

CRICKET

From 'not scared' to 'can win'

BISHWAJIT ROY

As Australia-Bangladesh Tests have not been a regular occurrence, one has to fall back upon nostalgic comparisons between a time gone by and the present when anticipating a series between the teams after 11-year break.

How much has changed in the approach of the Tigers in these 11 years? The contrast between then captain Habibul Bashar saying that his team were not scared of a domineering opposition 11 years ago and current captain Mushfiqur Rahim saying that they want to win the series reflects the different mindsets of the two generations.

However, there is one commonality – positive vibes permeated the dressing room prior to the 2006 series and also ahead of the coming two-match Test series.

"Our main target was to survive against the world's best side during our maiden tour to Australia [2003]. But this time we are going to perform against them. I think it is difficult to make any plan successful against a team like Australia. We will be better off concentrate on our own game."

On April 8, 2006, Bashar provided the above observation prior to the two-match Test series against Australia at home.

Bangladesh lost the series 2-0 despite coming desperately close to winning the first Test in Fatullah and Bashar said at the end of the series that the self-belief was the biggest achievement. "We feel now that we can push any team in the world. We are showing improvement, which is most important."

The then Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore said, "We have got the potential to bowl sides out in these conditions and win matches."

One may be surprised at the similarity of tone in the words of the then coach and captain and those spoken by the incumbent coach and his charges, who often talk about their burgeoning strength in home conditions.

Then, where lies the difference?

"There is a difference. Difference in experience, difference in the way they think, difference in ability to play big knocks, difference in top-order



Mohammad Rafique went along the grain with a five-wicket haul that brought Australia to their knees at Fatullah 2006, but now Bangladesh's spin attack will be expected to give the visiting Aussies a headache in the coming two-Test series. PHOTO: COLLECTED

batmen's batting averages, difference in the reality that the team has the world's number one all-rounder in their arsenal as well as a core group who know how to exploit home conditions," said former skipper turned selector Bashar.

"Look, 11 years ago prior to the Australia series we had gained some momentum and self-belief by winning some limited-over matches. If I am honest in my statement then I can tell you that we had overcome the fear despite the fact that then Australia were a formidable side. This current team also has the momentum ahead of the coming series but there is a difference between now and then as this current side has already established

themselves as a big force in world cricket, especially their home win against England has simply changed the whole scenario," he continued.

In Darwin and Cairns in 2003 they were very much at the steep end of the learning curve in the five-day game; Three years later when they faced the same opponents they were trying to find their footing; now in 2017 winning is their only motto.

Is it too ambitious?

"No, simply not... it may have taken a bit of time to mature in Test cricket – though the lack of matches actually hindered our progress – undoubtedly we have got a team who can win the match... yes, a Test match," a confident and optimistic Bashar ended.

'It'll be up to Shakib to lead spin offensive'

SPORTS REPORTER

Once again the Tigers are expected to bank on spin at home as they did against England last year when they take on Australia in the upcoming Test series. The pitch is likely to offer a lot of turn and purchase and according to former left arm spinner Abdul Razzak, it is experienced all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan who will have to lead Bangladesh's spin bowling department alongside young Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Tajul Islam against the Aussies.

There were a few other names floating around in the form of leg-spinner Tamir Hayder and left arm spinner Saqlain Sajib. But Razzak informed that it will be a difficult ask for a newcomer to make an impact immediately against a team like Australia.

"I think it will no doubt be helpful for Bangladesh to go with a spin-friendly track. It will be difficult for us to compete if we prepare a batting or even a sporting wicket. For youngsters to come and perform against Australia actually depends a lot on luck as well as less someone puts in an exceptional performance. Definitely you have to have the ability to bowl at international level."

"Shakib is the main spinner for us and then we have Miraz and Tajul who will be playing and definitely they will have a role, but I think it's Shakib who will have lead the spin department," Razzak told The Daily Star yesterday.

Both Shakib and Miraz returned home on Monday and Tuesday respectively after

completing their stints in the Caribbean Premier League.

Shakib played three matches for Jamaica Tallawahs, but young Miraz had to sit in the Trinidad Knight Riders dug-out throughout his stay. But Razzak, Bangladesh's first-class captain for Khulna Division, informed that despite not getting a game Miraz will still have gathered a lot of experience, and that even though he missed out on the Chittagong leg of the training camp, his confidence and preparation before the Test series will not be harmed.

