

SPORT

Test League to benefit Tigers

Set to play 12 Test series in 2019-2023 cycle

Star Sport Desk

Efforts to add greater content to international cricket came a step closer to reality after the ICC's chief executives committee (CEC) worked out a viable schedule for a Test and ODI league that will likely nurture Bangladesh's growth in the Test circuit.

The proposal, known as 'Option C', includes a rolling Test League starting in 2019 and an ODI league of the top 13 teams to be played over two years from 2020.

The 13-team ODI league for World Cup qualifying will be condensed into two years from 2020 onwards, meaning each team will only play eight opponents. David Richardson, the ICC CEO, said they were still formulating which eight opponents each team plays to make it 'as fair as possible'.

For the Test league, each of the top nine teams will play a maximum of 12 Test series – with a minimum two matches in each series – over four-year cycle. The original proposal was for 16 Test series, but it was reduced to 12 keeping the rising demand of T20 cricket in mind.

Over the past four years, Bangladesh played 10 Test series, while the West Indies have played the most with 13. The number of Test series will not change drastically, but the greatest impact will be that each team will have a chance to play against the others.

Although they have played against all teams in recent years, Australia, who will visit in August-September this year, in the past four years there has been a kind of imbalance in Bangladesh's Test arena.

Bangladesh visited India for the first time in 17 years in February 2017; that too for a one-off Test. The English came to Bangladesh after a break of seven years, while the Tigers last played a Test against Australia 14 years ago.

The new league means that there will be no such glaring absences from the calendar, which will be welcome news, especially considering that the last four-year cycle has perhaps been the best in the Tigers' history. They drew series against New Zealand, India, South Africa and England at home, drew a series away to Sri Lanka and won a series against Zimbabwe at home.

Two of their most famous results also came



After the Test win against England last year, Bangladesh players said they wanted more opportunities against top teams and they may get that with the proposed Test Championship. FILE PHOTO: STAR

during that time – a win over England in Dhaka after a close defeat in Chittagong, and victory in their 100th Test against Sri Lanka in Colombo.

The cricketing fraternity in the country has also been clamouring for more Tests, reasoning that the only way for Bangladesh to improve in the format would be by playing more matches against top oppositions.

The new proposal does just that by giving Bangladesh at least two Test matches against each of the other top-nine ranked teams.

Bangladesh will host Australia first before travelling to India and then Sri Lanka in the 2019-20 season. In the following season, they will host the West Indies and New Zealand before facing Pakistan away. They will again play Pakistan, at home this time, to kick off the 2021-22 season, then they will travel to New Zealand followed by a trip to the Caribbean Isles. In the last year, they will host India and Sri Lanka, before concluding the league with an away tour to South Africa.

The Test League is likely to start immediately after the 2019 World Cup and run till the beginning of the 2023 World Cup. It will conclude with a play-off between the top two teams at the end of the cycle.

While the news has been welcome by most with open arms, it should be of some concern to the two teams given full membership on Thursday.

Neither Afghanistan nor Ireland will feature in the league. Zimbabwe, currently the tenth ranked Test team, will also sit out. They will have to play against each other, and may organise Tests against the top-nine if the schedule allows.

The ICC has also capped bilateral series to three matches for the purposes of working out points. Teams may schedule matches beyond that, but they will not be taken into consideration in the calculation of points.

The ICC will add in specifics such as dates, terms and conditions, and present a more detailed schedule to the CEC for approval in the next ICC meeting in October.

Hockey's go-to man

Anisur Rahman



Though Mahbub Harun started coaching in 2003 after having called time on his playing career in the former national player three years to get in charge of the national team, which happened in the 2006 Asian Games. But since then Harun has proved himself as the go-to man for the federation and he has delivered on each of his assignments quite well, even better than most of the foreign coaches over the last one decade.

The former midfielder has once again been called up to guide the national team in the upcoming Asia Cup, which is being hosted by Bangladesh for the second time since 1985. Harun takes charge following the Bangladesh Hockey Federation's (BHF) decision to release German coach Oliver Kurtz due to a breach of the code of conduct.

In the last decade, the local game's governing body roped in four foreign coaches – German Gerhard Peter Rach, Malaysian Gopinath Krishnamurti, Pakistani Naveed Alam and lastly Kurtz, with the aim of taking the sport ahead. However, the ultimate goal was hardly ever achieved under their guidance.

