

SPORT



Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha (L) speaks to pacer Mustafizur Rahman (R) as bowling coach Courtney Walsh looks on during a practice session in Colombo ahead of tomorrow's third and final ODI against Sri Lanka.

PHOTO: AFP

'Body language the biggest change'

SAKEB SUBHAN from Colombo

On Bangladesh's current tour of Sri Lanka, it is hard to get too far from the tour-opening Galle Test. Till date it was the only truly bad game that Bangladesh played, culminating in a collapse of five wickets in the first hour of the fifth morning on a surprisingly non-threatening fifth day pitch. But far from morning telling the day, it was the jolt that 259-run loss gave to the team and the corrective measures that it set in motion that has had a telling effect on the rest of the tour, with Sri Lanka winless in the following three international matches.

Much of the change was caused by a team meeting between the players after the Test where they spoke openly about what they wanted to do and where they had gone wrong. According to Test vice-captain Tamim Iqbal's words after the second Test at the P Sara Oval in Colombo, the country's 100th, which ended in a first-ever win over Sri Lanka, the Galle Test also set off a tradition of the players holding a closed-door meeting before each international match, presumably to take ownership of the game plan that they are the ones who will have to execute. So far, it has resulted in a sense of purpose in every player on the field, and coach Chandika Hathurusingha saw that reflected in the body language of the players.

"The body language and effort on the field is the biggest change I have seen in the last few

matches, after the Galle Test," said Hathurusingha during the team's optional practice session yesterday morning at the Sinhalese Sports Club, the venue of the third and final ODI on April 1 in a series Bangladesh lead 1-0 after the washout in the second ODI in Dambulla. "They had a good one-to-one afterwards, and the boys responded to that very well. In the last game we were a bit lethargic after the first 10 overs, but after that we were really good in the heat."

Bangladesh did concede 311 in the second ODI before rain caused the game to be abandoned, but in that performance too there was a stark difference between how they pulled back the scoring rate and what Sri Lanka did in the previous ODI when conceding 324 for five and losing the match by 90 runs. That pitch was not as good for batting as the one on which Sri Lanka were all out for 311, but in similar heat the Sri Lankan fielding wilted while Bangladesh's fielding held its own as they restricted Sri Lanka to 76 runs in the last 10 overs while taking six wickets, three of them to an innings-ending hat-trick by fast bowler Taskin Ahmed.

It is a measure of the coach's, and perhaps the team's, expectations that when asked about the hat-trick, Hathurusingha half-jokingly said: "A hat-trick is always good, but it came too late for me."

There were diving stops near the boundary and the two direct hits from behind the stumps by Mushfiqur Rahim -- a person whose keeping skills are often maligned -- to run-out the dan-

gerous Thisara Perera and Dilruwan Perera were big contributors to that late run-check. More intangibly, it was the constant encouragement after the end of each over, regardless of how it went, that may have caught the coach's eye.

That has been the theme since the first Test. Bangladesh have outperformed their higher-ranked opponents so far in all three departments and now, whether or not it was a fortuitous wash-out for Bangladesh, the home side face the prospect of playing out an ODI series at home without getting on the scoreboard for only the third time since 1986.

"We are very much confident if we get our processes right. I think we will do well against Sri Lanka," said Hathurusingha. "They are a very strong team at home. I can't remember a time when they didn't win a single game in a series, so it is a good position we are in. We are 1-0 up, we can't lose the series. They have to play well, and we have to play our best game to come good."

Like most of his players, Hathurusingha did not seem to believe that chasing 311 was out of reach for Bangladesh. "It was a good score, but chasing 300-plus was not easy. The wicket was better than previous match. We were really confident that we could have got it."

"When you win, everything looks good," he had said at the start of the session. Regardless where one lands on the debate surrounding the second ODI, it is hard to deny that at the moment, things are looking good for Bangladesh.

A chance missed

Tie vs Pakistan sees hosts finish second in group

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammad Saifuddin could have sent a full-toss from 17-year old left-arm pacer Ghulam Mudassar anywhere, but the batsman pushed it gently towards point and could take only one run off the final delivery of the match as Bangladesh settled their last group encounter, against a formidable Pakistan, with a tie at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

Requiring seven runs off the last six balls, Saifuddin and Nayeem Hasan managed five runs from five deliveries and then there was a message for Saifuddin from the locker room saying that he must run a single if the ball reached the keeper's hand. Ultimately, it seemed that Saifuddin stuck to the demand for one run despite getting a juicy ball that could have won the hosts' the match and seen them to the semifinal of the Emerging Teams Asia Cup as Group B champions.

