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e-mail: sports@thedailystar.net
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SPORT

Fizz set to return for Sri Lanka tour

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman is expected to make a comeback into Bangladesh's Test squad for the Sri Lanka series. It is unsure as to whether or not the team will be announced today, but the selection committee is scheduled to have a meeting today afternoon during which the team is expected to be finalised.

The last time Mustafizur played a Test was back in July 2015 against South Africa. His highlight of the series was when he took three wickets in an over against the Proteas in the second Test. By the time Bangladesh's next Test rolled around in October 2016, Mustafizur was recovering from a shoulder surgery, the effects of which he has been struggling with till recently.

Following his operation in August 2016, he missed out on the series against Afghanistan, England, most of New Zealand and India. Having missed out on the recent tour of India, Mustafizur played a couple of four-day matches in the Bangladesh Cricket League, the country's premier four-day cricket competition. He bowled 31 overs in his last game and scalped two wickets. According to the selectors and Mustafizur himself, the player is fit enough for the Sri Lanka tour which begins next month.

While the team is not likely to see any major change, the one question that the team management will be pondering is regarding the inclusion of Imrul Kayes. Imrul is yet to prove his fitness. He however did seem at ease while batting in the Bangladesh Cricket League game yesterday at the BKSP.

Mosaddek Hossain replaced the injured Imrul in the squad for the India Test and he may have to make room for Imrul if the latter is deemed fit.

This could mean that either one of the pacers -- Shafiul Islam, Subhashis Roy or Kamrul Islam Rabbi -- may get the axe. Liton Das, Bangladesh's back-up wicketkeeper-batsman, is expected to retain his place in the team for the series. On the whole it seems as though there may not be more than two changes from the squad that toured India.

Chittagong Abahani's Kingsley Chigozie celebrates after scoring his side's second goal against Afghani club Shaheen Asmayee FC in their Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup encounter at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Holders lift local spirits

ANISUR RAHMAN *from Chittagong*

After the fans endured disappointing results from local outfits in the Sheikh Kamal Club Cup, defending champions Chittagong Abahani got off to a fine start in the tournament with a 3-1 win over Afghani side Shaheen Asmayee FC at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

With Dhaka Abahani and Mohammedan SC suffering frustrating defeats, it was up to hosts Chittagong Abahani's to lift local spirits and the holders did not disappoint the home crowd as their striking pair -- Haitian Augustin Walson and Nigerian Kingsley Chigozie -- provided cheerful moments by sharing three goals.

Chittagong Abahani raced to a sparkling start with Walson rattling the crossbar in the very second minute before coming close twice more in the opening twenty minutes of the game. However, the Nigerian had to wait until the 24th minute to break the deadlock, before he set up Kingsley to double the lead in the 40th minute from a counter attack.

After resumption, Shaheen Asmayee gave the hosts a run for their money as Said Nasir Hussain pulled a goal back in the 58th minute. The visitors then applied tremendous pressure to equalise but goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana made two brilliant saves to keep Abahani's lead intact.

Chittagong Abahani then stole the match away from Shaheed Asmayee as man-of-the-match Walson beat onrushing goalkeeper Hamidullah Wakili from inside the box in the 83rd minute after Kingsley managed to feed him the ball from the edge of the box while tumbling to the ground.

CTG ABAHANI Walson 24', 83' Kingsley 40'	3 - 1	ASMAYEE FC NASIR 58'
MOHAMMEDAN	0 - 2	MANANG Oladipo 53', Rai 87'

Earlier, in the day's first match, Mohammedan SC followed in the footsteps of archrivals Abahani as they fell to a South Asian club in their first match, suffering a 2-0 defeat to Nepal's Manang Marshyangdi Club at the same venue.

On the opening day on Saturday, Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani had fallen to a Maldivian outfit -- TC Sports Club -- after a performance that was below-par compared to their displays in the Premier League. However, the performance from Mohammedan was as expected.

They had finished 10th in the 20-team Premier League and a win over Manang Marshyangdi Club, which features eight national players, would have been a surprising result.