"When you get to play in different places it helps to gather a lot of experience and it was also a huge experience for Miraz going to the CPL. He knows very well that he has to play Test cricket after that and definitely he was not sitting there; he obviously worked on his fitness and bowling. We all know at this level every team has support staff who help the players get prepared. I think the more a player travels around the world, the more experience he will gather," the 35-year-old left-arm spinner said.

"When I played against Australia [in the second Test of Australia's last tour in 2006] they totally dominated us, but the first Test in Fatullah turned out to be an interesting one [when Bangladesh took a 158-run first-innings lead]. But if you compare our team back then with Australia there was a huge difference. Now I won't say there is a huge gap and the way Bangladesh are playing they can be brought to any team in home conditions. If everything goes well it will be tough for Bangladesh to win the series against Australia but not impossible," Razzak said.

Warner passes concussion test after bouncer blow

AGENCIES, Darwin

David Warner has passed a concussion test following a painful bouncer blow to the neck during Australia's intra-squad game in Darwin on Tuesday.

Warner retired hurt and threw a major scare into the Australian camp on day-two of the match, their final test-up before departing for a two-Test tour of Bangladesh.

The vice-captain was on two when he attempted a hook shot but missed a short-pitched delivery from Test teammate Josh Hazlewood.

Warner momentarily hit the deck, seemingly a result of the momentum of the stroke as much as the impact of the ball, but almost instantly got back on his feet.

As Hazlewood and skipper Steve Smith rushed to check on his seafarer, Warner dropped his bat, removed his helmet and walked off unassisted. Warner will be assessed for concussion on Wednesday morning as per Cricket Australia's protocols.

But the early signs were all positive, suggesting Warner is unlikely to be in any doubt for the first Test that starts on August 27.

It came as a relief to all teammates.

"He's a little bit sore and stiff in the neck but, just speaking to him then, he's all fine," Pat Cummins told Fox Sports after play.

"It's never the intent to hit a batsman, but it's just one of those things that happens."

"It's only a practice match, so he may or may not be out there tomorrow but he seems to be in pretty good shape."

The incident served as the latest reminder of the dangers of the sport that were highlighted so tragically by the death of Phillip Hughes, a close friend of Warner, in 2014.

Hughes was struck on the neck by a bouncer during a Sheffield Shield

match and died in hospital two days later.

The setback came as Warner tumbled out of the International Cricket Council's top-10 ranked Test batsmen for the first time in more than two years; Smith had no such concerns, in Dubai or Darwin.

The world's No. 1 batsman declared after scoring 84 with ease on Tuesday against an attack featuring Cummins, Nathan Lyon and Ashton Agar.

South Australia captain Travis Head, who is not part of the Test squad and is playing as a ring-in, scored 104 on a dusty deck that is starting to misbehave.



Australia vice-captain David Warner was hit on the head by a Josh Hazlewood bouncer in their intra-squad practice match in Darwin yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Shakib back on top in all formats

STAR SPORT DESK

Ace Bangladeshes all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has reclaimed his place atop the ladder of all-rounders in all three formats in the most recent International Cricket Council rankings, updated on August 14.

The left-arm spinner and middle-order batsman, who has made the top spot his own in recent years, was supplanted temporarily by India's left-arm spinner and lower order batsman Ravindra Jadeja, who also took the Test bowler's rankings.

Jadeja did not play in the recently concluded third Test against Sri Lanka in Pallekelle, which India won by an innings to sweep the series 3-0, because of a one-match suspension handed out for a code of conduct breach during the second Test in Colombo.

Shakib currently has 431 rating points, with Jadeja close behind on 429 points. His lead is slightly bigger in ODIs, where he has 353 points. 15 ahead of second-placed Mohammad Hafeez of Pakistan. In T20s, Shakib also has 353 rating points, 10 more than Australia's Glenn Maxwell. Meanwhile, fellow Bangladeshi player Mahmudullah Riyad has kept his position in the top 10 T20 all-rounders, slotting in at number five with 203 points.

The Warwickshire all-rounder had become a mainstay in all three international formats, but a side strain suffered barely two weeks into England's Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh at The Oval in June kept him out of action for 11 weeks.



Much will depend on how well Shakib Al Hasan (R) and Mehedi Hasan Miraz (L), both recently returned from Caribbean Premier League stints, take the spin attack to the Australians in the coming Test series. PHOTO: STAR FILE

Don't write WI off yet: Garner

AFP, London

Joel Garner has warned against "writing the West Indies off too early" ahead of their upcoming Test series against England.

A three-match campaign starts with the first day/night Test ever staged in England, at Birmingham's Edgbaston ground on Thursday.

