

# SPORT



Mustafizur Rahman has charmed the world in limited overs cricket. However, when he takes the field today at Galle and returns to Test cricket after more than one-and-a-half years, he will face a stiffer challenge. Can he weave his magic? West Indian legend Courtney Walsh (R) will definitely hope that the left-armer can take a leaf out of his book.

## 'Fizz will make them work hard'

SPORTS REPORTER from Galle



Midway through the captains' press conference yesterday, on the eve of the first Test between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in Galle, Mushfiqur Rahim quietly made one of the strongest statements of his tenure.

There were of course the usual lines trotted out about the team being ready to 'face hard times', and how their past performance at the Galle International Cricket Stadium — when, four years ago, they racked up the country's highest Test score and Mushfiqur himself made his first Test double-century — will lend mental support and provide self-belief.

But building upon the comparison between now and then, Mushfiqur said: "They don't have a lot of the senior players who were around the last time. We have players who played in that match. Overall, both sides have a chance to produce a result in their favour."

This was quickly followed by words on how strong Sri Lanka are at home, and how well they did against the mighty Australians recently. But the point was made, even if subtly. On an away tour to a Test nation that has routinely thrashed them, Mushfiqur said that Bangladesh can win the opening Test. For most other Test nations it is a routine utterance, but for a team that has won just eight of their 98 Tests so far, it was a big shift.

Before the England series last October, neither coach Chandika Hathurusingha nor captain Mushfiqur would utter a word about winning, even though they went on to score their first win over England in Dhaka after almost winning in Chittagong.

There is reason for that confidence, although the results say that

Bangladesh have lost all of their three away Tests this year and, going back to the England series, lost four of their last five overall. But there are reasons to be confident in those three away losses as Bangladesh competed for four days in each of those games, before losing the plot on the last day.

"We are ready to face a hard time, and I hope we can be competitive for the whole game, and not just three or four days," said Mushfiqur, in reference to the aforementioned reversals.

Another source of confidence may be the bowling line-up he is likely to have at his command. For the first time he will have the two Bangladesh youngsters together who took the world by storm upon their arrival to the bowling crease.

"It is a huge advantage. We have Mustafizur now with Shakib [Al Hasan] and Mehedi, who have done well together already," Mushfiqur said. "The type of bowler he is, Mustafizur will make them work hard on this wicket. Many of them are going to play him for the first time, which we have seen is difficult for any batsman."

The heat, which Mushfiqur said is worse than in 2013, will also play a part and Mushfiqur seemed to be hoping that it contributes to breaking up of the wicket, presumably so that Shakib and Mehedi can spin their webs effectively.

"The heat might help break down the wicket faster, but if the batsmen apply themselves, there are plenty of runs available."

Overall, even with the keeping gloves being taken away from him for now, Mushfiqur seemed in confident mood ahead of a hard away Test. If the confidence is to be proved well-placed by the end of the week, his team will also have to apply lessons learnt in the first two months of this year.

## Mushfiqur's battle of Galle

SAKEB SUBHAN from Galle



Almost exactly four years ago, this very setting was the scene of his highest personal peak. In a team that contained more obvious candidates for stardom, it was skipper Mushfiqur Rahim who confirmed what many thought but had not often voiced — that he is the best batsman in Bangladesh — with Bangladesh's first Test double-hundred.

Four years on, the Galle International Cricket Stadium — with the waves of the Indian Ocean crashing barely 200 metres behind cover or square leg, depending on the end the bowler is operating from — is once more the scene of Mushfiqur's battle. Only this time, he is at the centre of discussion before the first Test has begun, and the discussion revolves around a role he has performed and perhaps identifies with.

At the behest of the team management, Mushfiqur will relinquish the keeping gloves for the sixth time in 52 matches, and for the first time without injury forcing his

hand since his first two Tests in 2005 and 2006, when Khaled Masud was Bangladesh's premier gloveman.

The busybody cricketer that he is, this development must not have pleased him. As an intensely passionate cricketer he likes to be involved in the game at all times, and there is no more effective way to do that than to expect and prepare for every delivery to thud into the large gloves.

"I have said a lot of times that keeping is something that helps me," said the captain in the pre-match press conference yesterday. "From my vantage point behind the wicket, I could understand how the pitch is behaving and that helped me in my batting too. This time, of course, it will be different."

Yet his batting has perhaps been the strongest reason in calls for him to give up keeping, even more than the odd missed opportunities behind the stumps. He is the best batsman in Bangladesh, yet because of his keeping duties he has been coming to bat at number six in the order, which means he is often batting with the tail. Apart from his double-hundred in Galle, he has been the lynchpin of Bangladesh's recent batting performances --

the 127 in Hyderabad, the 159 in Wellington and even before that, the consummate class of the battling 39 on a Chittagong dustbowl against England.