Mohammedan were on an even footing in the first half, but they faltered in the second. Towhidul Alam Sabuz squandered an opportunity in the 35th minute to frustrate Mohammedan, before Aminur Rahman Sajib rattled the post two minutes from the break.

After the barren first half, Manang Marshyangdi took the lead from a counter attack as Nigerian Afeez Olawale Oladipo, after being set up by Rahit Chand, raced past a Mohammedan defender and chipped the ball over advancing goalkeeper Mamun Khan eight minutes into the second half. Bishal Rai wrapped up the victory with an angled shot from inside the danger zone in the 87th minute.

"Actually I am disappointed with the way we conceded goals and lost the match. The result could have been different had we taken the chances we created. However, the Nepalese club were better than us," said Mohammedan coach Abdul Kaiyum Sentu.

"It is always hard to play in Bangladesh and the match was not easy for us but we are happy to make a winning start," said Manang Marshyangdi Club coach Chhiring Lopsang Gurung.

EMERGING ASIA CUP

HK & UAE withdraw

SPORTS REPORTER

The Emerging Asia Cup will take place from March 25 to April 5 in Bangladesh. A total of six teams will be taking part in this competition, with two teams having withdrawn their participation due to their busy schedules.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Bangladesh Cricket Board CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said: "There won't be eight teams this time in the Emerging Asia Cup. As per the ACC schedule, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates will be busy due to their respective schedules. That's why we will be hosting six teams."

"As of now, we plan to host the tournament in Fatullah, BKSP and Cox's Bazar. The final may take place in Mirpur," he added.

The Emerging Asia Cup is an under-23 tournament. The Asian teams will be allowed to field four national players each.

Interestingly, this tournament will witness one of the rare face-offs between India and Pakistan. The two countries have not been involved in a bilateral series for quite some time due to security concerns.

Tigresses fail crucial tests

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh women's cricket team bowed out of the ICC World Cup Qualifier 2017 yesterday as the fifth-best team following their 42-run defeat via the Duckworth-Lewis method at the hands of Sri Lanka in Colombo.

That means that they failed to qualify for the eight-team World Cup with the top four finishers of this tournament set to join the four other teams -- Australia, New Zealand, West Indies and England -- who have already qualified.

The crucial matches for the Tigresses were the group games against Pakistan and South Africa. They had beaten Papua New Guinea, Scotland and had managed to reach the Super Sixes. However, they were one win short. It was always going to be difficult for them to beat India. Sri Lanka would have been a difficult opponent on their home turf as well.

However, Bangaldesh could have performed better in the group stages against their crucial opponents. They have beaten Pakistan and South Africa twice in the past, although those wins came at home. Against Pakistan they were bundled out for 160 while chasing 227 and against South Africa they only managed to score 100 runs.

In both these games, it was their batting that let them down. Batting has been a problem for quite some time for the women's team. While their new coach is trying hard to make the changes, they just could not manage to make enough improvements within the right time.

While Bangladesh did manage to eke out three wins in this tournament, there is no doubt that the team management will be a bit disappointed having not been able to compete in the crucial games.

Opener Nigar Sultana, Bangladesh's top-scorer with 24, walks back after being dismissed during their 42-run defeat (D/L method) to Sri Lanka in the Super Six match of the ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier in Colombo yesterday. PHOTO: ICC

Shakib, Tamim frustrate again

STAR SPORT DESK

Bangladesh cricketers Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan failed to make any lasting impact as their side, Peshawar Zalmi, suffered a nine-run defeat to the Karachi Kings in Dubai yesterday.

After sending Karachi out to bat, Zalmi only handed Shakib Al Hasan two overs despite him being one of their best bowlers. The left-armer got rid of the dangerous Babar Azam, who made a 38-ball 46, and gave away just 14 runs. Shoaib Malik made an unbeaten half-century to take Karachi to 174.

After the exchange, opener Tamim Iqbal put fear into the hearts of the opposition as he quickly hit three fours -- although the first one came off a fortunate edge. However, he was sent back soon after for a 12-ball 16.

With Peshawar at 3-33, Shakib strode in, tasked with rebuilding the innings, but he departed after a short stay for a 16-ball 18 that featured three fours.

