

SPORT



Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman bowls on the Clontarf Cricket Club centre wicket yesterday as the Tigers gear up for one final tilt at New Zealand in the last match of the Ireland tri-series here today.

PHOTO: BCB

It's all about execution: Mash

SPORTS REPORTER



With the group of death beckoning in the Champions Trophy starting with the opener against England on June 1, today's last tri-series match against New Zealand -- who have already won the competition -- is a litmus test of sorts for Bangladesh. So far on the Ireland tour, there have been signs of slow and sure improvement for the Tigers -- the bowlers have given a good account of themselves throughout, and although the batsmen disappointed in the four-wicket defeat to New Zealand, they were back on song in the eight-wicket win over Ireland on Friday.

Even so, the question that remains is whether this Bangladesh side have the quality to defeat a New Zealand side that has been bolstered by the return of first-choice players from the Indian Premier League.

"The first match that we played against New Zealand was very close. Maybe if we did some things differently -- in the batting, my bowling, etc. -- we could have won a match. It has been good so far in Ireland. We have done the most we can with the limited opportunities we have gotten to practise," Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza said during team practice at the Clontarf Cricket Club in Dublin yesterday, also the venue for today's match.

"There is nothing new to think of or plan, said Mashrafe when asked if plans would change because of New Zealand's returning stars. "A few of their players have come in so they are rotating them, but all of us have been here from the start, so we don't have to plan anything anew. It is all about executing the plans we have."

Mashrafe was looking to replicate the performance in their last match, which they won by eight wickets after shooting Ireland out for 181.

"I think that we bowled well in most matches. So from that perspective, if we can bowl like we did in the previous match, it will become easier for the batsmen."

Pitted in a Champions Trophy group that also features hosts England, world champions Australia and World Cup finalists New Zealand, winning this match will give them a huge mental boost and also take them fractionally ahead of Sri Lanka in the ODI rankings to sixth position, giving them a cushion as far as qualification for the 2019 World Cup is concerned.

"Every match is important for us. It will feel very good if we can win the last match before the Champions Trophy. Even though we have practice matches against good teams like Pakistan and India before the Champions Trophy, winning this match will give us a mental boost."

Mashrafe was noncommittal as far as the eleven for today's match goes, saying that the team that can win the match will play.

Anyone's game as Super League begins

SPORTS REPORTER



Gazi Group Cricketers begin their Dhaka Premier Division Cricket Super League campaign with a two-point advantage over their nearest rivals Abahani. When they meet Mohammedan Sporting Club, who have 12 points, in their opening Super League clash in Fatullah today, they will try to recover from the two consecutive defeats in the last two first-phase matches. Mohammedan have a daunting task in hand to make up for the huge first-phase deficit, but the Super League is wide open for the team.

Second-placed Abahani face off with fourth-placed Prime Bank Cricket Club, while the third-placed Prime Doleshwar

will play against the fifth-placed Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club in the other opening-day fixture at two different BKSP grounds.

"The beauty of this season's league is that every team is capable of beating the others. There are no overwhelming favourites. The level of competition is really high. While it is true that Gazi entered the Super League with an advantage, I think every team has the opportunity to clinch the title. So we are looking forward to a good Super League battle," said Khaled Mashud, former national skipper and Prime Bank coach.

The country has been going through a heat wave and it will be a major challenge for the cricketers to come up with their best performance, but a two-day gap between matches will give them some relief.

Wright takes charge of U-19 ambitions

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh has a long-cherished dream to reach the pinnacle in the ICC Under-19 Cricket World Cup and they hired Australian Damien Wright to fulfil that dream in the next mega event to be held in New Zealand from January 12 to February 4, 2018.

The new Bangladesh Under-19 head coach, a former pace bowler who played first-class cricket before embarking on a coaching career in 2011, has bracketed his new charges as 'a terrific bunch of kids' after spending some time with them at Mirpur yesterday.

Since taking part in the ICC Under-19 World Cup in 1998, Bangladesh achieved their best position in the last edition when they finished third at home last year and Wright said yesterday that they want to make sure they have a good tournament this time.

"At this stage it is a six- to eight-month plan leading up

to the U-19 World Cup. I want to make sure they have a good tournament. It is about performing as well as we can in the build-up to the World Cup," said Wright, a former bowling coach of the New Zealand team, when asked about his goal.

"I am really privileged to be here. It is my first time in Bangladesh despite having played 20-odd years. I met the guys just 5-10 minutes ago. We had a chat -- they are a terrific bunch of kids. I am looking forward to working with them. I want them [players] to aspire to be the next best. It is what excites me," said the 41-year-old Australian, who has been appointed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) till the end of their campaign in the Under-19 World Cup.

"You have to adapt to the conditions. We have to do it quickly, as senior players do. We have to make sure that these guys are exposed to those conditions going into the World Cup. We want to make sure we are really prepared," he said, adding that he will return home and come back around July.

SOUTH ASIAN B'BALL Bangladesh runners-up

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh finished runners-up in the 5th South Asian Basketball Championship as they lost their last match against defending champions India by 142-71 points in Male on Monday.

The Bangladesh team, who beat Nepal, Sri Lanka and Maldives in their first three matches, failed to put up any resistance against the regional powerhouse, who emerged champions with an unbeaten record. By dint of this victory, India will take part in the Asian Basketball Championship, which will be held in Lebanon in August this year.

