

SPORT



Skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's blistering 58 off 35 balls brought Bangladesh to the brink of victory in their practice match against the Sri Lanka Board President's XI at the Colombo Cricket Stadium yesterday, which eventually ended in a two-run defeat for the visitors. PHOTO: AFP

No one called: Vaas

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo

Former Sri Lanka pacer and current Sri Lanka Under-19 assistant coach Chaminda Vaas was one of the stars that graced the Bangladesh-Sri Lanka Board President's XI warm-up match at the Colombo Cricket Club yesterday.

Vaas has a special connection with Bangladesh as before their current fast



bowling coach Courtney Walsh was appointed, one of the names doing the rounds in May 2016 for the position was Vaas's.

As he stopped by for a quick look at the match yesterday, he was asked by one of the Bangladesh reporters about what happened to those talks with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB). Vaas was not too pleased as he replied: "Your CEO sent me the contract, but then no one called."

The BCB declined to comment on Vaas's comment, saying that contract negotiations are a confidential matter and therefore should not be out in the public domain.

Mash mayhem and Riyadh riposte in vain

SAKEB SUBHAN from Colombo



There are two roads that flank the Colombo Cricket Club ground -- Maitland Place and Independence Avenue. Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza hit sixes into both thoroughfares during an astonishing 58 off 35 balls which included four fours and as many sixes, but the Tigers had left the surge too late as they lost the warm-up match against the Sri Lanka Board President's XI by just two runs, ending the 50 overs on 352 for eight in response to 354 for seven.

While the bowling disappointed, there was some good news in the batting department as Mahmudullah Riyad brushed aside his exclusion from the country's historic Test and held the lower-middle order together with an unbeaten 71 from 68 balls with four boundaries and a six.

Mashrafe and Riyad came together with Bangladesh needing 116 runs off 71 balls, and when Mashrafe holed out to long on off Lahiru Madushanka, the equation had come down to 15 off nine with two wickets in hand.

Riyad, in the company of Mohammad Saifuddin, tried his best to take the team home and after a wide in the last over, which started with Thisara Perera trying to defend 13. Riyad was on strike with eight to win off two balls and a miracle finish was on the cards when he square drove a boundary past point, leaving

the visitors with four to win, but he could only hit the last ball to the midwicket fielder for a single.

Against a side that contains four players -- Thisara Perera, Kusal Perera, Sachith Pathirana and Dhanajaya de Silva -- in the Sri Lanka ODI squad for the three-match series starting in Dambulla on Saturday, Bangladesh's chase got off to the worst possible start when opener Imrul Kayes was out for his second first-ball duck in a row -- after his dismissal on the fifth day of the second Test -- when he edged Binura Fernando to the keeper. There was then a 116-run partnership between Soumya Sarkar (47 off 43) and Sabbir Rahman (72 off 63 with 11 fours and a six), but both holed out to long on off the spinners. Mosaddek Hossain chimed in with a classy 50-ball 53.

"Overall we had a good practice match. Wicket was good for batting, 350 was a chaseable target on this pitch. We wanted to have the experience of chasing. Although we lost the match, we gave a good fight and we played well," said Sabbir after the match.

"This was what we were hoping for from him [Riyad]," said Sabbir when asked about Riyad's innings. "He is a big player, a match-winning player and we hope for some big innings from him in the coming games."

Earlier, Bangladesh's bowlers were put to the sword in stunning fashion by the Board President's XI as they piled on 354 for seven in 50 overs. It was not as if the monumental score owed much to a late surge of sixes and fours as the last 10 overs produced 75 runs.

The SLBPXI sustained a high run rate throughout the innings, and although frontline bowlers Mustafizur Rahman and Shakib Al Hasan were not playing, that is a concern for a Bangladesh team heading into a venue where they conceded their second-highest ODI total -- Pakistan's 385 for seven in the 2010 Asia Cup.

Eight out of the nine batsmen who batted in the first innings after Bangladesh won the toss reached double figures with the highest score being Sandun Weerakkody's 67 off 54 and the lowest being Dasun Shanaka's unbeaten 26 off 12. Kusal Perera, a left-hander who plays in the style of the legendary Jayasuriya, retired after scoring 64 off 78 balls.

