

Can HP fill the A team's void?

SPORTS REPORTER



A competitive domestic competition is the key to a healthy pipeline for the national side. And refreshingly, domestic cricket has slowly moved forward towards achieving the desired standard. It however is not enough; a country must ensure that they have enough series for their second-string team so that they can provide the requisite international exposure for those players who have dropped off the national radar as well as young talent so that they can be better prepared to enter the national team.

Unfortunately, the reality is that series for the Bangladesh A team have been few and far between -- the last tour took place back in October-November 2015 when Bangladesh A visited South Africa and Zimbabwe.

"Without a doubt regular A team series are important but in reality it's not always possible to arrange it. We are trying hard to make it possible and hope it will take shape if we can arrange a tour as per our desire within the next two months," said the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) cricket operations committee chairman Akram Khan, adding: "Actually, the HP [High Performance] team is like the A team."

With the acute lack of assignments for the A team, a 16-member HP Squad is all set to fly to Australia tomorrow. The main purpose of the tour, however, is to train players in different conditions. During the visit the HP team will play some matches against local players in Darwin but it was actually arranged mainly by the HP team's Australian coach Simon Helmot as part of the HP squad's training in different conditions. When the first-class season in Australia ends, players come to Darwin and continue playing since the weather in Darwin is different from the rest of the country and Bangladesh HP team will only try to play matches against those players.

Still, it has come as an opportunity for out-of-favour players like Anamul Haque.

"Players like us who are out of the national side for long hardly get the opportunity to play against foreign sides, so this tour is important for us. If I am not wrong I am going to play matches on foreign soil almost after a two-year break. We have the domestic platform to prove ourselves as performers and we also need the platform against foreign sides to get ready for the national side because you know how big the challenge is now to get a place in the national side," said the opener.

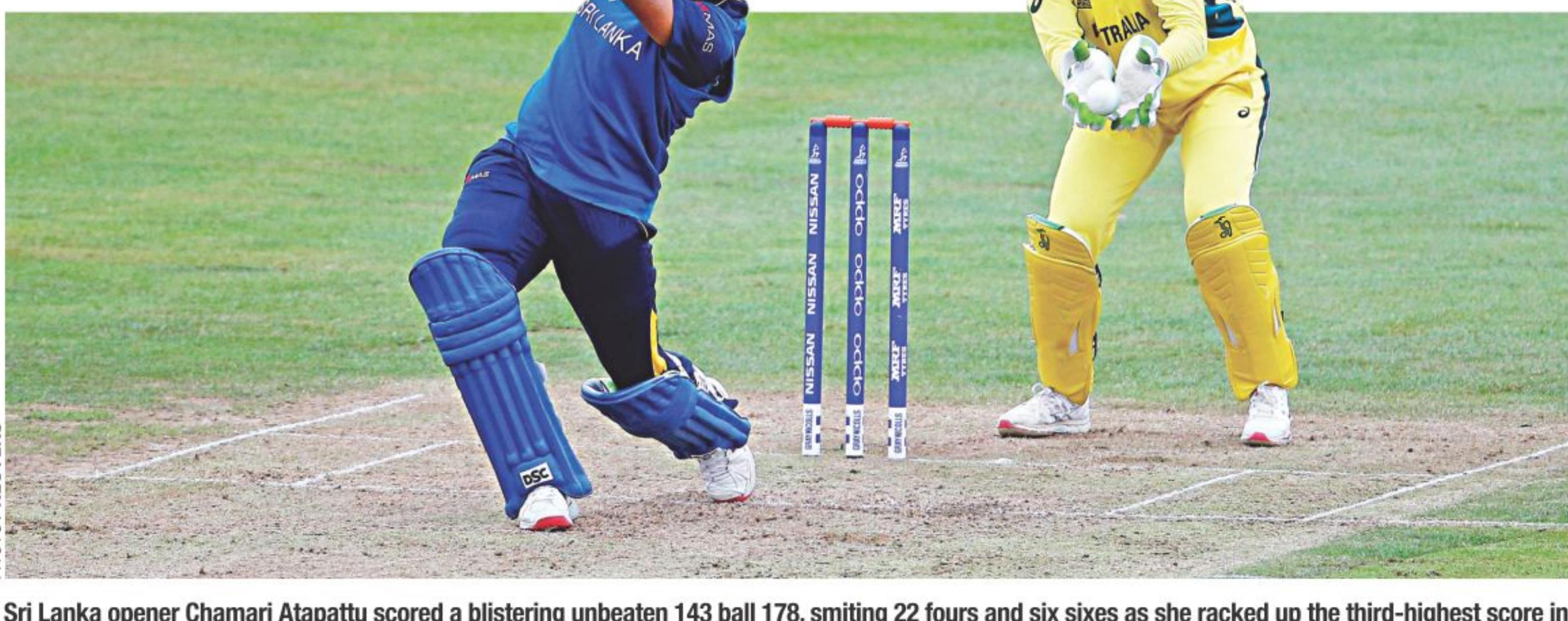
Chief selector Minhajul Abedin also said that this HP tour carries huge value as they are considering the selected players for the HP squad as players at the A team level. "Hopefully, the A team series will take place within the next few months, so those who show their potential during the HP team visit will be considered for the A team."



