

SPORT



(L-R) Mosaddek Hossain, Rubel Hossain, Soumya Sarkar, Mashfiqur Rahim and Sabbir Rahman share a light moment during a practice session in Dambulla yesterday. The Tigers will take on Sri Lanka in the second ODI today.

Let's have more of the same: Mash

SAKEB SUBHAN from Dambulla



After the doldrums of the New Zealand series, it seems that it has taken just one match to turn Bangladesh's ODI team around this season. Without engaging in hyperbole, it can be said that Bangladesh have put in their best performance since returning to cricket last September-October with the Afghanistan and England ODIs. But even in those two series -- won 2-1 against Afghanistan and lost by the same margin against England -- there was much to be desired from Bangladesh's performances such as capitalising on top-order starts, finishing their innings strongly and taking every chance on the field.

All those problems seemed to have been solved in the first ODI. Not only did Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan carry on with their starts, they took 90 runs in their last seven overs thanks in large part to Mosaddek Hossain and Mahmudullah Riyad, before hunting the Sri Lankans with a near flawless bowling and fielding display. Today, when they take the field for the second ODI at the Rangiri Dambulla International Stadium at 3:00pm (Bangladesh time), they will be standing on the brink of a first away series win over a higher-ranked, near-full-strength side with a match in hand.

Bangladesh had only ever won an away series against a team other than Zimbabwe once, when West Indies were forced to field a second-string team due to contract disputes in 2009. Today, however, there is every reason to believe that Bangladesh can notch another first, because since their first Test win against Sri Lanka, completed on March 19, they have looked like a team that have turned an important corner. So it was no surprise that skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was counting on the team to do the same today.

"There's a chance [to clinch the series today], but for that we have to play the way we played the first match," Mashrafe said at the pre-match press conference yesterday. "They [Sri Lanka] will try very hard too, since they are 1-0 behind. They will try to push us from the start. They know how to play aggressive cricket."

In that regard, the play that Sri Lanka seems to have in mind is attacking Bangladesh with seam and swing, having recalled 181-match veteran pacer Nuwan Kulasekara and fellow national pace discard Nuwan Pradeep to the squad. Even though the Sri Lanka management have said that they were brought in as cover for Suranga Lakmal after the pace spearhead had injured his hand trying to stop

a Shakib straight hit late in Bangladesh's innings on Saturday, the increased grass on the pitch suggests that pace may be their method of redress today.

But Bangladesh may even have that base covered, if the first ODI is an indication. On a slowish pitch Mashrafe himself had set back Sri Lanka with an economical and incisive first spell, while Taskin Ahmed took the important wicket of opposition skipper Upul Tharanga before Mustafizur Rahman, though expensive by his standards, finished things off with a three-wicket haul.

While Mashrafe was not totally convinced that the pitch would be a seaming one, he was confident that he has the personnel to take advantage in case it is.

"It is very difficult to say, but the confidence is high among the bowlers that are there," said Mashrafe when asked whether a seaming pitch would be more of a help than a hindrance. "It is difficult to say that it will be good for us, but I



believe that we have the ability to adjust to the wicket, so we will prepare in that way."

But with or without a change in the pitch, the recent shift in Bangladesh's attitude, especially in batting which he identified as their strength in away matches, is what the captain seemed to be looking at.

"I think it is a big lesson for us, the thing I said about batsmen having to learn how to turn 50s and 60s into hundreds," said Mashrafe replying to a question about the rarity of Bangladesh scoring 300-plus away and Tamim batting out nearly 48 overs for 127.

"Other teams score 300 regularly because one batsman converts fifties into hundreds. 324 is a big stride because of this; if Tamim had scored 50 or 60 and gotten out the score would have stalled at 270 or 280. These 30 or 40 runs are the difference. Even the burst of runs at the end was an effect of that big innings."

'We've got to step up'

SPORTS REPORTER from Dambulla



Since the win in the second Test, Bangladesh's first over Sri Lanka in the longest format, the air has been heavy with anticipation of the Lions' backlash to put the Tigers in their place.

Before the first ODI against Bangladesh on Saturday, skipper Upul Tharanga talked about the effort they were putting into their fielding drills and how much they were enjoying it, but their error-strewn display on the field in the first ODI was a continuation of their poor display in the Tests.

To stop Bangladesh's steadily growing momentum on tour, Sri Lanka seem to have turned to a bolstered pace attack with the recall of Nuwan Kulasekara and Nuwan Pradeep to the squad. There was also a

greenish tinge on the pitch at the Rangiri Dambulla International Stadium less than 24 hours before the match was to start.

