positive note as Bangladesh beat Sakai Academy 2-1 in the practice match, and that win is expected to inject a lot of confidence to the team before they compete in the tournament proper.

Before departing for Japan, coach Golam Rabbani Choton had said that their main target is to gain what would help them rectify their mistakes and prepare well for the AFC U-16 Women's Championship.

Boys Club edge past Old DOHS

SPORTS REPORTER

Minhaz Khan hit 92 but his effort was not enough for Old DOHS to avoid a six-wicket defeat against Bangladesh Boys Club in their First Division Cricket League match at the Jahangirnagar University ground yesterday.

Rubel Howlader made 62 and Sharif added 53 as Bangladesh Boys scored 214 for four wickets in 43.1 overs in reply to DOHS's 212 for five in 50 overs.

In the day's other matches, Ruppangji Tigers CC (243 all out) posted a massive 78-run victory over Baridhara Dazzlers (165 all out) at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium, Udayachal Club (217 all out) secured an 86-run victory against Talent Hunt CA (131 all out) at the Fatullah Outer Stadium, Sk. Jamal Cricketers (166-6) beat Kakrail Boys Club (165 all out) by four wickets at BKSP and Agrani Bank CC (194-4) defeated BKSP (193-9) by six wickets at BKSP.

Warner tops ODI rankings

AGENICES, Brisbane



David Warner had capped a superb month by soaring to top spot in the ICC rankings for ODI batsmen for the first time.

The number one ranking comes hot on the heels of Warner winning the 2017 Allan Border Medal, his second in succession. And to underline the 2015 World Cup winner's dominance in the 50-over format, Mitchell Starc continued his charge back to the No.1 spot for bowlers by jumping two spots up to second.

Warner's career-best score of 179 at Adelaide on Australia Day saw him amass 367 runs at 73.4 in the five-match ODI series against Pakistan that concluded with back-to-back hundreds in Sydney and Adelaide.

South African batsman AB de Villiers, who recently made his return to international cricket against Sri Lanka, sits in second place, while India's Virat Kohli is third.

There are eight Bangladeshi batsmen in the top 100 of the ODI batters' list, with Mushfiqur Rahim, at 19th, the highest placed. Tamim Iqbal (24th), Soumya Sarkar (30th), Shakib Al Hasan (33rd), Mahmudullah Riyad (55th), Nasir Hossain (57th), Imrul Kayes (73rd) and Sabbir Rahman (80th) are the others.

In the bowlers' rankings Trent Boult takes top spot followed by Starc, Imran Tahir, Sunil Narine and Josh Hazlewood. Shakib is in sixth place and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is 13th, while Mustafizur Rahman is 29th.

In the ODI all-rounders' rankings, Shakib Al Hasan is in top spot with 377 ratings points, 42 points ahead of second-placed Sri Lankan, Angelo Mathews. Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi is in third place, with James Faulker in fourth and Mohammad Hafeez in fifth.



TOP FIVE BATSMEN

Rating	Name	Team
880	David Warner	AUS
861	AB de Villiers	SA
852	Virat Kohli	IND
779	Quinton de Kock	SA