If clues were needed about selecting the squad for the ODI 11, uncapped left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam was the only bowler who conceded less than five runs an over with figures of one for 27 from six overs. In that same vein, off-spinning all-rounder Shuvagata Hom was the only bowler who bowled the full quota of 10 overs.

First-choice fast bowler Taskin Ahmed was clobbered to all parts as he conceded 52 runs from his six overs for the leg-before dismissal of Dilshan Munaweera. Rubel Hossain too was expensive, conceding 57 runs without success in his seven overs. Rookie Mohammad Saifuddin and former national quick Abul Hasan, who came to Sri Lanka for this practice match, bowled five overs each and had figures of one for 35 and one for 36 respectively.

POSTCARD FROM THE ISLAND

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo

LUMINARIES AT THE CCC

Much like the P Sara Oval where Bangladesh won their first Test match against Sri Lanka in the Tigers' hundredth Test on Sunday, the venue for their one-day warm-up match -- the Colombo Cricket Club Ground -- was an old ground steeped in history. Whereas the P Sara is the only ground in the subcontinent where Sir Donald Bradman played a match, in the Clubhouse walls of the CCC hang paintings of England captain Douglas Jardine and the terror-inducing Harold Larwood, two men who curbed Bradman's run spree in the 1931-32 Ashes, otherwise known as the Bodyline series. The England skipper and fast bowler played here on MCC's tour in 1934.

Not being an international ground anymore -- it hosted three Test matches in the 1980s -- the CCC provides a rare opportunity to watch the action from ground level just beyond the boundary ropes, just as you would a neighbourhood cricket match at the Abahani ground, for example. Only here, at least 12 of the players participating in the match will be in the upcoming ODI series starting in Dambulla on March 25. Yet there were only a few spectators inside the ground itself, while a few hundred more pedestrians stopped outside the wire mesh fence on the footpaths of the Independence Avenue and Maitland Place, the two roads that flank the ground.

But off the field, and especially in the Clubhouse at the opposite end of the ground from the scoreboard, the action was at least as eye-catching. Sri Lanka cricket royalty was flitting in and out. Roshan Mahanama had a long chat with his old teammate and current Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha by the boundary and was soon joined by Romesh Kaluwitharana, or 'Little Kalu' as he was called by the late television commentary legend Tony Greig. Kaluwitharana is a national selector now and after bidding goodbye to Mahanama, he took a seat beside the current chief selector and, more notably, the other half of the marauding opening pair that terrorised bowlers all across the world -- Sanath Jayasuriya.

Soon, they were joined by Sri Lanka strategic consultant Asanka Gurusinha and for an hour you had the top three that won Sri

Lanka the 1996 World Cup. It was a pity that skipper Arjuna Ranatunga, batting superstar Aravinda de Silva and Hashan Tillakaratne were missing. Then we would have had the top seven. Even World Cup winning seamer Chaminda Vaas, former national bowling coach and current assistant coach of the Under-19 team, stepped in for a few minutes to watch the action out on the field. None, however, wanted to talk and declined requests for interviews in the most polite ways.

TALES OF RANATUNGA

For the cricket lover there was more at the Clubhouse than former stars. There were the tales and this time they were not held back. At the bar a middle-aged gentleman in pinstriped trousers was quietly sipping his drink till he spotted a few Bangladeshi journalists. He then offered his heartiest congratulations for Bangladesh's win, and said that not utilising Hathurusingha was one of Sri Lanka cricket's big losses.

It turned out the man was Kalinda Indatissa, an interim committee member of Sri Lanka Cricket from July 2010 to July 2013 and a man who, as a practising lawyer in the 1990s and 2000s, was present during some of the more litigious phases of the country's cricket. He was almost ready to fly out to Australia during the Mutiah Muralitharan-Darrel Hair saga. He was also one of the three lawyers representing Ranatunga and De Silva in the match-fixing inquiry in London in 2000-2001.

According to him, Ranatunga was the man who changed the game in the island. He told a few tales of the man's greatness, from the difficulties he faced as a slightly rotund youngster breaking into Sri Lanka cricket in the early eighties to the stern but fair leader he became in the 1990s.