"We have included Nuwan Kulasekara and Nuwan Pradeep into the squad; the main reason was Suranga Lakmal's fitness [after he injured his hand while fielding in the first ODI on Saturday]," Sri Lanka manager Asanka Gurusinha said yesterday. "It can take 24-48 hours and we didn't want someone to come in tomorrow [Tuesday] morning. We thought to get two people in so that we have more options to look at. Up till yesterday we were not sure whether Lakmal will play but he has recovered and was okay today."

Sri Lanka had also played with three pacers in the first ODI, with Lahiru Kumara sharing the new ball with Lakmal and all-rounder Thisara Perera performing the first-change role.

"We are unlikely to make too many

changes but this wicket is different to the one we played on Saturday. So taking that into account we may make a few changes," said Gurusinha, the contradiction perhaps a peek into the hosts' troubled mindset so far in the series.

Gurusingha, part of a team and management under fire from the home media, also paid due credit to his opponents. "Give credit to Bangladesh, they have a very experienced side. Their ODI squad have nearly 1000 ODIs between them; that's a lot. They have been playing together for the last seven to eight years and it helps a lot."

"Sri Lanka is in the rebuilding stage but I don't want to use that word anymore, it's up to us to make sure that we are up and running to play at the highest level. If you are playing Tests or ODIs you cannot say that we are playing a rebuilding team. You've got to step up."

In that regard, the play that Sri Lanka seems to have in mind is attacking Bangladesh with seam and swing, having recalled 181-match veteran pacer Nuwan Kulasekara and fellow national pace discard Nuwan Pradeep to the squad. Even though the Sri Lanka management have said that they were brought in as cover for Suranga Lakmal after the pace spearhead had injured his hand trying to stop

Sanath hides behind transition excuse

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



Sri Lanka batsman Dinesh Chandimal had said after the 90-run defeat to Bangladesh in the

first ODI that the 'transition phase' excuse cannot be used anymore to explain away the home team's failures as they have been in that zone for the last two years.

It has been two years since the first of the duo of greats, Mahela Jayawardene, retired from the ODI format. Arguably the greatest Sri Lankan batsman Kumar Sangakkara had called time a year and a half ago and Tillakaratne Dilshan, another senior albeit of lesser influence, retired in August 2016.

Contrary to what Chandimal said however, Sri Lanka Cricket chairman of selectors Sanath Jayasuriya seemed to stick with the transition phase argument at noon yesterday, during the hosts' practice session.

"We are in Sri Lanka cricket's trial session

period," the legendary former opener, nicknamed the Matara Hurricane, said. "We are trying out youngsters for the last seven-eight months after all our senior cricketers retired. So it will be a little up and down."

Having given this answer, he seemed as short of explanations as everyone else in Sri Lanka's cricket structure when asked what the difference between the two teams was, stopping short of saying 'everything'.

"The Bangladeshis are getting runs on the board. We are not, so we need to get runs on the board; then there will be no difference. We need to field well and we need to bowl well."

"There have been some really positive things from Bangladesh. As a batting unit, as a bowling unit and as a fielding unit they've been doing well. They're batting well; their experienced players are there, the top four batsmen are getting runs. That's the key. That's what we want."

If Sri Lanka are planning on doing what their opponents are doing, they will want to do it soon, as a loss today may bring them nearer to the end of the rope.

Tait quits cricket

REUTERS, Melbourne

Australian fast bowler Shaun Tait has announced his retirement from all forms of the game on Monday due to persistent elbow injuries.

Tait, who had retired from first-class cricket in 2009 and one-day internationals in 2011, continued to play as a Twenty 20 specialist. "I honestly wanted to play a couple more years, whether it was over in the UK or here," the 34-year-old Tait told cricket.com.au.

"The elbow has pretty much gone off a cliff now, it's done and dusted. I suppose when you're not contributing on the field as much as you'd like to, it's time to finish up."

BD romp past HK



SAIF HASAN'S UNBEATEN 57 POWERED BANGLADESH TO AN EIGHT-WICKET WIN AGAINST HONG KONG IN THEIR OPENING MATCH OF THE MAX EMERGING TEAMS ASIA CUP IN COX'S BAZAR YESTERDAY.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

now we are only focusing on Nepal," he continued.

Bangladesh started well in reply to Hong Kong's paltry target with Saif and Azmir Ahmed contributing 46 runs in the opening stand. Mominul Haque scored a quick-fire 21 runs from 14 balls while Nazmul Hossain was not out on 24.