Darren Sammy (34) and Shahid Afridi (54) tried to take Peshawar to the win, but they fell just short.

Tushar crosses 9,000 runs

SPORTS REPORTER

Veteran batsman Tushar Imran breezed to his 22nd hundred and passed 9,000 first-class runs during Prime Bank South Zone's fourth-round Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) fixture against BCB North Zone at the BKSP yesterday.

In the day's other game at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, Abu Jayed was the highlight. He ripped through Walton Central Zone's top order with a four-wicket haul. If he gets one more wicket on the second day of the ongoing fourth round today, he will have bagged his fifth five-wicket haul in the last seven first-class matches, which is quite a feat.

All eyes were on Soumya Sarkar and Imrul Kayes at the BKSP yesterday. For Soumya it was a chance to work on his form, while for Imrul it was an opportunity to prove that he was fit for the Sri Lanka series. Both batsmen, however, disappointed with the bat on a flat deck.

While the bowlers did extract a bit of movement in the morning, it was not a difficult track to bat on. Soumya was run-out by a close-in fielder for 26 and Imrul was trapped in front for 31. Tushar then put on an unbeaten century stand with Shahriar Nafees, who reached 50 by stumps yesterday, to help South Zone revive and finish the day on 292 for three. While Tushar hit two sixes and 14 fours, Nafees hit one six and three fours. The duo put on 158 runs for the fourth wicket and threatens to extend that stand today.

At Fatullah, Central were reduced to 232 for seven by Islami Bank East Zone thanks to a great morning spell from Abu Jayed, who removed the top four Central batsmen within the first 32 overs. Central were reduced to 75 for four and would have ended the day on a worse note had Shuvagata Hom and Nurul Hasan not posted scores of 46 and 65. Nurul hit 65 off 88 balls with two sixes and seven fours. It was an aggressive innings but he eventually was bowled by Afif Hossain with around 10 overs remaining in the day. Former national player Abul Hasan got the remaining scalp of the day.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PRIME BANK SOUTH ZONE V BCB NORTH ZONE
PRIME BANK SOUTH ZONE: 292 for 3 (Tushar 127 not out, Shahriar 50; Shafiul 1-40)
WALTON CENTRAL ZONE V ISLAMI BANK EAST ZONE
WALTON CENTRAL ZONE: 232 for 7 (Nurul 65, Shuvagata 46; Jayed 4-52, Afif 1-20)

(L) East Zone pacer Abu Jayed was on song yesterday in the first day of the BCL fourth round against Central Zone in Fatullah yesterday, while South Zone's Tushar Imran (R) crossed 9,000 first-class runs with a ton against North Zone at BKSP. PHOTOS: STAR AND PRIME BANK

Asela lifts SL to series win

AFP, *Geelong*

Asela Gunaratne slammed a pulse-racing 84 to power Sri Lanka to a last-ball victory against Australia on Sunday, clinching the Twenty20I series.

Gunaratne pounded the Australian bowlers with five sixes and six fours off 46 balls to get his side home by two wickets to scenes of wild jubilation at Geelong.

It was the second time the Sri Lankans had denied Australia victory off the last ball, with Chamara Kapugedera hammering a boundary to win Friday's opening match in Melbourne.

With four overs left Sri Lanka needed 52 to win but an undaunted Gunaratne tore into the Australian attack, slamming Moises Henriques for three consecutive sixes and a four and then taking two fours and a six off Andrew Tye's final over.

The Australians could not believe what they were seeing after having the tourists struggling on 40 for five in the fifth over and going nowhere fast.

But Gunaratne, who bludgeoned 52 off 37 balls in the first game in Melbourne, hit out spectacularly while Kapugedera chipped in with a run-a-ball 32.

Henriques earlier hit his first T20 international half-century to steer Australia to 173 after they were sent in to bat.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 173 all out in 20 overs (Klinger 43, Dunk 32, Henriques 56 not out; Malinga 2-31, Kulasekara 4-31, Bandara 2-32)
SRI LANKA: 176 for 8 in 20 overs (Gunaratne 84 not out, Kapugedera 32; Faulkner 2-32, Tye 3-37)
Result: Sri Lanka won by 2 wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Asela Gunaratne.