"He [Mushfiqur] is our best batsman and we want him to bat up the order. He understands that this decision is for the sake of the team and he took it sportingly," team manager Khaled Mahmud had said when the news first broke out a week ago that Mushfiqur will not keep in the match.

Although Mushfiqur has in the past been touchy on the subject of giving up keeping during press conferences, he seemed indeed to have taken it sportingly.

"I will of course do what the team needs from me," said Mushfiqur yesterday. "I am quite happy. I will try, if I play up the order, to contribute as much as I can."

After the press conference Mushfiqur strode out to the centre wicket, lifted the covers and had a look. He took his position at the crease, in front of the stumps for some shadow practice, with the ramparts of Galle Fort looming behind him. There could hardly be a better setting than this for Bangladesh batting's bulwark to create some more magic.

PHOTO: AFP

## 'It will be a tough series'



RANGANA HERATH

SPORTS REPORTER from Galle



To the Bangladesh team and their fans, Galle may have special significance as the place where, in March 2013, the Tigers truly hit their strides and dominated a draw against Sri Lanka for the first time in contests between the two teams. But for the home side in today's first Test at the Galle International Stadium, that memory hardly exists as only one member of the 2013 side will take the field today. For Sri Lanka skipper Rangana Herath, a more important moment was winning the following match in Colombo and thereby taking the series.

"Last time we played against Bangladesh in Galle, they scored some runs and we scored some runs as well," said Herath, who is leading the hosts in absence of the injured Angelo Mathews. "Mushfiqur [Rahim] scored 200 and [Mohammad] Ashraful scored 190. But later in the Colombo Test we played really well and won the match. Even that confidence I have with my team at the moment."

What modesty may have prevented him from mentioning is that in the Colombo Test, it was his lethal left-arm spin that produced a 12-wicket haul and condemned Bangladesh to a seven-wicket defeat. Four years later in a Sri Lankan team in rebuilding mode, Herath remains the constant threat, especially in home Tests. In Galle, the left-arm spinner has eight five-wicket and three 10-wicket hauls in 15 Tests.

But that is not to say that this Sri Lanka team is a one-man show. Upul Tharanga is a threat at the top of the order while Dinesh Chandimal has rediscovered his form with a 190 in the tour match against Bangladesh.

Regarding the challenge from Bangladesh, the stand-in skipper said: "I said before departing for Zimbabwe that it will be a challenging series. And this time, against Bangladesh, the challenge will be the same. It will be a tough series. But I am sure the guys will do their best and I am really confident in my team."

"I am sure the Bangladesh spinners will come up with good plans and will do well as they have the off-spinner [Mehedi Hasan Miraz], Shakib [Al Hasan] and Taijul [Islam]. "They will have an advantage as they have Sri Lankans in the coaching staff because they know the condition well and also know our players' strengths and weaknesses. But this will be a new game. So we have to get on with that. The team who will play better cricket will win the match in the end."

## North Zone almost there

### Tushar scores third double hundred

SPORTS REPORTER



A fiery five-wicket haul from Shafiu Islam helped BCB North Zone move closer towards aceing the Bangladesh

Cricket League championship yesterday, the premier four-day cricket competition of the country. After getting bundled out for 374, North Zone reduced their opponents, Islami Bank East Zone to 192 for 7 at the end of the day at Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah.

After getting bundled out for 374, Shafiu removed the top three batsmen to put East Zone under pressure early after the exchange. He ended up dismissing the opposing skipper Alok Kapali and Abul Hasan to complete brilliant figures of 5 for



NAFEES ... 170 not out



SHAFIU ... 5 for 56

56 in 17 overs. At one point East Zone were struggling at 70 for 5 and were in danger of following on, however, a few crucial performances from the lower order helped them get close to the 200-run mark.

In the day's other game, Tushar Imran scored his career's third double century and helped Prime Bank South Zone end on a mammoth 701 for 8. Tushar, who reached

### TUSHAR'S SPECIALS THIS SEASON

- 108 v Barisal on Dec 20, 2016
- 141 v Dhaka on Dec 27, 2016
- 138 v Dhaka on Jan 03, 2017
- 220 v North Zone on Feb 19, 2017
- 217 v Central Zone on March 6, 2017

his century on the first day of the game, scored 217 and was well supported by Shahriar Nafees.

Nafees finished the day unbeaten on 170 and will be hoping to score a double hundred on the third day of the match.

South Zone are not likely to declare before Nafees reaches his double hundred since it is almost certain that North Zone will win the championship.