In his first assignment at the 2006 Asian Games, Harun met his target of leading the side to a seventh-place finish and achieved the same result in the Asia Cup in the following year. After having guided the side to the title in the 2008 AHF Cup, Harun was replaced by Rach ahead of the 2010 South Asian Games. The German, however, failed to bring any mentionable success during his three-year tenure.

It was again Harun, who guided Bangladesh to the 2012 AHF Cup title and then went on to produce their best-ever result in the inaugural Hockey World League (HWL) Round-2 in Delhi after leading the side to championship win in Round-1 in Singapore.

But the hockey administrators again looked for a foreign coach, and replaced Harun with Naveed, who guided Bangladesh to qualification for the Asian Games. However, the performance of the team in the 2013 Asia Cup and the 2014 Asian Games were poor. Consequently, Naveed was released of his charge and Harun was again the man the federation resorted to. Harun's charges beat South Korea 2-0 to earn direct entry into the AHF U-21 Cup with a sixth-place finish.

Then came Kurtz, who guided the national team to the AHF Cup title, but the team produced frustrating results under him in the HWL Round-2 in Dhaka,

with a defeat against Oman proving very frustrating. Now in charge again, Harun looks to do what he has always succeeded in doing.

"Whenever the national team was trouble, I was called up and then I worked hard to bring the team in shape. However, the team was handed to foreign coaches again and again over the last 10 years," Harun said. "I have been appointed the head coach on June 15 but I am still confused whether to take the charge as there is a whisper that Kurtz might return to his job."

Harun, however, is motivated to guide the team to seventh position in the upcoming Asia Cup.

"I achieved the target whenever I was given the responsibility. Let's wait and see what happens this time on our home soil. It will be tough to finish sixth, and we will have to beat Oman to regain the seventh position," said a confident Harun, who

wants to sit with the selection committee and BHF general secretary to talk about the players he needs to get the results.

Before entering the competition, Harun wants to play at least six practices matches – three in early August and three in late September – as he wants to bank on a squad with a mixture of experienced and young players.

Harun also promised that his side would put up scintillating performances like they did in Delhi in 2013.

"I want the boys to put up eye-catching performances like they did at the 2013 Hockey World League Round-2 in Delhi so that the spectators can return home with the satisfaction that Bangladesh really played well," hoped Harun, who also believes that foreign coaches should be given long-term contracts to bring changes in Bangladesh's playstyle.



MAHBUB HARUN

PROPOSED ODI SCHEDULE FOR BANGLADESH

Season	2020-21					2021-22		
Venue	Home	Home	Away	Away	Home	Home	Away	Away
Opponent	England	Afghanistan	Ireland	New Zealand	West Indies	Sri Lanka	South Africa	Zimbabwe

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Season	2019-20			2020-21			2021-22			2022-23		
Venue	Home	Away	Away	Home	Away	Home	Away	Away	Home	Home	Away	
Opponent	Australia	India	Sri Lanka	West Indies	New Zealand	Pakistan	Pakistan	New Zealand	West Indies	India	Sri Lanka	South Africa

Tight battle expected

India face England in opener today

AGencies, London



Eight teams are set to battle it out for the biggest prize in women's cricket, when the ICC Women's World Cup gets underway on Saturday in England.

As current ICC Women's World Cup holder and six-time champion, Australia enter the competition as favourites, but face stiff competition.

Led by Meg Lanning, the outstanding batsmen in the women's game today, Australia will be looking to win their seventh title in a tournament that now features the world's top eight one-day international sides.

India will have their task cut out when they lock horns with title contenders England in the tournament opener.

Organisers will hope that any rustiness has been chipped away come the start of the

tournament proper and that there is a repeat of the excitement generated during last year's women's World Twenty20 in India.

"Our last global (women's) event was won by the West Indies," International Cricket Council chief executive David Richardson told AFP during a conference call earlier this week.

"I know that it's easier to be more competitive in the Twenty20 format than it is in the 50-over one, but I think this tournament will show the talent that is available out there," the former South Africa wicket-keeper added.

A final at Lord's on July 23 will mark the culmination of 31 matches also played at county grounds in Bristol, Derby, Leicester and Taunton.

All the fixtures will be streamed live, with 10 broadcast on television in another sign of the growing global interest in women's cricket.



After playing a significant role in Bangladesh's Champions Trophy campaign, Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim is enjoying a well-earned vacation. He posted a picture inside Barcelona's hallowed Nou Camp yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

ACA rejects revised offer

Rhodes, Melbourne

Australia's cricketers rejected the board's offer of a revised new deal on Friday as the bitter dispute over a revenue-sharing model numbled on with just a week to go before the current agreement expires.