Captain Mithun Kumar Biswas led the charge for Bangladesh with 25 points and was well supported by Shamsuzzamam Khan Shoyeb, who scored 22 points. Vishesh Bhriugvanshi of India was declared player of the match.

The Bangladesh team are scheduled to arrive home this morning.

MANCHESTER ATTACK South Africa concerned

AFP, London



South Africa's team manager said his side had "genuine concerns" about remaining in England following the deadly terror attack in Manchester, but there are no immediate plans to return home.

Britain's deadliest terror attack for 12 years took place just two days before the start of a three-match one-day series between England and South Africa in the nearby city of Leeds.

It is the first international fixture of a lengthy, three-month tour for South Africa that includes the June Champions Trophy and subsequent four-Test series against England.

No major international cricket has taken place in Pakistan since 2009 because of security concerns following an attack, while England one-day captain Eoin Morgan and opening batsman Alex Hales refused to tour Bangladesh because of safety fears.

But having received security briefings from the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), whose security advisor Reg Dickason is well-respected throughout the sport, South Africa team manager Dr Mohammed Moosajee said his side were happy to remain in England as things stood.

"As you can understand we have some genuine concerns, the players are uneasy... there was a lot of chatter at the breakfast table," Moosajee told reporters at Leeds's Headingley ground on Tuesday.

"I am happy to say we've had constant communications from the ECB and their security manager.

"There have been guarantees put in place that security arrangements will be supplemented, starting today. We're told there will be more visible police at the stadium, at practice sessions as well as the hotels we will reside at."

Moosajee said the hotel the South Africans are booked in for in Manchester for the last Test "is literally walking distance from where events unfolded last night and there has been genuine concern."



The new Bangladesh Under-19 head coach Damien Wright (C) was impressed with his charges, labelling them 'a terrific bunch' after spending some time with them at Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Sohail in for Umar Akmal

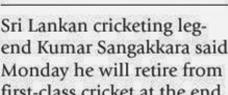
AFP, Lahore

Pakistan all-rounder Haris Sohail will replace middle-order batsman Umar Akmal, who was unceremoniously withdrawn from the Champions Trophy squad over fitness concerns a week before the competition, it was announced Tuesday.

The 27-year-old Akmal, known for his chequered disciplinary record, failed two fitness tests after joining the squad in Birmingham last week.

Sangakkara to quit first-class cricket

AFP, London



Sri Lankan cricketer Kumar Sangakkara said Monday he will retire from first-class cricket at the end of the present English county championship season in September.

The 39-year-old -- fifth in the list of all-time Test run scorers averaging more than 57 in 134 Tests, making 11 double centuries -- is still in prime form having scored two centuries for Surrey in their match with Middlesex which finished on Monday.

'All bases covered' First Eng-SA ODI today

AGENCIES, London



Whatever happens to England this summer, Eoin Morgan is determined to make sure they never lose their cool -- even in the intense heat of tournament cricket.

Morgan will lead his side in the three-match one-day series against South Africa, starting at Headingley on Wednesday, but they are working towards a far greater prize.

They are favourites to win the Champions Trophy, which starts on June 1 when England meet Bangladesh at The Kia



EOIN MORGAN

Oval. If they do so, it would be England's first major global title in the 50-over game.

"We're not the best team in the world but we have all bases covered," the Evening Standard quoted Morgan as saying yesterday. "We bat all the way down to 11. We have a left-arm bowler, quick bowlers, guys who are reliable, a leg-spinner and off-spinner.

"I've never played in a side with such variety in the batting, with guys open-minded about doing different things. We're all building towards the World Cup -- but these guys need more games to be able to go into that tournament and say: 'We're favourites.'"

'CA's greed game backfired'

REUTERS, Melbourne



Australia's cricket board gambled that greed would motivate top players into accepting a pay offer and while that bet has backfired the parties are likely to thrash out a deal in time to avert an Ashes boycott, former captain Ian Chappell has said.

Players have rejected Cricket Australia's (CA) offer that would end a 20-year-old revenue-sharing model when the next collective bargaining agreement starts in July.

The proposal offers more money than the current five-year CBA but allows only international players to share in surplus revenues, while domestic cricketers would have to settle for fixed amounts.

Former Test skipper Chappell was a leading figure in Australian cricket's most bitter pay dispute in the 1970s, which paved the way for the breakaway World Series Cricket.

"I'm delighted the players are sticking together and staying strong on it," Chappell said in comments published by Sydney newspaper the Daily Telegraph on Tuesday.

"From afar it looks as though the board are trying to splinter the players, which I find a rather strange tactic.

"Maybe the board thought, 'You know what the players are like'. They were working on the theory of greed, that you keep the top blokes happy with money and they won't care about the rest.

"It looks like they've picked the wrong target."

CA CEO James Sutherland raised

tensions earlier this month when he told players to agree to terms by the June 30 deadline or risk being unemployed.

It elicited a heated response from the Australian Cricketers' Association, the players' union, and opening batsman David Warner warned the board it might not have a team for the five-Test Ashes series starting in November.

CA has declined to comment further on the pay dispute.

Chappell said Australia's top players could easily "do a Chris Gayle" and play as free agents in the world's lucrative domestic Twenty20 competitions like the former West Indies Test captain did.

But he doubted it would come to that. "There will be more posturing and eventually they'll come to their senses," he said.