

SPORT



Time to look forward after that Galle disappointment and there was plenty of positive energy as Mushfiqur Rahim (C) and his men returned to the business end at the P Sara Oval in Colombo yesterday, ahead of their landmark 100th Test.

Mahmudullah deserved better

SAKEB SUBHAN from Colombo



With the auspicious occasion of Bangladesh's 100th Test match coming up tomorrow, the whole apparatus of Bangladesh cricket seems to have been plunged into gloom in Sri Lanka, and a bit of farce in Bangladesh. At the centre of it all is Mahmudullah Riyad, a long-time member of Bangladesh's core who, because of underperformance was axed from the squad for the second Test and, according to team manager Khaled Mahmud, was supposed to fly home either today or tomorrow, depending on availability of air tickets.

A noticeable gloom had settled on Bangladesh's practice session at the P Sara Oval yesterday. Mahmud had said that Riyad was notified of his exclusion from the squad for the landmark Test the night before. The batsman, who last scored a Test century seven years ago and has hit two 50s in his last 18 innings, warmed up with his teammates before glumly heading into the dressing room as the rest headed to the nets. He was not seen thereafter as news started to break of his exclusion and planned flight back home.

That is where, a few hours later and roughly 2,000 kilometres away, things got muddy. In a press conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon reacted with surprise when told that Riyad would be flying home.

"I don't know any news about him being sent back home. It is different if he wants to come back because he is not playing the second Test, and then return [to Sri Lanka] with Mashrafe. There's no question of him being sent back home," Papon said yesterday evening. BCB director IH Mallick then seemed to apprise him of the situation, saying that Riyad was indeed coming back 'for a few days'.

"Why? If he wants to come back it is a different issue. We are not telling him to be sent back, because he is supposed to be in the ODI team. I haven't received an ODI squad or nobody has told me yet that he is not going to be in the ODI squad. He is not in the second Test. But he is supposed to be there, in the future," was Papon's retort. The ODI leg of the tour will start with a warm-up game on March 22.

"This is the first time such a thing has happened. I don't know why [Khaled Mahmud] Shujon said that he will go back; whether it was Riyad who said it or he said it. I don't think it is possible for them to do such a thing without discussing with me first.

Later last evening, after the ODI squad was named with Riyad in it, the scenario seemed to have changed. "He was supposed to go back on Wednesday, since I couldn't get a ticket for tomorrow [Tuesday]. But now that he is in the ODI team, I don't know what will happen. The president will come [to Colombo] tomorrow; then we will know what will happen," Mahmud told The Daily Star.

So as things stand, Riyad -- a respected senior member of the team -- was first told that he was out of the ODI squad and going back home, before being in a state of limbo about where he will spend the next few days. What is interesting is that, earlier in the day, Mahmud had said when asked if the decision to send back Riyad would adversely affect the team: "Obviously they will feel bad when someone like Riyad, who has been in the team for so long, goes back. But we are behind in the series and it is not a place for emotions; performance is paramount."

A question that arises is that whether the team management took the decision to send Riyad back thinking that his exclusion and continued presence in the dressing room for the 100th Test will be a distraction. If that is so, how wise was it to intervene in that process? Another question is how the president can say that Riyad will definitely be in the ODI squad and in the very next sentence say that the squad has not been submitted to him.

With the history of national team governance, it is perhaps fitting that the 100th Test comes up with more questions than answers.

Uncapped Sanjamul, Hom in ODI squad

SPORTS REPORTER



National selectors announced a 16-member squad for the three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka, brining in uncapped left-arm spinner Sanjamul Islam in place of off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz. The Minhajul Abedin-led selection panel made few changes from the last team which featured in New Zealand. The new faces in the latest squad are 27-year-old Sanjamul and Shuvagata Hom while Mehedi and leg-spinner Tanveer Haider are excluded from the team. The first ODI will take place at Dambulla on March 25.

But Mahmudullah Riyad retained his place in the ODI team after a lot of drama and probably his omission and then inclusion was the biggest news of the day.

The non-performing top-order batsman hogged the spotlight throughout the day after he was dropped from the second Test squad. Whispering was also ripe that Riyad was going to drop out from the ODI team and the selectors, it was learnt, submitted a 15-member squad to BCB President Nazmul Hassan Papon excluding the experienced right-hander as per the suggestions from the team management from Sri Lanka. But in the afternoon the BCB boss told the reporters that there was no question of dropping Riyad



SANJAMUL ISLAM

from the team.

