

SPORT

Tigers return for brief respite

15-man squad for SA likely to be named today

SPORTS REPORTER



There will be very little time to reflect on the 1-1 series draw against Australia as the Tigers returned to the capital from Chittagong, the city where the second Test was played, yesterday and have less than 10 days to contemplate the challenge that lies in wait less in South Africa.

The team is scheduled to fly for South Africa on September 16, and will play their tour-opening three-

day warm-up match in Benoni from September 21. It will be the start of a two-Test, three-ODI and two-T20I tour of a country that hosts conditions most unfamiliar to Bangladesh cricketers. The Tigers have toured South Africa twice before for two-Test series in 2002 and 2008, and have suffered innings defeats in all four matches in the seam-friendly conditions.

The Australia team, meanwhile, are scheduled to return to Dhaka today and fly to India where they will play an ODI series.

There will be no pre-series training camp for the South Africa series as the Tigers had already participated in the nearly month-and-a-half conditioning and skills camp before the Australia series. A 15-man squad for the two Tests in South Africa is likely to be named today, and there are expected to be a few changes, dictated by the conditions, especially in the bowling line-up.

Bangladesh Cricket Board chief selector Minhazul Abedin said that they will include five pace bowlers in the squad, a sea change from the second Test against Australia where Mustafizur Rahman was the lone pacer.

Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha is set to fly off to Australia within the next couple of days, and will join the team in South Africa at the start of the tour. The cricketers will take a break from now until their departure date.



Bangladesh's ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was back in training at the indoor facilities in Mirpur yesterday as the team turns focus from the Test series against Australia to the upcoming tour to South Africa where they are scheduled to play two Tests, three ODIs and two T20Is, starting later this month.

PHOTO: STAR

ITINERARY		
Date	Match	Venue
Sept 21-23	3-day tour match	Benoni
Sept 28-Oct 2	First Test	Potchefstroom
Oct 6-10	Second Test	Bloemfontein
Oct 12	One-day tour match	Bloemfontein
Oct 15	First ODI	Kimberley
Oct 18	Second ODI	Paarl
Oct 22	Third ODI	East London
Oct 26	First T20I	Bloemfontein
Oct 29	Second T20I	Potchefstroom

OUT OF ORDER

SAKEB SUBHAN



Sabbir Rahman's four innings in the just-concluded Test series against Australia read 0, 22, 66 and 24. In both innings of the second Test which Bangladesh lost on the fourth day on Wednesday, Sabbir played crucial knocks that ended in what may fairly be called injudicious shots. With judgement at a premium in Bangladesh's batting, those shot selections may have warranted criticism, but two factors taken together helped Sabbir avoid a backlash.

The first one is the kind of batsman Sabbir is. He oozes aggression and currently, with his temperament not quite up to scratch, the best use that can be gotten out of him lie

in innings where he makes the most of his time in the middle by maximising the runs on offer. The second one is his batting position. Now, Sabbir has batted at four, six, seven and eight in his short career so far, but as he said following his 66 on the first day in Chittagong, seven is where he is comfortable and can best execute his role.

When a batsman walks out at number seven in a Test, he is mostly faced with one of two scenarios -- the team have suffered a collapse or they are in a situation ranging from the reasonable to the strong, and in both scenarios a Sabbir innings has good value.

Unfortunately for Bangladesh, that is the only batting order decision they got right in this series -- Shakib Al Hasan's spot at number five and Tamim Iqbal's as an opener are two others, but they were not subject to change in this

series. All the other positions in the batting order are contentious, none more so than Tamim's opening partner and the number three position, occupied currently by Soumya Sarkar and Imrul Kayes respectively. Technique and skill can be developed over time, but a stable batting order can be implemented now. More than other formats, every batting position in Tests becomes a specialist one as batsmen -- especially in the top six -- have to play a certain kind of innings not just for 10 or 15 overs, but for a whole day or more at times.

That is why before the series Imrul was not too happy about his designated role; as a career opener and one half of the country's most successful opening pair, he said he did not know what to do with himself when waiting for the first wicket to fall. That restlessness showed in his dismissals in the series during which he scored 21 runs in four innings with a highest score of 15. The reason he has been batting at number three is that Soumya Sarkar continues to play as the first-choice opener, a position he is yet to justify both in terms of technique and temperament.