At the moment, North Zone have 19 points from five games and are on top of the table. South Zone are second with 13 points. For South Zone to have any chance to win the trophy, they will need to win their current game by an innings, which will give them seven points.

However, in the case of North Zone, a



TUSHAR IMRAN ... 217

mere draw will give them three points since they are, in all likelihood, going to get a first innings lead against East Zone. And those three points will be enough for them to win the championship.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

<p><b>PRIME BANK SOUTH ZONE v WALTON CENTRAL ZONE</b></p> <p><b>PRIME BANK SOUTH ZONE:</b> 701 for 8 (Tushar 217, Nafees 170, Mithun 131; Shuvagata 3-202, Tanbir 2-65)</p> <p><b>BCB NORTH ZONE v ISLAMI BANK EAST ZONE</b></p>	<p><b>BCB NORTH ZONE:</b> 374 all out in 111.3 overs (Forhad 108, Junaid 84, Dhiman 47, Nazmul 43; Saifuddin 4-55, Abul 3-85)</p> <p><b>ISLAMI BANK EAST ZONE:</b> 192 for 7 (Saifuddin 35, Kapali 32; Shafiu 5-56)</p>
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## I deserve a call-up: Tushar

SPORTS REPORTER



Tushar Imran made yet another big score yesterday in the Bangladesh Cricket League to once again raise the question as to whether

he deserves a call to the national side. The experienced campaigner believes that if domestic performance is considered one of the main criterions for national selection then he deserves a call from the selectors. And although national selectors have said that they will only consider Tushar's great run-sprees if they form the Bangladesh A team, the batsman found no reason to think along those lines.

"I don't know what the policy of the selectors is but I deserve a national call if domestic performance is the criterion for selection. If someone in the national side is dropped from the team for being out of form, should he need to wait for the A team to prove his worth again or would he need to perform in the domestic circuit?" questioned Tushar while speaking to The Daily Star yesterday.

"See most of our current team players either came up from the Under-19 team or their good domestic performance, so why will things be different for me? I think in my 17 to 18 years of cricketing career I am passing my best time, so if you don't consider me in my best time, there is no point to say that I have to wait for the A team," he continued.

Tushar was also confident about his fitness levels.

"If anyone wants to raise a question about my fitness then he must consider how much time I spent for the big innings that I have played so far and you know I am not a big hitter so I had to work hard for purchasing the runs. And mental fitness is also important to score big runs and I have that and age is not a factor for me because I am enjoying the game," he said.

## Pujara drives India after Jadeja six-for

AFP, Bangalore



Batsman Cheteshwar Pujara hit an unbeaten half-century to lead India's spirited fightback against Australia on the third day of a gripping second Test in Bangalore on Monday.

The hosts were 213 for four at stumps, leading Australia by 126 runs in their second innings after the tourists' hopes of building a big lead were undermined by an outstanding bowling performance by Ravindra Jadeja.

Pujara on 79 and Ajinkya Rahane on 40

were batting at close of play.

The duo put together a stubborn 93-run partnership for the fifth wicket to lift India from a wobbly 120-4 at Bangalore's M Chinnaswamy Stadium.

Pujara led the way with his controlled knock as he kept a persistent Australian attack at bay, prompting skipper Steve Smith to rotate his bowling options.

Rahane was equally persistent in his resolve to give the visitors a daunting fourth innings chase as he hardly played a loose shot during his 105-ball stay.

The 29-year-old Pujara, who recorded his 14th Test fifty in his 46th Test, capitalised on

a dropped chance by Smith at first slip off Nathan Lyon when he was on four.

It was Australian seamer Josh Hazlewood who rattled the Indian top-order with his three wickets, including the prized scalp of skipper Virat Kohli in the afternoon session.

India's trouble started when opener Lokesh Rahul fell to left-arm spinner Steve O'Keefe after hitting a dominant 51 and handing India a good start.

Rahul, who top-scored with 90 in India's first innings, put on 45 with Pujara after Abhinav Mukund (16) was bowled by Hazlewood early in the lunch session.

O'Keefe lured Rahul into a drive outside off stump and a diving Smith took a brilliant one-handed catch at first slip.

In the morning session, left-arm spinner Jadeja returned with figures of 6-63 to help dismiss Australia for 276 in their first innings, a lead of 87.

SCORES IN BRIEF

**INDIA:** First innings 189  
**AUSTRALIA:** First innings 276 (Warner 33, Renshaw 60, Marsh 66, Wade 40, Starc 26; Ashwin 2-84, Jadeja 6-63)  
**INDIA:** Second innings 213 for 4 (Rahul 51, Pujara 79 not out, Rahane 40 not out; Hazlewood 3-57)