England, fresh from a 3-1 win over South Africa in a four-Test home series, will start as huge favourites.

"Not only have the West Indies lost their last six Test series, they have been beaten in 14 of their most recent Tests in England and drawn the other three."

But fast-bowling great Garner, now the West Indies team manager, said Monday: "It's going to be some interesting times. I think people are writing the West Indies off too early and it could be at their own peril."

And with a fast-bowling attack led by Kemar Roach and Shannon Gabriel, allied to a new work ethic being installed by Australian coach Stuart Law, Garner believes his side, who have played a day/night Test – a hard-fought defeat by Pakistan in Dubai in October – could yet upset the odds.

"Cricket is played in the middle of the end of the day," Garner added at an event staged by series sponsors Investec in London on Monday. "I think the fellas have got talent."

"It's who makes the greatest adjustment in the day/night game. Games between England and the West Indies are competitive. I wouldn't completely write them off."

West Indies, however, have arrived in England without several star players including Chris Gayle, Dwayne Bravo, Marlon Samuels and Darren Sammy – the legacy of a bitter dispute with West Indies cricket officials and the fact that the Caribbean Premier League Twenty20 tournament is going on at home at the same time as the Test series.

Eng brace for 'the unknown'

REUTERS, London

England's cricketers admit they will be taking a leap in the dark when the country hosts its first day-night Test, with a pink ball, against the West Indies this week.

Few England players have experience with the ball, which will be the centre of attention when the first Test gets under way at Edgbaston on Thursday.

England seamer Stuart Broad said it would be a "step into the unknown" and that bowlers will have to "figure out how it will spin".

Earlier this week, he said he had only ever bowled a single delivery with the new ball, and England will have had just one session with the ball under lights before plays starts.

England's new-ball partner Jimmy Anderson may be slightly better prepared, having taken two wickets for Lancashire with the pink ball in a one-off round of County Championship matches.

The experiment received a mixed reception, with some players reporting that the ball went soft earlier than its red equivalent.

While red balls are dyed, white and lacquered, white and pink balls rely on paint to provide colour. The demands on pink balls, which last 80 overs, are much greater than those for white balls, which are used on shorter forms of the game.

PCB to honour Misbah, Younis and Afridi

DAWN.COM

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) plans to host an award ceremony to honour three former captains of the Pakistan team in September.

PCB Chairman Inayatullah Saif-ud-DawnNews on Tuesday.

"We plan to arrange a special award ceremony for former captains Misbah ul Haq, Younis Khan and Shahid Afridi," said the chairman. "They served Pakistan for a long period and deserve appreciation."

Saif further said that top players from the team will also be honoured at the ceremony.

"We will honour and appreciate our top players and umpires in the same award ceremony to encourage them," he said.

Glenn tweaks stride to add to spin skills

CRICINFO

Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell has altered his bowling technique, shortening his delivery stride to generate more dip and drift, ahead of the tour of Bangladesh in a bid to strengthen his case as the squad's fourth genuine spin-bowling option, behind Nathan Lyon, Mitchell Swepson and Ashton Agar.

"I've shortened my bowling stride a little bit to make sure that I've got that drop on the ball and that I'm getting the shape that I actually want," Maxwell said at Australia's training camp in Darwin. "It's obviously one of my skills that I can bring to the side, and something that's going to help me try and nail down that No. 6 position, having that extra string to my bow."

Maxwell is Australia's incumbent No. 6 after his comeback century against India in Ranchi in March – his first Test since 2014. However, Maxwell bowled just six overs in two Tests on spin-conducive surfaces in that series.

"I could understand why I wasn't bowling at certain stages," Maxwell said. "I suppose coming into this tour, I'm hoping that I can show that I've put a lot of work into my bowling and I can get that opportunity."

Australia are likely to go in with two specialist spinners and Maxwell, but could consider the option of three genuine spinners if the pitches favour spin from the outset. To open that spot, Maxwell's Victorian team-mate Peter Handscomb could be asked to keep wicket. Matthew Wade is the designated wicketkeeper in Australia's squad for Bangladesh.



Woakes eyes England return

CRP, Birmingham

Chris Woakes is desperate to put weeks of injury frustration behind him by making an England return against West Indies on his Edgbaston home ground last night.

The Warwickshire all-rounder had become a mainstay in all three international formats, but a side strain suffered barely two weeks into England's Champions Trophy opener against Bangladesh at The Oval in June kept him out of action for 11 weeks.