Bangladesh will play their second match today against Nepal at the same venue.

Meanwhile, in the opening day's other matches, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan won their respective games in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar.

SCORES IN BRIEF

HONG KONG: 125 all out in 35.1 overs (Babar 37, Nizakat 2; Mominul 3-11, Nasir 3-18)

BANGLADESH: 126-2 in 16.1 overs (Saif 57 not out, Nazmul 24 not out; Mominul 2; Ehsan 2-48)

RESULT: Bangladesh won by eight wickets.

AFGHANISTAN: 284-7 in 50 overs (Janat 108, Munir 90, Najib 33; Duraisingham 4-50, Pavandeep 1-39)

MALAYSIA: 129 all out in 45.5 overs (Sharif 36, Virandeep 32, Faiz 19; Naveen 2-13, Aftab 2-15, Naib 2-26)

RESULT: Afghanistan won by 15 runs.

NEPAL: 180-9 in 50 overs (Dhamala 43, Vesawkar 38, Bhandari 24; Mudassar 5-26, Osama 2-38)

PAKISTAN: 183-4 in 45.1 overs (Imam 104 not out, Hammad 22 not out, Butt 21; Lamichhane 2-32, Malla 2-44)

RESULT: Pakistan won by six wickets.

INDIA: 288-9 in 50 overs (Aparajith 100, Vihari 56, S. Chowdhary 5; Aponsu 2-42, Karunaratne 2-57)

SRI LANKA: 253 all out in 48.2 overs (Asalanka 68, Jayasuriya 64, Wannidu 38; Kanishka 3-53, Aswin 3-55)

Rakib, Rani qualify for World Cup

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Abdullah Al Rakib and Women's International Master Rani Hamid qualified for the 2017 World Cup and 2018 Women's Championship after emerging champions in the Asian Zonal Chess Championship in Kathmandu yesterday.

Rakib beat Grand Master Enamul Hossain Razib in the ninth and final round to earn eight points while GM Ziaur Rahman became runner-up with 7.5 points.

Rani and last edition's champion Shamima Akter Liza earned eight points each, but the former was declared champion in tie-breaking system.

Meanwhile, WFM Nazrana Khan Eva, who became third in women's section with six points, earned her second WIM norm and she now needs one more norm to earn the WIM title. Samiha Sharmin Shimmi, who finished fourth with 5.5 points, also achieved the title of Women's Candidate Master in this event.

Titas, Police into semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Titas Club and Bangladesh Police completed the semifinals lineup of the Walton Independence Cup Volleyball Tournament yesterday.

Titas beat Bangladesh Air Force in 3-1 sets while Police beat Fire Service in straight sets at the Volleyball Stadium in Paltan.

In today's semifinals, Titas will play against Power Development Board while Bangladesh Army will face Bangladesh Navy.

India set to seal series

AFP, Dharamsala



All-rounder Ravindra Jadeja starred with both bat and ball on the third day of the fourth Test on Monday to put India on course for a series-clinching victory against Australia in Dharamsala.

The left-hander top-scored with 63 to help India surpass Australia's first-innings total of 300 and then snared three wickets with his spin bowling as the visitors crumbled.

India's pacemen did the early damage, with Umesh Yadav picking up two wickets and Bhuvneshwar Kumar dismissing the in-form Australian skipper Steve Smith for 17 to leave the Aussies reeling on 31 for 3 inside 10 overs.

A short ball from Kumar hit the bottom edge of Smith's bat before crashing onto the stumps in spectacular fashion.

Smith ended the four-Test series with 499 runs including three centuries, only the sixth visiting batsman to have scored so many hundreds in a series in India.

The spinners then got down to business on a lively track that offered plenty of bounce, with Ravichandran Ashwin also grabbing three wickets to help his side skittle out Australia for just 137 in the final session.

At stumps the top-ranked home side were 19-0, needing 87



INDIA ALL-ROUNDER RAVINDRA JADEJA (R) CELEBRATES ONE OF HIS THREE WICKETS ON THE THIRD DAY OF THE FOURTH TEST AGAINST AUSTRALIA IN DHARAMSALA YESTERDAY. PHOTO: AFP

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings: 300

INDIA: First innings 332 (Rahul 60, Pujara 57, Rahane 46, Jadeja 63; Cummins 3-94, Lyon 5-92)

AUSTRALIA: Second innings 137 (Maxwell 45, Wade 25 not out; Yadav 3-29, Jadeja 3-24, Ashwin 3-29)

INDIA: Second innings 19 for no loss