Australia's top cricketers face being locked out unless a new deal is struck between Cricket Australia (CA) and the Australian Cricketers' Association (ACA) before the end of the month.

Unless the impasse ends next week, the upcoming Australia A tour of South Africa, a two-test series in Bangladesh and a limited-over tour of India are under threat from the dispute, with the Ashes also looming at the end of the year.

"The ACA has advised players not to sign," the players' body said in a statement.

Australia's Tour of Bangladesh

'Tigers are very good at home'

AGencies, Melbourne



Australia batsman Usman Khawaja, who has not played an international game since January 22, warned that it would be unwise to take hosts Bangladesh lightly in their upcoming two-match Test series.

Khawaja last played for Australia in an ODI against Pakistan, but did not feature in Australia's four Tests against India.

"The Tigers have produced a number of impressive performances in recent times, including a Test win on home soil against England. With that in mind, Khawaja says Australia must be taking their next opponents lightly.

"They're very good in their backyard, much like India," Khawaja told cricket.com.au. "Their wickets are very similar to those in India. It will be a challenge."

"It's a tough tour to go to because I haven't been to Bangladesh before and from all reports it's a very congested

country, getting around is pretty tough, very different to what we experience.

"People think of Bangladesh 'It's an easy win, it's only Bangladesh' but it's not like that anymore. They're very competitive at home so it's going to be a very good series."

Australia has not played a Test in Bangladesh since 2006 when former Test bowler Jason Gillespie scored a memorable double-century in what turned out to be his final Test. And he had some advice for the Australian team who will be visiting this time around, light-heartedly asking them to watch



USMAN KHAWAJA

Bangladesh since 2006 when former Test bowler Jason Gillespie scored a memorable double-century in what turned out to be his final Test. And he had some advice for the Australian team who will be visiting this time around, light-heartedly asking them to watch

the footage of his terrific innings.

"What a batting masterclass," Gillespie told cricket.com.au when asked if he recalled his famous knock. "They [Australia's batsmen] really should just get on YouTube and type in 'best innings in Test cricket' and 201 not out will come up, that's the first one. They should watch that – the highlights take just over an hour – absorb everything and learn as much as they can about the art of batsmanship in Bangladesh. It's one real tough place to bat."

He then added that the players, for all of whom it will be a first tour of Bangladesh, would have a great time and encouraged them to embrace the experience.

"I'm looking forward to seeing them go out there and have a wonderful tour of Bangladesh," Gillespie continued. "It's a great place to play cricket, the crowds are fantastic, the public is right behind their side and they're very respectful of other teams. [The fans] love Australian players. They'll have wonderful time there and really enjoy."

BCCI seeks Kohli-friendly coach

AFP, New Delhi



India are likely to favour a new coach who can 'get along' with Virat Kohli, cricket officials indicated Friday, after Anil Kumble stepped aside following a row with the captain.

Former opener Virender Sehwag and Australia's Tom Moody are reported to have applied as coach, but Ravi Shastri may also now become a candidate after Kumble's departure, Indian media said.

Spin-bowling great Kumble withdrew from the running for a new contract on Tuesday, saying his

position had become "untenable" after a breakdown in relations with Kohli.

The new coach for the world's number one Test team will be decided by the three-man advisory committee of Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly and VVS Laxman.

"The advisory committee are adept at getting the right man but they would certainly have the Kumble episode at the back of their mind while selecting the new coach," a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

Even though Kohli has no role in the selection, a person who will get along with the captain is always good

for the team and who better than Sachin, Sourav and Laxman to know how the captain-coach relationship works," the official said.

Since Kumble's unhappy exit, a one-year-old tweet welcoming an extension, but now it's seeking an open field.

A top BCCI official told AFP that candidates might have had reservations if Kumble was seeking an extension, but now it's seeking an open field.

Shastri worked with Kohli as team director before Kumble became coach in June last year, and is said to have a good relationship with the captain.

Kohli, now leading India's West

Indies tour, said on Thursday that dressing room matters should be "sacred and private."

"His point of view is out there and we respect that decision," Kohli said in a post on Twitter on Thursday, when asked to comment on Kumble's departure.

"I have total respect for him as a cricketer and what he has achieved. There's no taking away that aspect of him at all and we respect him totally," Kohli added.

Acting BCCI president CK Hanu has said a new coach will be named before India start their tour of Sri Lanka in July.