

SPORT



Having finally come to terms with the local weather, Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell was in full flow during a training session at the BCB Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Have to neutralise Shakib & Mustafizur : Maxwell

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite heavy rainfall every now and then the visiting Australian team have already felt the scorching heat right from the beginning of their Bangladesh tour.

All-rounder Glenn Maxwell was perhaps the most affected by the hot and humid conditions in Dhaka where he suffered from a heat-stroke on the very first day of training.

"Yesterday was obviously pretty tough with the overnight and morning rain; all the moisture coming out of the ground and making sweaty work for us. It's been good -- we got a lot out of the last few days. Basically we are putting on the finishing touches for day one. I think the guys have really enjoyed their time so far.

"I caught a bit of heatstroke on the first day which wasn't a good start. I think just doing some running outside, then had to go inside to do some fitness tests and then going back out-

side didn't help too much. The body shut down a little bit but I was fine after the ice bath and plenty of fluids," said Maxwell told reporters after the training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

According to Maxwell they had prepared thoroughly for the pitches even before coming to Bangladesh, when the Australian team trained on similar sorts of wickets in Darwin.

The cricketer from Victoria made his comeback to the side after over two years since making his Test debut in 2013 and smashed a magnificent hundred against India earlier this year. He also informed that defence will be the key on subcontinent pitches.

"It is probably what we did back in 2012 when JL (Justin Langer) was the batting coach. We did a lit bit of it in the nets in Dubai. I think the main thing is to basically use your bat. If you don't have the safety of your front pad, it makes you get your leg out of the way and actually play with your bat so I think it is more about refining your defence and making sure you are trusting the fact that you can hit the ball

and not hoping that your pads are there just to save you," he said.

Maxwell also said that his side wanted to negate the impacts of opposition stalwarts Mustafizur Rahman and Shakib al Hasan.

"Mustafizur is obviously the exceptional bowler we faced during the IPL during his breakthrough season. I suppose his pace dropped off as he played a bit more Test cricket. He is still an outstanding bowler who has the ability to swing it and has an unbelievable change-up slower ball. He is not your conventional left-arm seamer. He has obviously got a very flexible wrist with which he can flick it in the last moment. It looks exactly the same whether it is his bumper or his slower ball. It is a hard thing to pick up.

"The same thing with Shakib, who is a really experienced player. He has been the number one all-rounder in the world for a while. He is an excellent cricketer. We have to play these guys really well to negate their influence in the Test series and make sure we are staying on top of the game," Maxwell added.

The ShafiuI gamble

SPORTS REPORTER



When the selectors initially announced a squad for the first Test against Australia, there was hardly any ambiguity about who was going to make it to the final eleven from the 14-member list. Later, the amendment to the side through the intervention of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan brought back Mominul Haque after a lot of drama has caused some debate over the number three position, apart from discussions about Nasir Hossain's chances of playing in place of Mosaddek Hossain.

Other than those two, the remaining positions are probably fixed, including the pace attack. With the controversy surrounding Mominul's initial exclusion, pacer ShafiuI Islam's inclusion ahead of Rubel Hossain, Subhasish Roy and Kamrul Islam Rabbi has hardly been noticed. It can however be understood that since the 27-year-old has been included in the squad, he will not continue to warm the bench and instead partner Mustafizur Rahman at the expense of Taskin Ahmed, the other pacer in the squad.

That seems a fair supposition because there is no point to include him only to carry him when he last played a Test against England during which he bowled 12 wicketless overs across two innings. The right-arm paceman was included in the squad for the one-off Test against India in February this year, but only visited with the team, like he did during Bangladesh's trip to Ireland and

the ICC Champions Trophy in England.

As the selectors have placed their faith in a bowler, who has been able to play only nine Tests since his debut in 2010 while the team have played 39 over the same period, that too ahead of bowlers who have appeared more regularly, there can hardly be any doubt over his chances of playing.

Out of those nine, ShafiuI played five Tests in January 2010. Then, since playing against Zimbabwe in Harare in August 2011, he made his return to Test cricket in 2014 against West Indies and played one more match against Zimbabwe in the same year before making a return against England.

Such a peculiar stop-start career -- his nine Tests yielded 15 wickets and 56 ODIs netted 63 wickets -- is the result of a series of injuries. But whenever he is fit, the team management has preferred to keep him in the side because they do not doubt his ability.

ShafiuI also showcased his worth with his swing bowling during his injury-plagued career whenever he got the chance. His ability to bowl wicket-to-wicket at good pace and with a consistent length have been factors behind his selection and according to a source, his contribution can come in handy on wickets mostly likely to assist the spinners.

The team management however will only hope that he will not break down again. Bangladesh cricket has made huge progress in terms of fitness and injury management and in this regard Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's long-lasting second life is the biggest example. There is no apparent reason why the same cannot be true of ShafiuI.



ShafiuI Islam (R) has often found it hard to get into the Bangladesh team and even harder to retain his place in the side. Having been included in the 14-member squad, the lanky paceman would be desperate to prove his case when Bangladesh take on Australia in the first Test in Dhaka beginning on August 27.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Faisal, Miraj giving coach hope

SPORTS REPORTER



With four goals in two matches including a hatrick, Bangladesh U-15 team's forward Faisal Ahmed Fahim is buzzing with confidence.