Bangladesh A matches like the unofficial Test in India in September 2015 offered players like Sabbir Rahman the chance to stake a claim, which he did by scoring a century in Bangalore.

PHOTO: PTI FILE

PHOTO: REUTERS



Sri Lanka opener Chamari Atapattu scored a blistering unbeaten 143 ball 178, smiting 22 fours and six sixes as she racked up the third-highest score in the history of Women's ODIs during a Women's World Cup match against Australia in Bristol yesterday. Australia won the encounter by eight wickets.

India seek unassailable lead

Third ODI against Windies today

PTI, Antigua



A formidable India will fancy their chances of taking an unassailable 2-0 lead against a weakened West Indies when the two sides lock horns in the third game of the ongoing five-match ODI series on Friday.

India lead the rubber 1-0 after winning the second one-day international in Port of Spain by 105 runs. The opening match of the series was rained off after only 39 overs of play at the Queen's Park Oval.

World number three India showed their might in the second game with a 105-run drubbing of the hosts, which highlighted the gulf between the two teams.

In the second match, the bowlers stifled the home team with their impeccable line and length after India's top three batsmen - Ajinkya Rahane, Shikhar Dhawan and Virat Kohli - delivered the goods as they

recorded their biggest ever victory in the West Indies.

Rahane smashed his third ODI hundred, while Kohli and Dhawan notched up fluent half centuries, as India produced a dominating batting display to pile on 310 for five.

The trio would look to continue in same vein even as veterans like Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Yuvraj Singh would hope for a good hit in the middle.

The presence of young all-rounders Hardik Pandya and Kedar Jadhav gives the visiting side's batting solidity, and off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin's ability with the bat is well-documented.

In the bowling department, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Umesh Yadav will again lead the attack with Pandya coming in as first change, while the spin responsibility is likely to be shouldered by Ashwin and Kuldeep Yadav.

Yadav, a chinaman bowler, was

impressive in the second ODI, returning figures of three for 50 in nine overs and earning accolades from skipper Kohli.

For a change, Yuvraj too rolled his arms over after a while, and it remains to be seen whether the team management opts for an extra slow bowler in Ravindra Jadeja.

Seamer Bhuvneshwar Kumar was miserly, claiming two wickets while giving away just nine runs in his five overs.

Besides the usual practice sessions, the likes of Kohli, Yuvraj, Dhawan and Pandya looked happy while sweating it out in the gym ahead of the match.

Though they are playing a weak and inexperienced opposition, it is important from India's perspective to finish the series on a positive note ahead of the tougher tours to Sri Lanka and South Africa in the future.

Trailing 0-1 in the series, the West

Indies have brought in two fresh faces -- Kyle Hope and Sunil Ambris -- for the remaining three ODIs.

Hope and Ambris replaced Jonathan Carter and Kesrick Williams in the 13-man squad.

Hope, brother of current West Indies wicketkeeper Shai Hope, leads Trinidad and Tobago in domestic cricket while Ambris plays as a wicketkeeper-batsman for Windward Islands.

The home team would hope the new additions bring about a change in fortunes.

While the Indian batsmen looked comfortable in the 39.2 overs of play that was possible in the first ODI, the West Indies were no match for the visitors in the second match.

Having failed for the first time to qualify for the ICC Champions Trophy, West Indies would be desperate to turn the tide at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium.

Lankans to tour Pakistan?

DAWN.COM

After Pakistan's Champions Trophy success earlier this month, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is hoping the Sri Lankan cricket team will tour the country for ODIs and Twenty20 matches near the end of this year, news agency APP reported quoting a PCB official.

Dawn.com's own sources said that talks over a possible series were ongoing but nothing is official as yet.

"Our Sri Lankan counterparts have expressed willingness in sending their team to Pakistan as the security situation is improving in the country," an unnamed official was quoted as saying.

The official said Sri Lanka may tour Pakistan in November or December.

APP quoted the official as saying that matches between the two teams would likely be held only in Lahore.

How Stokes spent his IPL paycheque

AGENCIES, London

If you're Ben Stokes, England's red-hot allrounder, what do you do with the 2.8 million dollars from the Indian Premier League?

You buy a new supercar. And that's it.

"I won't be touching the rest for a long time," Stokes, who did not reveal what car he had bought, told the Daily Mirror. "But I had to treat myself, and I love cars."

However, it's not the money that drives Stokes.

"Looking back on the price tag that everyone talks about, the fact is I would have left with the same amount of money had I done poorly or had I done well -- so the only way I was going to judge myself was by how I did on the pitch not by the price," said Stokes, who put in three man-of-the-match performances for Pune, including a match-winning century.

