

Changes in the works?

SPORTS REPORTER

 With their run to the ICC Champions Trophy semifinals last month, the Bangladesh team's rise in profile was reflected in a rise up the ODI rankings table. They ended the tournament in sixth place and were sitting pretty in the race for direct qualification to the 2019 World Cup, for which hosts England and the seven top-ranked sides as of September 30, 2017 will gain automatic entry. Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan, after his return from London's annual ICC conference, all but confirmed Bangladesh's participation in the global event, the chances of which were further strengthened by ninth-placed West Indies' loss to Afghanistan and eighth-placed Sri Lanka's loss to Zimbabwe.

But with direct qualification almost assured,

ICC ODI RANKINGS			
TEAM	MATCHES	POINTS	RATING
South Africa	50	5957	119
Australia	47	5505	117
India	38	4424	116
England	50	5645	113
New Zealand	46	5123	111
Pakistan	41	3885	95
Bangladesh	31	2905	94
Sri Lanka	51	4657	91
West Indies	34	2594	76
Afghanistan	30	1618	54
Zimbabwe	38	1814	48
Ireland	25	1028	41

** Rankings after Sri Lanka-Zimbabwe second ODI*



NAZMUL HASSAN

thoughts turned to the planning regarding the 2019 showpiece event where there will be a lot of expectations on Bangladesh after their showing in the last two 50-over ICC events. Interestingly, the man who many credit as the inspiration behind the uplift in Bangladesh's level of play starting with a quarterfinal finish in the 2015 World Cup, was the only player in question when Hassan was asked whether tough decisions will be in the offing in the lead-up to the 2019 World Cup.

"It has already been initiated. There had already been talks about the T20 captaincy -- we were not sure if Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza] would be able to play as a captain in 2020," he told reporters at his Dhanmondi office yesterday, referring to the discussions which led to then ODI and T20I skipper Mashrafe retiring from the latter

format in Sri Lanka in April.

"We talked to him about it then and he gave the declaration of his own accord. We did not say when it will happen, he declared it himself. That in itself is also a big example that we are thinking about the process."

Mashrafe had announced his decision to quit the format at the toss of the first T20I against Sri Lanka on April 5, and there were rumblings behind the scenes that he was unhappy with the 'talks' about him continuing.

Hassan, who had held a discussion with senior players including Mashrafe the night before in Colombo, had returned to Bangladesh and remarked that he had never seen the hue and cry for a T20I retirement that the beloved Mashrafe's stepping down received.

In yesterday's press conference, when the question about tough decisions was asked and Mashrafe's name came up Hassan talked at length about the issue, ostensibly to illustrate that a long-term plan was in the works. However, with the slightly sore recent history with Mashrafe, these words may just be a sign of the thinking behind the scenes, especially as far as ODI leadership is concerned.

Adding further fuel were remarks about the importance of finding a place for youngsters while answering another question. "There is no doubt that the senior players have contributed greatly," Hassan said, before balancing that view with a list of Bangladesh wins that were delivered by youngsters. "If we do not create opportunities to play for them, then will they play the 2019 World Cup all of a sudden? And if we have to do that, then we will have to leave someone or the other out."

PAY DISPUTE

Bangladesh tour also under threat: ACA

Australia A set to boycott SA tour

AFP, Sydney



Players will boycott an Australia A tour of South Africa this month in an escalation of their bitter dispute with Cricket Australia unless a new pay deal is agreed, the Australian Cricketers' Association said Sunday.

The players' union held an emergency meeting in Sydney where they decided to take action for the tour beginning on July 12 unless a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed with CA by Friday.

ACA chief executive Alistair Nicholson said a "significant breakthrough" was needed for the South Africa tour to proceed.

The latest development in the stalled pay row comes after both parties failed to reach an agreement on a new MOU before Friday's deadline after months of protracted negotiations.

It leaves as many as 230 male and female players unemployed and threatens fixtures including this year's prestige home Ashes series.

"They don't intend to tour but the reality is they don't fly out of the country until Friday," Nicholson told reporters of the Australia A tour.

"So the players are going to go into camp as planned and hopefully we can make some progress with regards to the MOU.

"There would need to be a significant breakthrough on the key issue of the revenue sharing model."

CA said in response it would never force any players to play for an Australian team.

"Australia A is a development tour which gives players an opportunity to perform at a high level," CA said in a statement.

"It is therefore surprising that players would elect not to tour, however CA has never, and would never attempt to force anyone to play for an Australian team who is unwilling to do so.