That leaves the team with three openers, no number three, a musical chairs situation at number four with skipper Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Imrul, previous number three Mominul Haque and most recently Nasir Hossain all occupying the spot since the England series last October. Mushfiqur is Bangladesh's best-equipped Test batsman and should bat higher up than at six where during three of his four innings this series, he walked in having to do damage control instead of setting the game up. That is as much a matter for Mushfiqur, who would presumably have to give up the keeping gloves to sustain performance up the order, as it is for the team management.

Meanwhile Mominul, returning to the team in the second Test against Australia, batted at four in the first dig and eight in the second just so that Nasir could break up the procession of left-handers against off-spinner Nathan Lyon. The ploy did not work, and two players who could have been more valuable in their accustomed positions were sacrificed at the most crucial time.

A batting order made up mostly of players unaccustomed to the situation they are walking into can hardly be expected to respond competently to crises such as the second innings in Chittagong. Being a home series, the two Tests were the perfect opportunity to settle the order and give the players confidence in their roles. Unfortunately, the team will shortly be heading to the hostile conditions of South Africa with all but two players in the top six unsure of their functions.

'If there's a problem, it's Mushy's own'

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Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan said yesterday that while others could give suggestions, there is no scope for anyone to dictate the captain's decisions.

The BCB president made the comment after Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim said during the post-match press conference in Chittagong on Thursday that one would need to ask the higher-ups or team management about the redefinition of his role in the team and the peculiar batting reshuffle which promoted Nasir Hossain to number four while recasting Mominul Haque as the number eight.

"I want to clear up one thing which is that we can only give him suggestions but in no way force him. We have discussed many issues, including strategy, but I never dictate him. I don't know exactly what he meant but he is also involved if it was a decision by the team management," Hassan explained to reporters yesterday.

"The day prior I had discussed whether he could go back to number four but he [Mushfiqur] stuck to his decision. If there is any problem then it is his problem. ODI captain Mashrafe [Bin Mortaza] and T20 captain Shakib [Al Hasan] never faced anything like this. You simply cannot change Mashrafe's mind after he takes any decision," he added.

On the other hand, BCB cricket operations committee chairman Akram Khan told reporters that they would discuss redefining Mushfiqur's role ahead of the South Africa tour as the captain himself raised the issue.

"Both parties will need to sit [together] to take the decision. We kept Liton Das in the squad for the past series as there were thoughts of releasing some of the burden on Mushfiqur. As the question came to his [Mushfiqur's] mind, we will take the decision that will be best for the team," Akram said.

Meanwhile the BCB president also hinted at a change to the team for the South Africa tour, saying that opener Anamul Haque could be a good option especially as they have been considering having a right-left combination in the top order.

"It's not like someone will come into the team if I propose their name, but Bijoy [Anamul Haque] is an option for us. I will sit with the team management to know their plan," said Hassan.

The BCB president also emphasised on bringing new players into the team with an eye on the future.



Imrul Kayes (L) and Soumya Sarkar continued their miserable form with the bat during the recent Test series against Australia, raising more questions about the management's decision to tinker with the top order.

PHOTOS: STAR FILE

Happy to see Fizz's smile return: Walsh

SPORTS REPORTER



Mustafizur Rahman's comeback with his trademark smile in the second Test against Australia pleased

bowling coach Courtney Walsh ahead of the Tigers' tough away challenge in South Africa, where the pacers will need to play a big role as opposed to their limited contributions at home.

"Mustafizur bowled well and he showed aggression and good control. I think getting those wickets will give him confidence as well. Getting David Warner out twice in the same Test is no mean feat because he is a class player. Obviously they play for the same team in the IPL [Indian Premier League] so there is a bit of satisfaction. What I am happy to see is the aggression and the smile coming back, these are good signs," said Walsh while speaking to reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Mustafizur not only went wicketless in the first Test, but looked ordinary. However, the 22-year-old generated good pace and bounce while sticking to better lengths and provided evidence of some new artillery in stock in the second.