SL take on Zim today

AGENCIES, Harare

Sri Lanka are looking to pick themselves up as the series against Zimbabwe begins in Galle today after a string of poor performances prompted coach Graham Ford to quit.

Angelo Mathews leads the Sri Lankans as they look to get over their first-round exit in the Champions Trophy. But the islanders have just won five of their 20 one-day games since August 2016 with two coming against hosts Zimbabwe during a tri-nation series triumph in November.

Zimbabwe, on their first tour of Sri Lanka since 2001-2002, are led by Graeme Cremer and are trying to build momentum as they look ahead to the World Cup qualifying tournament in April next year. He also hoped that the exodus of the best cricketing talents of his country stops after highly skilful players chose to migrate to neighbouring South Africa or United Kingdom.

"We have lost some very good players. Hopefully they will be back. It's hard to build when quality players go. If you take

someone like Brendon Taylor, he was our main batter and then Kyle Jarvis was our front-line bowler. It's very hard to fill those big shoes," Cremer told journalists ahead of the first ODI against Sri Lanka in Galle.

Zimbabwe are ranked 11th in ODIs and are unlikely to gain automatic qualification for the World Cup as only the top seven teams in rankings plus hosts England are certain of definite participation for the 2019 World Cup.

"Obviously we are disappointed that we are not among the top eight. West Indies are also in the same boat like us. We need to put good performances consistently in the next few months. Qualifying for the World Cup is our next big target. We are very disappointed that we are not there and the only way we can get there is by playing good cricket," Cremer noticed.

There was a blow for the tourists during training as left-arm spinner Wellington Masakadza was hurt and was taken off the field. "He had to go to Colombo for scan, but not looking great at the moment. Hopefully we will get to know by tomorrow the situation," Cremer revealed.



West Indies captain Jason Holder catches a ball during a practice session at the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Ground in Antigua ahead of today's third ODI against India.

PHOTO: AFP



While Australian cricketers are dealing with contracts disputes, national captain Steve Smith was in romantic mood, proposing to his girlfriend Dani Willis in New York. Smith shared a picture of the happy couple, tweeting: "Today I got down on one knee and Willis said YES!"

CA threatens unemployment

AFP, Sydney

Cricket Australia has sent a formal letter to warring players officially informing them they will be unemployed if a deal is not reached this week in their protracted pay dispute.

Amid reports that Australia's cricketers will decide this weekend whether their image rights are sold offshore, CA high performance manager Pat Howard has warned they must seek permission to play in other Twenty20 leagues.

Months of bitter negotiations are coming to a head before the current MoU expires on Friday with players to be unemployed if there is no resolution.

Coming tours to Bangladesh and India are also at risk along with England's showpiece Ashes tour to Australia later in the year.

With the increasing likelihood of no agreement, media are reporting that some players will seek employment in foreign T20 leagues if they are left without a contract.

CA has warned players that if they sign with competing sponsors they will not be offered new contracts, The Australian newspaper said.

The more than 200 players who will be out of contract were informed that they would not be expected to train or play and that they would not be paid for that period even when a new contract was signed, the CA email said.

The correspondence is seen as a clear sign that CA intends to dig in if players do not

agree to its proposal to modify the revenue-share arrangement from previous agreements.

The Australian Cricketers' Association has been staunchly opposed to CA's plan to modify the existing MoU that provides a flat share of revenue for the players.

CA has offered international men's and women's players a share of surpluses up to Aus\$20 million, while increases in domestic players' payments would be capped at 18 percent (men) and 150 percent (women).

In the latest CA correspondence, Howard told the players: "If your contract expires on 30 June, you will not be an employee of CA, a State Association or a W/BBL Team from 1 July."

"This means that you are not required to play, train, perform player appearances or media commitments, and you will not be paid a retainer until such time as a MoU is agreed and a player contract is agreed with you in writing."

The players have established 'The Cricketers Brand' in anticipation of a lockout but CA warned them they need to be careful about new sponsors.

Fairfax Media said that with a resolution unlikely before Friday's deadline suitors in India and England were ready to pounce.

The players' union told Fairfax Media that they had had inquiries from India about sponsoring a collective of Australia's most high-profile players should the pay dispute not be resolved by Friday.

Ball injury adds to bowling concerns

AFP, London

Paceman Jake Ball piled on the problems for England's bowling attack on Thursday when he was ruled out of the first Test with South Africa because of a knee strain.

The 26-year-old suffered the injury in the County Championship and joins fellow seamers Stuart Broad and Chris Woakes on the sidelines ahead of next week's first Test against the Proteas.

"He went for a scan yesterday [Wednesday] to assess the damage and was unable to take to the field when the third day of the day-night match resumed after a rain delay," read a Nottinghamshire statement.

"Ball is set to miss the next two weeks of action, which will also rule him out of the reckoning for the start of the Test series against South Africa, which starts on 6 July at Lord's."