The tenth grader from Sirajganj scored a hatrick as Bangladesh thrashed Sri Lanka 4-0 in the opening match of the SAFF U-15 Championship. He went on to add another in the 3-0 drubbing of Bhutan as the defending champions sealed the top spot from the group to set up a semifinal clash against Nepal.

Faisal believes the semifinal match will be a tough one, but he is confident of adding to his goal tally and taking his side to the final.

"I feel really happy after scoring goals in both matches and it has increased my confidence about scoring in upcoming matches. Besides, we are optimistic about doing well in the last four battle as the whole team is performing well in line with the coach's instructions," Faisal said over phone yesterday.

"As I got goals in both matches, I may be blocked by the opposition players in the semifinal. So I will try to help my teammates score and take Bangladesh to the final," said Faisal, who was part of the plate-group champions Bangladesh U-14 team in Super Mokh Cup in Malaysia last year.

Faisal, who was a student of the non-functioning BFF Academy in Sylhet, did not get any goals in Malaysia, but he had previously scored 12 goals to help Arambagh FA clinch the title of the 2016

Pioneer Football League.

"As a team, we are performing well by implementing our game plans and if we can do that too in the semifinal, we can expect another win," said Faisal.

Bangladesh team's coach Parvez Babu praised the youngster for his movement, skill and scoring ability.

"Faisal is a speedy player with good ability to dribble and score. He looks confident on the pitch and he is always hungry for doing something during matches," Babu said. "I think he will be more matured the more he plays. If we can provide proper facilities to boys like Faisal, they can become really good footballers in future."

The coach will definitely bank on Faisal's exploits to overcome the semifinal hurdle, but he has other match-winners like Miraj Hossain Mollah at his disposal.

There are a few players in the squad that were part of Bangladesh U-14 team in the Super Mokh Cup which was also guided by Babu who believes that being part of that team helped the current team gel together.

"There are six to seven players in the squad who were part of the Mokh Cup team, so it is helping me a lot to transfer my ideas among the boys. Bangladesh have been improving match by match and two successive wins made the players confident ahead of the semifinal.

"We have created a lot of scoring chances in both matches but converted only seven. If we can avail the scoring opportunities, we can definitely expect a win in the semifinal," said the former national booter.



FAISAL AHMED



MIRAJ HOSSAIN

'Small steps can have big results'

SPORTS REPORTER



There is very little doubt that spin will be the weapon of choice in the upcoming Test series between Bangladesh

and Australia.

It will be a tough ask for the batsmen to face the music and according to the Tigers' opening batsman Tamim Iqbal, whoever executes their skills better till the fifth day will have a better chance to come out on top.

It was nothing short of a fight for the Bangladesh batsmen during the home series against England last October, when the pitches in Dhaka and Chittagong turned from the word go.

Still, the Bangladesh batsmen showed an ability to adapt to the situation, which will be expected yet again when they takes on the Aussies. Tamim was of the opinion that the likes of Nathan Lyon and Ashton Agar

in the Aussie line-up will definitely test the Bangladesh batsman.

"Spinners get the advantage in our conditions and they [Australia] also have quality spinners like Nathan Lyon. We have to be prepared for everything and it's not as if we will prepare a turner and easily win. As their batsman are going to struggle on the pitches, so will we. I think whoever will execute their skills till the fifth day will have more of a chance to win," said Tamim after being announced as the brand ambassador of a motorcycle brand at a hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

He went on about Lyon and said that the off-spinner will be the biggest threat for the home side and informed that they have been preparing accordingly for some time now.

The dashing left-hander however emphasised more on session-by-session performances than thinking about the ultimate result, saying that the Tigers should focus on small duels

against the Aussies.

"I think playing on our home soil is our advantage, but we can't win even before the start of the game and we must fight in each session and win against them. You can't think that Australia will lose as they will be playing on our home soil. They are a professional unit and also among the best Test teams in the world and if you want to compete against them you have to win every session and every ball. We have to beat them in every small step; only then can we think about winning the Test match.

"We know it will be difficult but not impossible and we have been preparing ourselves accordingly for the past month and a half, and we have also done a few meetings. I am hoping that we will be prepared before the first Test which is on August 27 and the more we can execute our skills on the field, the greater the chance of the result being in our favour," he said.



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal (3rd from R) poses with officials after being announced as the brand ambassador of Haojue motorcycle -- China's biggest motorcycle brand -- at a hotel in the capital yesterday. Haojue bikes were first introduced to the Bangladesh market in 2014.

PHOTO: STAR

BD tour of WI likely to be pushed to July

CRICINFO

Bangladesh's tour of the West Indies, scheduled for February next year, is likely to be pushed to July. A change, if any, will be necessitated by the World Cup qualifiers, scheduled for next March.

Both the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and Cricket West Indies (CWI) have tentatively agreed to the change. It is understood that after the qualifiers, West Indies will host Sri Lanka in June followed by the series against Bangladesh a month later before wrapping up the home season with the Caribbean Premier League.

The change would probably come as a relief for Bangladesh, as, without it, they would have to pack their bags quickly for the Caribbean tour in February right after their home series against Sri Lanka. It would have meant a crammed schedule as Bangladesh would then have had to fly directly to Sri Lanka to play the Nidahas Trophy, which is scheduled from March 15 to 31.

After the two home Tests against Australia finishes on September 8, Bangladesh will fly to South Africa to play two Tests, three ODIs and as many T20s till October 29. The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) will start on November 2 soon after their return. Soon after the BPL, they are set to host Sri Lanka for a full tour in December-January.