So it seemed that the board high-ups, not convinced with the axing of Riyad, added one more player to the squad to accommodate both Riyad and Hom, who was supposed to replace the for-

SQUAD
Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Imrul Kayes, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Shabbir Rahman, Mahmudullah, Mosaddek Hossain, Masrafe Bin Mortaza (captain), Mustafizur Rahman, Rubel Hossain, Taskin Ahmed, Subashis Roy, Sanjamul Islam, Shuvagata Hom, Nurul Hasan.

mer in the squad.

Minhajul however dismissed the notion as rumours. "I don't know from where they got the news when we didn't announce the squad. Riyad was very much in our plan."

Regarding Sanjamul and Hom's inclusion, the former national skipper said: "We picked up Sanjamul for his brilliant perfor-

mance in the domestic cricket. Sanjamul is a very good left-arm spinner, and useful batsman and an excellent fielder. On the other hand we have decided to include Mehedi in the Emerging Cup team as the team management wanted to play him only in Test right at this moment."

When asked about Hom's inclusion, he said that Hom is a useful cricketer and he can be a good option for the T20 series. "We have also discussed about Nasir (Hossain) but we finally picked up Shuvagata. Nasir was not considered as there are good options like Mosaddek and Sabbir (Rahman) already in the team. Nasir might be considered for the Emerging Cup."

Clubs can take 3 from nat'l pool

SPORTS REPORTER

A club will be able to register three players from the 'national pool' during the inter-club players' transfer of the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League which is expected to commence from April 7.

The two-day players' transfer for the country's List A 50-over competition is scheduled to take place on March 17 and 18 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

"A total of 19 players have been included in the national pool from where a club will be able to pick up maximum three players. On the other hand a club will be able to field one foreign player this season," informed coordinator of the league Amin Khan yesterday.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon however told the reporters at a press conference yesterday that they were also considering of the option of one more foreign player.

"We have discussed on one foreign player but it would not be bad if we consider two foreign players. Everybody is brining batsmen, so I would like to see a good bowler also but no way one club brings two batsmen," said Papon.

Unlike last season, the players will be able to negotiate with the clubs directly as opposed to the players-by-choice system.

Mitchell Marsh to miss Ashes

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australian all-rounder Mitchell Marsh requires reconstructive surgery on his shoulder injury which will sideline him for up to nine months and end his hopes of participating in this year's Ashes series, local media reported on Monday. Marsh, a pace-bowling all-rounder, struggled with the shoulder injury throughout Australia's home summer and was ruled out of Australia's remaining two Tests in India last week.

Seamers a little jaded in last session: Walsh

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



While most of the players are eager to look at the looming 100th Test as just another match, incidentally one that they have to win to level the two-match series, Bangladesh's fast bowling coach Courtney Walsh was hoping that the sense of occasion brings out the best in the Tigers when they square off against Sri Lanka at the P Sara Oval in Colombo on Wednesday.

"I am hoping on the special occasion of the 100th Test, pride alone will kick in and the boys will do everything that they can to try to win this Test match," said Walsh, a West Indian fast-bowling legend and veteran of 132 Tests, during team practice at the P Sara Oval yesterday morning.

In the first Test Bangladesh played three pacers -- Mustafizur Rahman, Subashis Roy and Taskin Ahmed -- and on the first half of the first day the trio bowled well to tie the Lankans back, before a collective collapse in the last session surrendered the initiative. Walsh identified the pacers' bowling late in the day as an area of concern.

"That is something we are looking at, and I think that they can do it. They are not fully experienced on how to come back in the third spell. You get it by playing a lot. It is something that we have been working on, how to bowl that last spell," Walsh said. "Our seamers have been a little bit jaded in the last session of most of the Tests we've played. It is obviously an area of concern and it is something that we are looking to fix."

On Sunday, head coach Chandika Hathurusingha had pointed out that the bowling attack's inexperience is a disadvantage as far as taking 20 wickets to win a match is concerned. Walsh seemed to agree.

"I think there has been improvement but obviously the inexperience is showing up a little bit. They are a work-in-progress. They are working pretty hard and I think it will only get better."

Unlike the head coach, who said that too much was being expected of a team still finding its feet in Test cricket, Walsh did not think expectations were unjustified.

"It is not unjustified because they are going to learn at some point in time. When you play Test cricket, you have to take 20 wickets. They will get

better the more they play, but the other factor is that they are playing on different tracks. By the time they realised what happened in New Zealand and India, we had left those places. And now we are here. It is about adapting quickly. So far I think we are getting reasonable batting tracks. With more experience, you will only get better.

"You need a bit of patience in these conditions, and consistency. I think they have a bit of variety to try," said Walsh when asked whether the pacemen lack variety. "Mustafizur [Rahman] is someone special, but all the bowlers have skill. But they must know when to keep things quiet and when to attack."

The man who once held the world record for most Test wickets then circled back to the occasion of Bangladesh's 100th Test, an event he seemed to be relishing.

