



FIX YOUR FOCUS ON HIM: The return of Mominul Haque in the Test fold made everyone happy and here Sabbir Rahman (R) is having fun with the little left-hander.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Vital query that needs answers

SPORTS REPORTER



Mominul Haque has been reintroduced into the squad for the first Test against Australia after a lot of drama, for now putting an end to the whirlwind regarding team selection even though fears remain about how much harm the current muddled selection process will cause the country's cricket in the long term.

However, there is still much curiosity about whether the diminutive left-hander will get a call to the final eleven for the first Test starting from August 27 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. It must be ensured that the decision on the final eleven will be taken 'without fear or favour, affection or ill-will'. There was hardly any doubt that Mominul deserved a place in the 14-member squad, but does he warrant a place in the eleven?

Mominul was not part of the eleven in Bangladesh's most recent and historic 100th Test in Sri Lanka that they famously won. If the last and winning combination is prioritised then Mominul has no chance. But there is a scope to raise questions about the number three position where Imrul Kayes batted in the last Test and scored 34 and 0. It is now no secret that announcing Mominul as a replacement for Mosaddek Hossain -- who batted at number eight and seven in that Test -- was nothing short of eyewash as Mominul can only fit in the top order.

One question that needs to be answered before thinking about Mominul's place is why the team management has been trying to establish Imrul as a number three batsman when the left-hander has proved that he is good at opening especially when his partnership with Tamim Iqbal looked to be gelling brilliantly.

"This is a vital question -- why the team management has been going against a settled opening partnership between Tamim and Imrul. Both left-handers showed that they have a good understanding and the record also shows that this opening pair works well for the team. Why are they trying to break a proven opening stand, I cannot understand," said coach Mohammad Salahuddin, who is also a mentor of Mominul.

Meanwhile, the record also speaks in favour of Salahuddin as the Imrul-Tamim partnership scored 2205 runs in 48 innings at an average of 47.93 with four hundred partnerships and eight half-century stands. On the other hand Imrul has an average of 34.66 in three matches at number three which includes a hundred. However, his highest score of 115 came in his first match at number three against Sri Lanka in Chittagong in February 2014, when Shamsur Rahman opened with Tamim, but in his next five innings at number three Imrul has scored just 93 runs at 16.6.

"In my opinion, at this moment Mominul is the best option at number three," said Salahuddin.

Mentor to a number of national players, Salahuddin however wanted Mominul to rise to the challenge. "Mominul is altogether a different character who is hardly driven by emotion, so I am hopeful that he will take all the opportunities with both hands. And I think he can take the inspiration from Shakib [Al Hasan], who just believes in speaking through his performances."

Joshi to join Tigers' camp

SPORTS REPORTER

Former India left-arm spinner Sunil Joshi will arrive today to join Bangladesh's camp as a spin bowling coach for the two-match series against Australia.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) made a short-term contract with the 47-year-old, who played 15 Tests and 69 ODIs for India, after their first choice Stuart MacGill, the former Australia leg-spinner, was reluctant to join the Tigers ahead of the two-match Test series.

When contacted BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said: "Yes, the spin bowling coach is coming to assist the team for the home series against Australia."

The first Test will take place at Mirpur from August 27 and the second Test will be played at Chittagong from September 4.

Aussies call off warm-up

SPORTS REPORTER

Australia's two-day warm-up match against a BCB XI scheduled for today was cancelled yesterday after captain Steven Smith and coach Darren Lehmann visited Fatullah and found the ground still waterlogged.

BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus told The Daily Star: "The Australia team decided to not play the two-day match. They will be practising on a regular basis at the Academy ground in Mirpur and are happy with the facilities available there."

'Tests are much harder'

SPORTS REPORTER



Despite the subcontinental conditions where pacers have to work really hard on spin-friendly pitches, Tigers' pacer Taskin Ahmed is of the opinion that the Australian seamers are ahead of the Bangladesh pacers when it comes to reverse swing and variations.

However, the speedster also added that the Bangladesh fast bowlers have come a long way over the years and are now capable of causing problems in any conditions.

Taskin, who made his Test debut three years after his maiden limited-overs appearance for Bangladesh and has taken seven wickets from four Tests so far,

informed that Test cricket is much harder than limited-overs cricket and he is looking to prepare himself accordingly.

"I have not played that much Test cricket and so far I have realised that Test cricket is much harder. I only played ODIs and T20s previously but now I also play Test cricket and in this format you have to bowl according to a plan and you need changes of pace. I hope that I will be able to bowl according to the situation. I have enjoyed bowling in New Zealand but it was not the same in Sri Lanka, while I have never played a Test in Bangladesh. I think it requires a lot of patience and skill.

"In terms of reverse swing and variations we have improved a lot. We have improved by practising -- we are working on reverse swing and also swing bowling and I hope that we will be able to do

what we have not done in the past," said Taskin at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.



TASKIN AHMED

The 22-year-old added that he wants to contribute with a match-winning spell if he gets the opportunity against the Aussies.

"A winning spell does not mean

taking five-six wickets; instead, if I am able to bowl a few good overs in a spell where the spinners have already taken seven wickets but you come on and break a hundred-run partnership. That will help the team as well so I want to do something like this. I want to bowl reverse swing with the old ball and I am working on it and hope that I will be able to implement those on the field," he said.

Meanwhile, when asked about Mustafizur Rahman's form, which will be crucial on home soil, Taskin informed that he is confident that the 'Fizz' has all the ability to make a comeback in style.

He also expressed his happiness over Mominul Haque's inclusion in the squad but at the same time he added that it was unfortunate for Mosaddek Hossain to miss out on the first Test due to an eye problem.