"CA remains ready to negotiate a new MOU and has again called on the ACA to show genuine flexibility and commence negotiations in the best interests of the players and the game."

The players' union decision also includes players who are on multi-year deals with their respective state teams and who will refuse to play without an MOU.

"It's not an easy thing to do... but we are very united," Australia A captain Usman

Khawaja told reporters.

The ACA also warned that upcoming Australian tours to Bangladesh and India were also under threat.

"Players expressed a strong desire to tour both Bangladesh and India and urged CA to support them by renewing an MOU on fair terms, allowing the tours to proceed," the ACA said.

"However, due to the fact of unemployment and the resolution and an absent MOU there are no professional cricketers presently obliged or available to tour."

Australia's Test tour to Bangladesh is from August and the one-day international series is in India in September.

In the absence of a new deal the players



PHOTO: AFP

Australian Cricketers' Association chief Alistair Nicholson (L) speaks during a press conference in Sydney yesterday.

also discussed the prospect of the ACA taking control of their playing rights and selling them to the governing body.

"The venues are all booked. The schedule is there. It's just a different way to get the players playing cricket," Nicholson said. "An agreed MOU remains the clear preference."

Looking further ahead, the ACA said that in the event of a dispute which could threaten this year's Ashes series with England, the association would look at offering the players back to CA "on the right terms".

CA and the players' union have hit an impasse after the board attempted to scrap the 20-year-old arrangement of giving players a fixed share of revenues, in favour of dividing surpluses among elite players and offering a pay rise.



Tidbits from St Petersburg

ATIQUÉ ANAM from St Petersburg

On the penultimate night of the Football For Friendship (F4F) programme in Saint Petersburg, Russia, there was a sudden announcement that Diego Maradona would be coming on to the field to greet the young players and have a word or two with journalists. The Argentine legend was expected to be in town to watch the final of the FIFA Confederations Cup. Everyone, including the journalists and the young players and officials, were rushed to a venue where there was a football match taking place. But after quite a few hours of waiting, it was announced that Maradona was unable to come. It was such a big disappointment that one of the fellow journalists even quipped: "The best dribbler has dribbled again". To be fair though, the flight carrying the Argentine legend was delayed according to the official version.

KERZAKOV HOPING FOR BETTER TIMES

Aleksandr Kerzhakov may not be a household name across the globe, but he is arguably the most popular Russian footballer of his generation. With a record 30 goals in the Russia jersey and close to 150 goals for several European clubs including Russian giants Zenit St Petersburg, Kerzhakov has earned his place in the Russian record books. The 34-year-old forward, who has played with two generations of Russian national players and lived the short-lived Russian revolution of Euro 2008, believes better times are ahead for his country.

Russia, the hosts of the ongoing FIFA Confederation's Cup and next year's FIFA World Cup, were eliminated from the group stages of the Confederations Cup in which they were debuting. But the son of a former footballer feels this phase shall pass too as there are new stars on the horizon.

"Our dress rehearsal for the World Cup has not been ideal," Kerzhakov said while speaking to this reporter during a Children's social project named Football For Friendship in St Petersburg on Sunday.

"However, we have one more year before the World Cup. Our coach is gathering a new team at the moment. I suppose that during the World Cup there will be new football stars who will be noted and recognised, and not only during the World Cup but after that also," Kerzhakov said while present here as a brand ambassador of the event.

Kerzhakov hoped that things, both on and off the field, would be even better in one year's time as Russia build up to host football's showpiece event for the very first time. "Everything was well-prepared for the Confederations Cup. It was a kind of rehearsal. I am sure that the World Cup will be much better than this. Most important thing depends on the weather. Hope it remains good."



ZAMORANO, BAPTISTA AND MORE

The fifth season of the Football For Friendship Project, aligned each year with a global international football event, drew its curtains through an entertaining two-hour show, with special appearances from former Chile international Marcelo Salas, former Brazil international Julio Baptista, Russia's record goalscorer Aleksandr Kerzhakov, FIFA's general secretary Fatma Samoura and other local sporting and entertainment celebrities.

The footballers and other sports icons handed over awards to the winners of different categories of the F4F football tournament before Fatma gave a powerful speech emphasizing football's ability to unite.

The speakers hoped this event, which has broadened its scope to 64 countries in its fifth season, will spread even further in coming years.

WOMEN'S WORLD CUP SA hammer Windies

AFP, London

West Indies collapsed to 48 all out in a 10-wicket defeat by South Africa in Leicester on Sunday.

The reigning World Twenty20 champions posted the sixth lowest completed ODI total in women's cricket.