But the one that stood out was a story about a certain Test during which Ranatunga, a fair time after his retirement, was sitting in one of the hospitality boxes. He was frustrated by the opposition piling on runs against his team, and told the then team manager exactly what field should be set and which bowler to be used. The story goes that the manager relayed the information and a few overs later, the partnership was broken by the trap that Ranatunga set.

"Such was his reading of the game," Indatissa said with a wistful smile.



Sri Lanka Cricket's chief selector Sanath Jayasuriya (4th from L) has a chat with the national team's strategic consultant Asanka Gurusinha (3rd from L) during the practice match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka Board President's XI on Wednesday. PHOTO: SAKEB SUBHAN

I have bigger dreams: Azmir

SPORTS REPORTER



Azmir Ahmed celebrated his call-up to the Emerging Teams Asia Cup squad with a 151-run knock in a practice match at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

A mammoth 222-run innings in the First Division Cricket League in February brought the 21-year-old under the spotlight before an unbeaten 103-run knock in a practice match at Fatullah gave the selectors confidence in his ability. Now another big hundred off 137 balls, featuring 10 sixes and eight fours, seem to have reinforced the selectors' claim that he is of a different class.

"I retired after making 151 inside 40 overs," said the right-hander, who is studying BBA at the Govt. Titumir College.

However, Azmir is dreaming even bigger.

"I have had the confidence and dream that one day I will play cricket at the top level. I was just waiting for a chance. The double hundred has changed everything in my life so quickly that it still seems like a dream to me," Azmir said over phone.

"I born and brought up in Dhaka and am the youngest among five children. I fell in love with the game in my boyhood years. I played in the Standard Chartered National School Cricket Competition for Wills Little Flower School and played age group cricket for Dhaka Metro before joining Agrani Bank Cricket Club. But I had never trained in any camp under the

Bangladesh Cricket Board before this," he continued.

It was not a trouble-free journey for Azmir, but instead of recalling those bitter experiences, he is looking forward to fulfilling his ambitions.

"It's not so easy in a middle-class family to live with cricket because you are not sure whether you can shine or not. I am no exception, but I only want to look forward. Everybody in my family is excited now. I have had the ambition, which I think has brought me here. Now it's my challenge to capitalise on this chance and fulfil my ambitions."

When asked about his batting style, he said: "Everything comes naturally to me and I never feel pressure which I think is my strength. I love to play positive cricket. Mushfiqur bhai [Mushfiqur Rahim], Tamim bhai [Tamim Iqbal], Ricky Ponting and Rohit Sharma are my favourite batsmen."

Azmir credited his coach and mentor Anwar Hossain Chowdhury, saying: "He has done everything for me and brought me where I am."

However, Chowdhury was not at all surprised by Azmir's rapid rise.

"I am not surprised because he is really special. I am hopeful that he will go far if he can continue his hard work. I have been guiding him since he was in class six and I have hardly seen such a gutsy batsman. He has all kind of shots in his arsenal and never feels pressure. You may have heard about his batting, but he is also a very good off-spinner. Even today he bowled three overs for two wickets while giving away only five runs."

BD-SL BP XI SCOREBOARD

SLBPXI	R/B	4s/6s
Munaweera lbw b Taskin	24/21	3/1
Perera retired out	64/78	4/0
Weerakkody c Rubel b Saifuddin	67/54	8/2
Siriwardana c Nurul b Sanzamul	32/29	3/1
D de Silva run out	52/47	5/0
P de Silva b Hasan	28/25	1/1
Perera c Sunzamul b Mashrafe	41/30	2/1
Shanaka not out	26/12	2/1
Madushanka not out	1/5	0/0
Extras: (b-1, lb-5, w-8, nb-1)	19	
Total: (For 7 wks in 50 overs)	354	
Did not bat: Dananjaya, Pathirana, Fernando.		
Fall of wickets: 1-36, 2-150, 3-188, 4-202, 5-250, 6-317, 7-326.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Mashrafe	9	0	66	1
Taskin	6	0	51	1
Shuvagata	10	0	59	0
Rubel	8	0	67	0
Mosaddek	2	0	13	0
Hasan	5	0	35	1
Sanzamul	6	0	27	1
Saifuddin	4	0	26	1