"We just need to get a positive result in this Test. I cannot emphasise how special this is for Bangladesh. We would love to hear the Bangladesh song in this Test match. I know the guys are pumped up for it, and once we perform as we can, we can give any team problems. Hopefully this is where we turn things around."

Pressure is right on India: Lyon

PTI, Ranchi



Australia's leading spinner Nathan Lyon Monday said the "pressure is right on India" in the ongoing four-match Test series and patted his team for their fighting display in the last two games.

The series is poised at 1-1 with two more matches scheduled in Ranchi and Dharamsala.

"There's a lot of belief. There's a lot of people who wrote us off, before we even got on a plane and landed in Dubai, let alone coming over here," Lyon said.

The off-spinner was quoted as saying on Sydney Morning Herald, "We're one win away from retaining the trophy and that's what we are here to do."

"The pressure is right on India - there's no pressure on us. Everyone said 'we were going to lose 4-0, they're no good, they're a young cricket team learning,' but we believe we can beat the best teams anywhere in the world."

"We proved that in the first Test, we came close in the second Test and even that hurt - that's probably the best thing about that game."

"I think they're feeling the pressure a little bit to be honest. And it's good."

"With our air speed and ability to get the ball reversing, and the earlier we can do that the better off it is," Lyon said.

Lyon suffered a cracked-skin on his right index finger during the second Test but he's confident that he will be in the playing XI for the third match starting here on from Thursday.

'Happy to be in for the 100th Test'

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



A relative newcomer to the Bangladesh Test team, 22-year-old Liton Das is a man of few words. His re-entry to the team after last playing a Test in July 2015 was an unhappy one as Bangladesh lost the first Test to Sri Lanka in Galle by 259 runs.

His is the wicketkeepers' lot; for a generation one person becomes the wicketkeeper in a stable national team while all other domestic cricketers have to wait for an injury or loss in form to get a look-in. With Liton, it was skipper Mushfiqur Rahim's importance as a batsman and some ordinary performances with the glove that provided an opening. The young keeper-batsman then sealed the deal with a Bangladesh Cricket League double-century in late January to make the squad for the one-off Test in India, which he did not play.

"No, I actually played as a keeper in Tests before, so it was nothing new for me," said Liton when asked whether his balance-altering inclusion was an extra pressure.

His keeping was impressive in the first Test, with his one-handed grab to

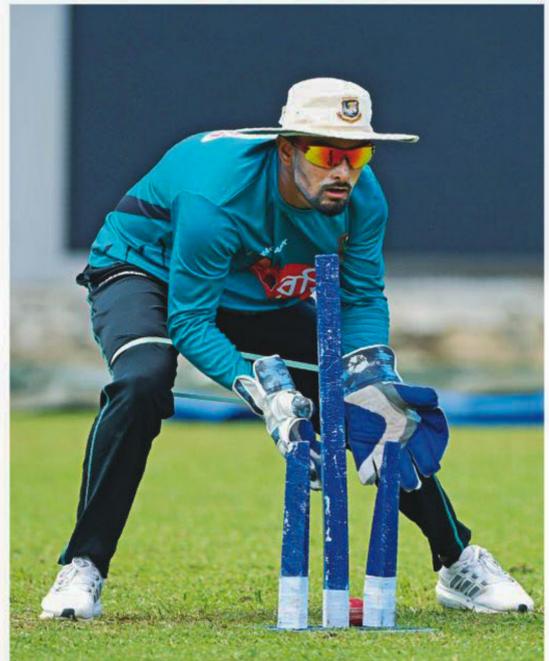
dismiss opposite number Niroshan Dickwella on the fourth day being a highlight. However, his batting -- getting out to ill-advised shots in both innings -- left a lot to be desired.

"I could not quite perform the way I wanted to. I contributed with my keeping but could not contribute fully with the bat," was the concise summation from Liton while talking to the press during team practice at the P Sara Oval in Colombo, the venue for Bangladesh's 100th Test match starting from March 15.

"It is a big thing for Bangladesh cricket and it is a big thing for me too, that I am in the squad for the 100th Test," Liton said. "I will try to give my 100 per cent; I think every team member will do the same to make it a memorable occasion."

"Every Test is important, but the 100th Test has some prestige associated with it. Everyone will want to make it memorable and perform well so that their name is associated with this landmark."

With Bangladesh's recent history of fourth-innings implosions, Liton thought that the toss in the upcoming Test will be important. "Since the conditions are hot, the wicket will crack and there will be turn on Day Five. If we bat first it will be a plus point for us."



Liton Das kept well at Galle but he needs to score runs to cement his place behind the wicket.

PHOTO: AFP