Lehmann eyes Tigers' top order

SPORTS REPORTER



Although the recent selection drama over Mominul Haque attracted all the headlines as the left-hander made a comeback after initially being left out of the squad, according to Australian coach Darren Lehmann Bangladesh's top order will be a crucial factor in the upcoming Test series for the visitors.

The Aussie coach is well aware of the threat from the Tigers batting line-up, especially at home, and is planning to neutralise that strength.

"They have got some quality batsmen all the way down the list. They actually got a really good record at home. They did well against England. Their top order is a key to how they bat. So we have to make early inroads with the new ball. It will spin and probably reverse, the way the wicket goes. They have good depth and are a good side at home. We made some inroads into India but we still lost that series. The challenge for us is to win a series away from home," the former Australia cricketer told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur after completing their training well before the scheduled time yesterday.

Meanwhile, the visitors have already chalked out their

plans, keeping the pitch and conditions in mind. Lehmann informed that they are yet to finalise the playing eleven but hinted that they might go with two spinners. Off-spinner Nathan Lyon and left arm spinner Ashton Agar are almost shoo-ins for the first Test, with Lehmann saying that the latter lends flexibility to the team.

"We obviously haven't played too much so we know where we want to go. It is a decision we make after we look at the Test wicket and conditions. Mostly likely, I think we will play two spinners.

"His [Agar's] lengths are a lot better. He has had a good Sheffield Shield season last year. Young Swepson is a good prospect as a leg-spinner. We have Holland back home who has bowled well. It is really tight between all the spinners. But Ashton batted really well and he is a gun fielder. We are really pleased for him.

"We are hoping for Ashton to reproduce that sort of form. He [Holland] was excellent over there [in Darwin] but we have decided to go with Ashton. He has got an all-round game that he hopefully can take to the next level. For example, when we play three quicks, he can play up the order. He gives us a lot of flexibility in that way," he said.

The 47-year-old is not concerned about the pitch in Mirpur; instead he said that the shorter the game the more exciting it will be to play.



Australia captain Steve Smith (C) is disappointed after a bout of heavy rain cut short their afternoon training session at the BCB Academy ground yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

AHF hoping for a grand Asia Cup

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh is on the right track to host the 10th Men's Asia Cup Hockey Tournament in October, opined Asian Hockey Federation (AHF) high-ups during a programme at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

The programme was organised to announce Hero, the world's largest two-wheeler manufacturer, as the title sponsors of the event.

The eight-nation tournament, to be held in Bangladesh after 32 years, will start from October 11 and end on October 22. Hosts Bangladesh will take on Pakistan while India will play against Japan in the two matches of the opening day at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.

"Everything is going in the right direction so far and we expect the floodlights will light up the day before the start of the tournament," said AHF CEO Tayyab Ikram.

The AHF is also pondering whether to award Bangladesh more international tournaments in a bid to attract its youth to the game.

"The day I took office at AHF, I was thinking of bringing Asia Cup back to Dhaka. I always believed Bangladesh has all the ingre-

dients of a top hockey nation and hosting Asia Cup this time under floodlights will help them grow interest among the youth to play hockey," Ikram said, adding that they are also thinking of whether to host matches between India and Pakistan in Dhaka.

J Narain, the sports advisor of Hero Motocorp, hoped that this edition of the Asia Cup will be a grand success. "Hero is always with sports and it is associated with cricket, hockey, golf and many others. We have a special feeling for this edition of Asia Cup as Bangladesh

remains close to the heart of Hero Motocorp. We have every hope that Asia Cup will be an event of pomp and grandeur in Dhaka."

Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) president Air Chief Marshal Abu Esrar said that they are delighted and honoured to host the event after a gap of 32 years and thanked the government for allocating US\$2.25 million for upgrades to the stadium and installation of floodlights. BHF general secretary Abdus Sadeque was also present on the occasion.



Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) president Air Chief Marshal Abu Esrar (C) speaks as Asian Hockey Federation and BHF high-ups listen during a press conference regarding the 10th Men's Asia Cup at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

WI the worst Test team in over 50 years: Boycott

STAR SPORTS DESK



Former England opener-turned-celebrated commentator Geoff Boycott termed the current West Indies team as the worst he has ever seen after their capitulation in the opening Test against England at Edgbaston, where the touring side lost 19 wickets in a day.

"This West Indies lot are the worst Test match team I have seen in more than 50 years of watching, playing and commenting on cricket," Boycott wrote in Telegraph.

"They can't bat and can't bowl. I get no pleasure out of saying this as I played against some of the greatest players the world has ever seen wearing the maroon cap of the West Indies," he commented while referring to the appalling decline of the once all-conquering team.

"It is a cricketing tragedy to see the West Indies like this and there is no gloating over them losing. We all want England to win Test matches but we should not be euphoric about this. It is just sad to see a once-proud Test team lower than any I have

ever seen before."

While referring to the first pink-ball Day/Night Test on England soil as a mismatch, he wrote: "This was a Test match in name only and the gulf between these two cricketing countries is as wide as the Grand Canyon."

The Yorkshireman observed that 'the West Indies bowling lacks pace ... they have no spinner, just a batsman in Roston Chase lobbing up wide balls wider and wider of the off stump hoping he does not get clobbered for too many runs. The batting is even worse. They are just young kids with limited techniques trying to take on two of the best seamers in world cricket in conditions that suit them'.

He also lamented that 'there are no experienced players to help and guide these youngsters at difficult moments and there were a lot of difficult moments for this team'.

Boycott, known for his cut-throat approach, wrote: "This series is no preparation for the Ashes whatsoever. Any runs scored or wickets taken do not tell us anything about how these players will cope in Australia. It is probably the worst series we could play before an Ashes tour."