BLANDESH	R/B	4s/6s
Imrul c Weerakkody b Fernando	0/1	0/0
Soumya c Shanaka b Siriwardana	47/43	5/2
Sabbir c Perera b P de Silva	72/63	11/1
Mushfiqur c Shanaka b P de Silva	20/23	2/0
Mosaddek c Madushank a b Dananjaya	53/50	4/2
Mahmudullah not out	71/68	4/1
Shuvagata lbw b Dananjaya	2/6	0/0
Sanzamul c Bansika b Dananjaya	5/8	0/0
Mashrafe c Perera b Madushank a	58/35	4/4
Saifuddin not out	2/3	0/0
Extras: (b-1, lb-1, w-20)	22	
Total: (For 8 wks in 50 overs)	352	
To bat: Rubel.		
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-116, 3-124, 4-152, 5-218, 6-223, 7-239, 8-340.		

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Fernando	6	1	46	1
Madushanka	6	1	39	1
Shanaka	3	0	24	0
Perera	8	0	68	0
Dananjaya	8	1	61	3
Siriwardana	10	0	59	1
P de Silva	9	0	53	2

Result: Sri Lanka Board President's XI won by 2 runs.

Kohli sticking to his guns

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD



India captain Virat Kohli has vowed he will not change his aggressive approach in a bid to get out of the rut that has him destined for one of the worst series of his career.

One of the big four batsmen in world cricket, Kohli entered the series in career-best form but has failed to live up to his superstar billing.

Kohli has made a paltry 46 runs from five innings and

needs to score more than 30 in Dharamsala in order to avoid his lowest tally for a series of three Tests or more.

He made a similarly inauspicious start against New Zealand last year only to pound a double century in the final Test. A similar performance in the final Test would go a long way to sending Australia home without the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

There are few weaknesses in Kohli's game but the Australians believe the gun no.4 is vulnerable chasing wide deliveries early in his innings. He has lost his wicket cheaply in this fashion twice this series.

The great Sachin Tendulkar ended a lean run in Sydney in 2004 by shelving his cover drive, one of his favourite strokes but one that had been bringing about his downfall. He was rewarded for his monk-like discipline with an epic 241 not out, which ranks as one of the best innings of his career.

India's No.3 Cheteshwar Pujara showed a similar concentration during his 11-hour vigil in Ranchi. "Everyone has a different style of batting, I wouldn't change mine," Kohli said. "If the situation demands you to play, you know, 300 balls and score 50-60 runs, you obviously put in effort for the team and grind the draw out. Different situations demand you play differently. But given an ideal situation of a first innings scenario, I would not change my game at all."

Australia were due to arrive in Dharamsala from Delhi on Wednesday night to begin their preparation for the winner-takes-all fourth Test starting Saturday. After nearly two months of toil in Dubai and India, the game is now mental more than physical for the visitors, who have two optional sessions before the series decider.

Belief is high in the Australian camp they can emulate the feats of Adam Gilchrist's team in 2004 and post a rare series victory in India.

They have overcome India on a rank turner, competed hard on a wicket offering variable bounce and saved a Test on a fifth-day track.

"I think it gives the squad a massive amount of confidence, knowing we can go in and assess the pitch as quickly as we can and then play our game from there," Peter Handscomb, one of Australia's saviours in the third Test, said.

"Obviously we did that well in Pune and we've had two different types of wickets again in Bangalore and Ranchi so if we can assess the conditions as quickly as possible and go from there I'm sure we'll be fine."

While Handscomb and Shaun Marsh dug Australia out of a hole in Ranchi, the visitors know they should not have been in such a mess in the first place. Handscomb said the pre-tour camp in Dubai had laid the foundations for Australia's escape in Ranchi.

"I don't think we've overcome the barriers in this Test, I think we did that before the first Test," he said.

"We'd known coming into this series that we'd developed some good plans, each had their own plan and we've stuck to them."

"Whether they've worked immediately or not, we've still backed them in and that's purely because we had that time in Dubai where we could work that out and we got confidence there and as soon as we came to India we were able to implement that and go from there."