

SPORT



Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and coach Chandika Hathurusingha are deep in discussion during practice at the Oval yesterday, ahead of their Champions Trophy warm-up against India here today. INSET: Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan (L) will be eager to rediscover some form with the bat today. PHOTOS: BCB



More than just a warm-up

AL-AMIN from London

It will only be a practice game and each team will feature 13 players. This was what Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha said ahead of the Tigers' last warm-up fixture against India. The match will start at The Oval at 10:30am today.

While it is true that it is only a practice game, the charismatic Sri Lankan knows deep down how important the fixture is for his charges before playing the ICC Champions Trophy opener against hosts England at the same venue on June 1.

"It's an opportunity for us to play against the best team. They have got the most compact batting; their bowling has also got depth and variation. It will be an occasion for our bowlers to test their skills and for our batsmen to score runs against a quality attack. Besides, India are a team so busy it is hard for any team to play against them frequently. And if we can do well in that

game it will give us a world of confidence for the opening game against England," Akram Khan, the chairman of BCB's cricket operations, said.

This game is also destined to add spice after that inexplicable defeat of the Tigers against India during the T20 World Cup last year when Bangladesh, needing two runs off the last three balls, suffered a moribund one-run defeat after the departure of Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad off successive deliveries in that tense last over in Bangalore.

Bangladesh will also go into the game after an inexplicable defeat against Pakistan -- a practice game where Bangladesh scored 341 and were heading for a victory until that late Fahim Ashraf thunderstorm turned the game on its head in the last three overs. Bangladesh rested their key pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman in that game. Besides, fiery pace bowler Rubel Hossain also did not play any part on that questionable Edgbaston ground, which had a boundary square of the wicket as small as 43 meters.

There might be a possibility for Mustafizur to play against India. The left-arm pace bowler, who

did some batting practice in the nets when Bangladesh played against Pakistan, bowled during an intense session close to the centre wicket at The Oval yesterday. Rubel, considered a potent weapon with the old ball, also bowled in the nets.

Opener Tamim Iqbal is doubtful for the match because of a niggle, but he did turn up to bat late in the session.

The game will also be an opportunity for Shakib Al Hasan to rediscover his batting form.

India-Bangladesh games have been associated with bad blood, especially in social media, in the recent past. It actually started after the 2015 World Cup quarter-final between the two teams when Bangladesh felt that they were victims of erroneous umpiring calls. Bangladesh however won the home series against India 2-1 after the World Cup. Although it will be a practice game at The Oval today, it might turn out to be more than just a warm-up with the passionate followers of both teams rooting for victory.

'No team is unbeatable'

AL-AMIN from London



Tamim Iqbal is a man on a mission. The left-handed opening batsman, who is in fine form, believes that nothing is impossible for this vibrant new Bangladesh. While talking to this reporter at the team hotel in London prior to heading for the team's training session at The Oval, where Bangladesh will play their last practice game against India today and also play the ICC Champions Trophy opener against hosts England on June 1, Tamim said that they believe nobody is unbeatable. He also assured that it is only a matter of an innings for a champion all-rounder to rediscover his form.

"I have tried my best. I'm happy that I'm in a rhythm. I was quite successful in the last series. My target is to keep on continuing to contribute for my team in the next three games. And if I can do that we have a chance to do better in the tournament. But I've always said that we will have to act as a team, which we have been trying to do for the last two odd years," Tamim told this reporter during an extended chat.

"We are in a very difficult group. We have been placed with teams who play very well in these conditions. So, it will always be difficult for an Asian team. But we are now not a team that is going to start a game with a defeatist mind-set. We are now not a team for anyone to beat easily. I think we have earned respect from other teams with consistent good performances," said a confident Tamim, who has the most ODI runs and centuries for Bangladesh under his belt.

Asked what positive changes the team has made since the last World Cup down under in 2015, he said: "The biggest change is that we are more confident now. Ever since the last World Cup we played consistently good cricket. It was not that we have won one or two games in patches, which was the case before; we have won series against big teams. We have also played well away from home. The tri-series in Ireland is a very important build-up for us."

He did not like the idea of donning tags like 'underdog' or 'dark horse' heading into the second-most important ICC flagship event.

"I don't like to put a tag or something like that. We have been preparing ourselves well for the tournament. We are trying to execute our plans. We have got five to six

players who are very experienced. We have now got a very talented young batch who have got the experience of 30-40 one-day games. And if we can execute our plans we will be very tough to beat by even the best in the world," he added.

He also said he was very disappointed with the Pakistan defeat.

"It really hurt us all. We should have won that game. This is what we are focusing on -- not to commit those small mistakes. You have seen how South Africa lost their game against England in just seven-eight balls. We are trying to correct those small mistakes. We certainly have more talent in the team than two years ago," observed a member of the fantastic five.

He also said that his long-time associate, Shakib Al Hasan, will find form sooner rather than later.

"I have always said that senior players should play important roles in the team. I'm in a good rhythm now, so is [Mahmudullah] Riyad Bhai. Mushfiqur [Rahim] Bhai is also playing well. But we will have to accept that everybody may not play well at the same time. The important thing is that if you are in from you must carry on and finish the job. Shakib may not be in the best of form at the moment but I know it's a matter one innings and he knows it too. And if he clicks we will be a dangerous side."

Asked how important the first game against England will be, Tamim said: "Every game is important but the first match is crucial because it gives you an indication of where you are heading. England are one of the best teams in the world and they are more dominant on their home turf. But nobody is unbeatable. We are not thinking how good they are; we are more focused on our own game. And we are a team that believes nothing is impossible."