Instead, Pakistan finished as champions of Group B due to a superior run-rate and will face off against Afghanistan -- who eliminated India after a two-wicket victory yesterday -- in the second semifinal at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong. Bangladesh will play the first semifinal against Sri Lanka, who defeated Malaysia by 205 runs to romp into the semifinals as Group A champions, at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong. Both semifinals will be held tomorrow.

Facing a very good bowling attack, Bangladesh were on the brink of chasing down the 234-run target and captain Mominul Haque believed that they were deprived of a win due to a lack of experience about how to handle this kind of situation.

"I think pressure played some role and it might happen as this kind of situation is not common for the two batsmen at the crease. I think we can learn many things from this kind of match. Yes, nothing could have been better

than winning, but a tie is also not a bad result if you consider the strength of the Pakistan bowling attack," said Mominul who led from the front with a 91-ball 75 to take his team to a position to win the match. Mohammad Mithun was the other notable scorer with a 68-ball 53, while Nazmul Hossain scored 30.

Selector and team manager Habibul Bashar also expressed his satisfaction over the team's performance.

"It is not easy to handle a genuine leg-spinner like Usama Mir, who has turn, flight and googlies in his arsenal, or an off-spinner like Bilal Asif. Their pace attack is also equally good, so I am happy with the way our batsmen handled them and I believe they got a good experience," said Bashar.

Mir bowled the penultimate over when Bangladesh needed 14 runs from two overs and he gave away seven runs with three leg-byes.

Earlier Pakistan recovered from 35 for four to score 233 runs thanks to an 86-run fifth-wicket partnership between Hammad Azam and Haris Sohail.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: 233-8 in 50 overs (Sohail 63, Talat 57 not out, Azam 30; Saif 3-54, Hasan 2-40, Nasim 2-57)
BANGLADESH: 233-8 in 50 overs (Mominul 75, Mithun 53, Shanto 30; Gohar 2-40, Talat 2-41, Mir 2-58)
Result: Match tied
SRI LANKA: 311-9 in 50 overs (Samarawickrama 124, Asalanka 78, Perera 31; Duraisingam 3-52, Sing 2-56, Ahad 2-67)
MALAYSIA: 106-10 in 27.3 overs (Ramly 29, Faiz 22, Aziz 18; Aponso 5-31, Silva 3-26)
Result: Sri Lanka won by 205 runs.
HONG KONG: 214-10 in 50 overs (Rath 51, Mcaulsen 43, Waqas 30; Karm 3-29, Malla 2-25, Karki 2-37)
NEPAL: 220-3 in 44.2 overs (Malla 70, Airee 60 not out, Vesawakar 55 not out; Subraymanyam 2-31)
Result: Nepal won by seven wickets.
INDIA: 242-8 in 50 overs (Vihar 59 not out, Gill 46, Aparajith 38, Haq 4-56, Naib 2-20)
AFGHANISTAN: 246-8 in 46.3 overs (Ahmadzai 51, Shinwari 50, Kamal 42; Nagarkoti 2-29, Gani 2-42)
Result: Afghanistan won by two wickets.



Skipper Mominul Haque's 75 was a fine knock in Bangladesh's tied game against Pakistan in the Emerging Teams Asia Cup in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS



Habibur hits 275 off 110

SPORTS REPORTER

Habibur Rahman showed just how merciless a batsman can be during a Prime Bank Young Tigers' National School Cricket tournament at the City Club ground yesterday.

A player of Dhaka Metro's Shamsul Hoque Khan School & College, Habibur blazed his way to an incredible 275 off 110 balls. He blasted the Rahmatullah Model High School bowlers to all corners of the field, racking up 32 boundaries and 22 sixes in his wake as his side reached 532 runs in 45 overs.

In reply, Rahmatullah Model High School were bundled out for 105 runs to suffer a massive 427-run defeat.

Fizz's dip no cause for alarm

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



Ever since his debut, when he took the world by storm by bowling Bangladesh to a series win over India, Mustafizur Rahman has been a precious commodity in Bangladesh cricket. His shoulder surgery last August was a cause for real concern among fans and pundits alike, and it was fuelled further when he could not reach top pace during the New Zealand limited-overs leg in December-January, before missing the one-off Test against India.

Concerns were allayed to a large extent by Mustafizur's performance in the Test series in Sri Lanka, especially in the second Test, but they are never too far from the surface as they cropped up again when he conceded runs at more than six an over in the first two ODIs, albeit scalping three wickets in the bargain in the first game. It was a rarity for the left-arm, who had gone above that mark only once before in the 13 matches he has played so far and whose career economy rate is an excellent 4.79.

"He took three wickets," was the reply from head coach Chandika Hathurusingha yesterday when asked about Mustafizur's expensive spells. "I have no problem with him because he played a different role. He didn't open the bowling and we used him later on because we had 300 on the board [in the first ODI]. If the run rate goes above seven or eight then Fizz is always in the game."