Chedean Nation, with 26, was the only West Indies batsman to make double figures as South Africa captain Dane van Niekerk became the first bowler, in either men's or women's international cricket, to take four wickets without conceding a run in her final figures.

Hasaranga's debut hattrick crushes Zimbabwe

AFP, Galle



Teenager Wanidu Hasaranga took a hattrick on his international debut as Sri Lanka took revenge on Zimbabwe with a seven wicket drubbing in their second one-day international on Sunday.

Fellow-spinner Lakshan Sandakan also took four wickets, to earn the player-of-the-match award, as Sri Lanka hit back at their critics with a confident performance in Galle.

Sri Lanka bowled out Zimbabwe for 155 and then reached 158-3 in 30.1 overs. Upul Tharanga ended unbeaten on 75. The win relieved pressure on Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews after

the squad was accused of being unfit by the country's sports minister.

"I wouldn't call it a clinical performance," he said. "We still dropped catches."

But Mathews said Sri Lanka's "attitude and intensity was superb. We just need to regroup, and it was great effort from the boys."

The captain hailed Sandakan and Hasaranga, two of the three changes made after Zimbabwe tore apart the Sri Lanka bowlers in their six wicket win on Friday.

"Sandakan was brilliant, so was Wanidu. Credit should go to the selectors to pick him. I, honestly, haven't seem him much," Mathews said of the newcomer.

Nineteen-year-old all-rounder Hasaranga bowled only 16 balls but tore through Zimbabwe's tail.

Malcolm Waller hit Hasaranga for four but was bowled the next ball going for another big hit. The teenager then snapped up Donald Tiripano and Tendai Chatara with googlies.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ZIMBABWE: 155 all out in 33.4 overs (Masakadza 41, Ervine 22, Waller 38; Sandakan 4-52, Hasaranga 3-15)

SRI LANKA: 158 for 3 in 30.1 overs (Dickwella 35, Tharanga 75 not out, Mathews 28 not out; Chatara 2-33)

Result: Sri Lanka won by seven wickets and level 5-match series 1-1.

Player-of-the-match: Lakshan Sandakan.



Sri Lanka's hattrick hero Wanidu Hasaranga (L) celebrates after dismissing Zimbabwe's Donald Tiripano during the second one-day international in Galle yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

BFF struggles to break old habits

SPORTS REPORTER



Even though the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) declared it will take a new approach to develop the country's football in a four-year plan; the game's governing body has seemingly stuck to its old habits, especially in youth development.

When any international age-level tournaments that are organised by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) or South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) take place, the BFF send squads to the championships with quick-fix preparations.

In addition, apparently no initiative has been taken since the plan's disclosure last December. And so unfortunately there seems to be no difference ahead of the SAFF U-15 Championship, which will be held from 18th August in Nepal, even though the four-year plan was designed to provide elite training for the U-12, U-14, U-16 and U-19 teams and despite Bangladesh being

the returning champions.

Bangladesh was eliminated from the semifinals of the SAFF U-16 Championship's first two editions on the back of short-term preparations. However, they turned the tables when Bangladesh hosted the tournament in 2015 with a squad comprised of players from the now defunct Sylhet Football Academy, BSKP and national-wide Sailor U-15 Football championship.

The players from Sylhet Football Academy and BSKP were the main architects of the triumph as they had good basic football skills as opposed to those who came from the Sailor U-15 Championship, which has not been held in the last two years.

Meanwhile, the game's governing body conducted training for the U-15 footballers across the country, with financial aid from the National Sports Council, and selected 64 players. These players will begin the final phase of their training from July 5 in Gopalganj under the guidance of nine coaches. On the other hand, there are still no initiatives to start the SAFF U-15 Championship, which has been revised from the

previous U-16 format, to defend the title.

"Preparation for the SAFF U-15 Championship will not start before July 25 as the training of some 64 U-15 footballers who have been picked from the NSC talent hunt at grass-roots level will get underway from Wednesday in Gopalganj," said BFF coach's education coordinator BA Jubair Nipu.

If preparations get underway as according to Nipu, the boys will only get two weeks to prepare themselves before heading off to Nepal to take part in the regional championship.

When asked about how the U-15 squad will be formed, Nipu said they would select players from the Pioneer Football League, Super Mokh Cup, Development Cup and NSC talent hunt.

"We will first reduce the players from the U-15 training camp and then some 50 players from Pioneer Football League, Super Mokh Cup, Development Cup will join in a trial to form the U-15 squad for SAFF championship," said Nipu, who is less optimistic about defending the SAFF title with the proposed two-week training.