Since joining the Tigers as a specialist bowling coach last September, the legendary West Indies pacer is probably going to face the biggest challenge with the pace department when they take on the Proteas in their own den. Walsh was well-aware of that fact, which is why he was not willing to waste any time in preparing his pacers for the tour.

"It's going to be seaming condition; that we all know. In South Africa that is what we are expecting. The seamers have to be more on the mark and we won't have time for complacency this week. So the work has to be done and that's why I came earlier to work with the bowlers and try hard to get everybody in shape. It's going to be a test and a challenging time for us," said Walsh.

"We have improved a lot. The experience that we have gained will help us even in the different conditions of South Africa. The team has improved and the guys have the hunger. They want to do well, they want to make Bangladesh proud, they want to perform at the highest level," he continued.

Walsh believed that nothing would have been better than winning the Test series against Australia, but he rated the draw highly adding: "You have to give them [Australia] credit. Nathan Lyon bowled extremely well and David Warner hit back to back Test hundreds. I think the difference between the two teams was that they were a bit more consistent than us."

Just focusing on my role: Taijul

MAZHAR UDDIN



One fine morning in a small city of Natore in Rajshahi, Taijul Islam's uncle came to him upon hearing a megaphone announcement on the streets that there will be a camp for the under-13 cricketers in the city.

A keen young Taijul was looking for just such an opportunity to showcase his talent, and he did just that, going on to represent Bangladesh in the national under-13 team.

He went on to represent age-level teams and it was in his under-19 days, during which he was also playing for Orient Sporting Club, that the left-arm spinner received his first call up to the first-class National Cricket League for Rajshahi in 2011.

The only son among three children, Taijul had already started contributing to his family from his cricket earnings, and he nursed the ambition to play for the national team.

Finally, he broke through the domestic circuit with a bag full of wickets in the 2013-14 season and made it to the Test team in West Indies in 2014, where he showed his ability with the ball. Soon he recorded the best innings figures by a Bangladesh bowler in just his third game, with eight for 39 in the Mirpur Test against Zimbabwe.

He finished the Test series with 17 wickets and was rested for the first four ODIs and, when he made his ODI debut against Zimbabwe, he immediately entered himself into the record books.

Taijul became the fourth Bangladesh bowler to take a hat-trick after Shahadat Hossain, Abdur Razzak and Rubel Hossain. He was also the first in



the history of ODI cricket to bag a hat-trick on debut, before Kagiso Rabada and Sri Lanka's Wanindu Hasaranga emulated the feat later on.

The 25-year-old was never tagged as the superstar in the Bangladesh team despite his outstanding entry into international cricket and the spinner has been playing his role quietly without even thinking of the fact.

With 54 wickets in just 15 Tests, including three five-wicket hauls, Taijul normally likes to stay in his own space and does not talk much in general. He believes that the performances should speak and does not think about being a superstar. Just like his demeanour, he prefers to play his role and

contribute for the team in a quiet manner.

"I never thought that I have to become a superstar in the Bangladesh team; I only concentrate on my bowling and the role I am given by the team management. We have Shakib [Al Hasan] bhai, the best all-rounder in the world and the biggest superstar and I always try to learn from him," Taijul told The Daily Star yesterday.

He was solid in the two-match Test series against Australia; his performance in the second innings of the first Test was overshadowed by an extraordinary performance from Shakib both with bat and ball.

Taijul took three vital wickets after his solitary one in the first innings but more importantly, he managed to contain runs and put the pressure on the Aussie batters.

"I was given the role to contain runs and bowl in partnerships with Shakib bhai and Mehedi [Hasan] and I think they bowled really well too. I tried to bowl in a tight line to unsettle the batsmen into making mistakes, but in the second Test in Chittagong I think we were unable to find the rhythm," he said.

With a good understanding of the game and his limitations, Taijul tries to draw the batsman forward regularly, which opens the possibilities for close catches, or even to sneak through with his arm ball, which he did in the first innings in Chittagong when he bowled Aussie skipper Steve Smith.

He may or may not find a place in the squad to play on the green pitches in South Africa, but whenever a subcontinent or spin-friendly pitch is in the offing, it is Taijul who will be an unsung but sturdy name on the team sheet.