"And don't forget that he is coming back after a big injury, on the shoulder of the bowling arm. It will take time, and we have no issue because of the way he bowled in the Test match. Those pitches [in the ODIs] were very good and probably the second wicket didn't suit his type of bowling very much because it was not gripping and there was a bit of a carry."

He also bowled from both sides of the wicket in the second ODI, going for 60 runs in his eight overs for one wicket. It was probably just an off day, but there will be no better way to assure his fans than to put in a definitive performance in the third and final ODI on Saturday.

A reward for BHF

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) has been awarded the prestigious Raja Azlan Shah Memorial Trophy by the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) for their active role in management at both international and domestic level, said a BHF senior official yesterday.

"Today [Thursday] I have learnt that the Asian Hockey Federation have recognized BHF by awarding it the Raja Azlan Shah trophy, which is given to the member countries following good activities and management," BHF general secretary Abdus Sadeque said.

"During our tenure, we have arranged some five to six international tournaments which was one of the reasons to award us," added the legendary hockey player.

Sadeque also informed that the AHF meeting confirmed Bangladesh as the venue for the 10-men Asia Cup which will be held in Dhaka in October.

Hosts Bangladesh, South Korea, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Japan, China and Oman will be competing in the Asia Cup.

The Subashis show and the Hathuru bouncer

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



There are interesting tidbits you can catch during a Bangladesh practice session, especially when the team are in the run of form they are currently in on the tour of Sri Lanka.

Yesterday at the Sinhalese Sports Club ground in Colombo, the team had an optional practice session where nine of the 17-member squad showed up. There are no prizes for guessing that the forever diligent Mushfiqur Rahim was one of them. The eight others were Mustafizur Rahman and Soumya Sarkar from the team that played the first two ODIs, and Imrul Kayes, Shuvagata Hom, Nurul Hasan, Subashis Roy, Rubel Hossain and Sanjamul Islam from the bench.

After fielding drills, the nine headed to the nets. While the batting of Mushfiqur is always a joy to watch, Subashis stole the show yesterday. It seems Courtney Walsh, Bangladesh's fast bowling coach and former legendary West Indies fast bowler-cum-batting-bunny, has a rival.

Facing local net bowlers, spinners mostly, Subashis went to the crease with a chest guard and proceeded to come down the wicket on numerous occasions and get bowled. All the while Richard Halsall, the fielding coach, was looking on and called Subashis over while Rubel took his place and smashed them to all parts.

A few words with Halsall, who gave him some instructions along with some shadow

demonstrations, and Subashis was a changed man -- for three minutes. He took his feet to the ball and played some half-decent drives, but soon enough it was down the wicket and bowled again.

Before the Subashis show however, the incumbent and the deposed were batting in adjoining nets. Imrul, for some time Tamim Iqbal's opening partner, was batting nicely in one net while the man who currently walks out to start proceedings, Soumya, was receiving throwdowns with the sidearm from head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and was not looking half as fluent. But Soumya seems one of those players who does not really flourish inside the confines of the nets but hits his stride when out in the middle.

At any rate, he would have been well advised to follow Subashis's example and wear a chest guard. After ducking under a few sidearm bouncers, he attempted to sway out of one and it hit him in the chest. He crouched in pain by the side of the net and Hathurusingha went to check up on him, but it looked fine and Soumya was back on his feet ready to face the next ball.

As Hathurusingha was walking back, he seemed to have a wry smile on his face. Perhaps he was relishing felling a batsman, even if with the aid of a sidearm, as he probably would not have done it very often with his military medium in his playing days.

Then Mushfiqur came to replace Soumya and muddled almost every ball thrown at him. He may not be one for the lighter moments, but he certainly shows the rest how it is done.

SENIOR DIV FOOTBALL League returns after two years

SPORTS REPORTER

The Senior Division Football League had once been one of major pipelines in grooming footballers for the Premier Football League, but it has lost its appeal due to inconsistency in holding the league which started in 1973.

The league, which was held only five times in the past 11 years, is all set to return after a two-year hiatus with the participation of 12 Dhaka clubs at Bishreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium today.

However, the participating teams will play lesser matches as the league, sponsored by Saif PowerTec, will be held in round-robin format with a time frame of six weeks.

"After the first round matches, we wanted to hold the Super League to give more matches to the teams but we can't do it due to the unavailability of the ground," said Dhaka Metropolitan Football League Committee (DMFLC) chairman Harunur Rashid at a press conference.

The champions and runners-up will be promoted to Bangladesh Championship League while the bottom team will be relegated to the 2nd Division Football League.