He felt that the only crucial cog Bangladesh will be missing going into the tournament is a good pace bowling all-rounder.

"We can improve in all three departments. Maybe we don't have a good seam bowling all-rounder that most teams have. This is an area we should focus on at the U-19 or U-17 levels. It's very important to have pace bowling all-rounders in the team."

Can the Champions Trophy be the beginning for the fantastic five of Bangladesh -- the fifth member being captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza -- to achieve something very big.

"Why not?" Tamim retorted.

ALLEGED FIXED MATCH BFF to inform AFC by May 31

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is preparing a progress report on the alleged fixed match of the Senior Division Football League as the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) instructed the local game's governing body to inform them of updates by May 31.

The match in question between Dhaka United Club and Friends Social Welfare Organisation, which took place on May 21, came to the AFC's notice after it was widely publicised due to the suspicious nature of the match.

"Referring to reports published on different newspapers, the AFC on May 25 wanted to know the details of the alleged fixed match," said BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag yesterday.

"Dhaka Metropolitan Football League Committee has already formed a probe committee to submit its report within a week and I am expecting to get an impression of that tomorrow [Tuesday] and then we will update the AFC by May 31," said Shohag, adding that it is not mandatory to provide the AFC with a final decision by Wednesday.

"If we need more time to get the findings, we will let them know but we will inform what we have already done and what things we are going to do," concluded the BFF spokesman.

CAN BEN STOKES ENGLAND'S FIRE?

AFP, Undated

Just over two years since a defeat by Bangladesh in Adelaide sealed their embarrassing first-round exit from the 2015 World Cup, England face the Tigers in the Champions Trophy opener at The Oval on Thursday with genuine optimism they can at last win a first major one-day international tournament.

"At a very early age, before he left New Zealand, he started showing signs he could develop into a very good cricketer. He had an instinctive technique and style of play -- it was very basic, almost 'see ball, hit ball,'" father Ged Stokes said.

On his day, and in the right conditions, he can also be an effective right-arm swing bowler.

But in age where all bowlers can get 'collared' in white-ball cricket, Stokes

suffered when, having to defend 19 in the last over of the 2016 World Twenty20 final in Kolkata, he was hit for four successive sixes by Carlos Brathwaite.

England's hope is that this remains his lone 'nightmare' spell with the ball, with Stokes resilient enough to absorb the experience.

TAYLOR LOOKING BEYOND SECOND PLACE

Ross Taylor's status as one of New Zealand's greats does not count as much as team records for the batsman who lists "any time it's a world tournament" as his cricket priority.

Leaving a legacy of being second is not something the 33-year-old wants.

In 87 years of international cricket since New Zealand played their first Test in 1930, the only tournament they

have won was when they beat India in the 2000 Champions Trophy final.

When asked to name his career highlights ahead of his fourth Champions Trophy, Taylor, who debuted six years after that win, said: "Beating Australia 3-0 in the Chappell-Hadlee in 2007, the last World Cup was pretty special and making the final of the (2009) Champions Trophy was a highlight," he said.

Taylor senses this New Zealand side can put the runners-up tag to bed.

"The players have played together for so long now we know each other so well. Our depth is probably our strength," he said.

"But we need to start well. We have two hard matches straight up against Australia and England and if we don't start well the tournament's over."



South Africa pace bowler Kagiso Rabada (C) cut England in half during a four-wicket burst that saw the hosts fall to 20 for six during the third ODI at Lord's yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Rabada burst delivers solace

AFP, London



South Africa beat England by seven wickets to gain a consolation win the third one-day international at Lord's on Monday.

But England took the three-match series 2-1 despite being well-beaten in a match where only 60 overs out of a scheduled 100 were bowled.

England collapsed to 20 for six in five overs after being sent into bat in overcast conditions after South Africa captain AB de Villiers won the toss, with new-ball duo Kagiso Rabada and Wayne Parnell, who eventually shared seven wickets between them, doing the damage.

Jonny Bairstow top-scored with 51 in an innings where the only other batsmen to make it to double figures were tailender Toby Roland-Jones, who made 37 not out on his ODI debut, and David Willey (26).

South Africa opens Hashim Amla (55) and Quinton de Kock (34) put on 95 for the first wicket before JP Duminy (28 not out) and de Villiers (27 not out) completed the rout.

This series served as a warm-up for the Champions Trophy, a tournament featuring the world's top eight ODI sides.

Khelaghar stay in DPL

SPORTS REPORTER



Khelaghar Samaj Kallyan Samity retained a spot for next season's Dhaka Premier League by winning their respective relegation play-off game against Partex Sporting Club. Tanvir Islam proved to be the hero as he spun his side to a comfortable eight-wicket victory at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The outcome also ensured that Victoria Sporting Club and Partex were both relegated to the Dhaka First Division Cricket League as they are on two points each while Khelaghar moved to eight points.

On the other hand, Shinepukur Cricket Club and Agrani Bank have been promoted to the Premier League as First Division champions and runners-up respectively.

The two remaining relegation playoffs will now merely be formalities.

Left-arm spinner Tanvir scalped six wickets for just 18 runs from his 9.1 overs as Partex were shot out for a measly 73 runs in 25.1 overs. So far, this has been the best bowling figure in the ongoing Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League.

Khelaghar reached the target in only 15.1 overs with Robiul Islam Robi scoring 34.



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal (L) talks to young teammate Sabbir Rahman before practice at The Oval in London yesterday. PHOTO: BCB