

SPORT



Batting uncertainties set to continue?



SPORTS REPORTER

The Australia series ended in bittersweet fashion; it was a historic shared series which saw Bangladesh win their first Test against the mighty Aussies, but the defeat in the second Test raised many questions about Bangladesh's misfiring batting order and especially the confusion surrounding the number three and opening positions.

With one-time opener turned makeshift number three Imrul Kayes and current opener Soumya Sarkar both included in the squad for the South Africa Tests, the message from the team management seems to be that they will continue with the arrangement -- playing a Test with three openers.

The number three spot is arguably most crucial in the batting order and, barring injury, generally the team management does not tend to tinker or replace someone as a make-shift option.

But Tigers head coach Chandika Hathurusingha has experimented with the number three position in Tests as Imrul was asked to bat there despite being successful for large parts of his career as Tamim Iqbal's opening partner.

Imrul had expressed discomfort about batting in the unfamiliar position before the Australia series, during which the left hander had scores of 0, 2, 4 and 15 in his four innings.

Since making his Test debut against South Africa in 2008, Imrul has one century at number three, but since that hundred in 2014 he has averaged 14 in his eight innings at the position. The 30-year-old has played 25 of his 30 Tests as an opener, striking two centuries at an average of 27.34 while forming by far Bangladesh's most prolific opening pair with Tamim, with an average of 47.93 and high point of a 312-run stand against Pakistan in 2015.

However, after nine years of international cricket Imrul is yet to settle into his position, and that is also down to his inconsistent performances, which required him to make a comeback with a bang whenever he was dropped from the side.

With a solitary fifty in his first 16 Tests, Imrul was dropped from the side in 2011 and made his comeback after over two years when he smashed a century against Sri Lanka batting at number three.

Once again, Imrul is under pressure after scoring just one fifty in his last 15 innings and the upcoming tour of South Africa could well be his last lifeline to regain form and secure a position in the playing eleven.

On the other hand, Soumya made an entry to the Test side with high expectations, but lost his place after three Tests in 2015. On his comeback to the Test team the left-hander scored 86 and 36 against New Zealand earlier this year and hit three consecutive fifties against Sri Lanka.

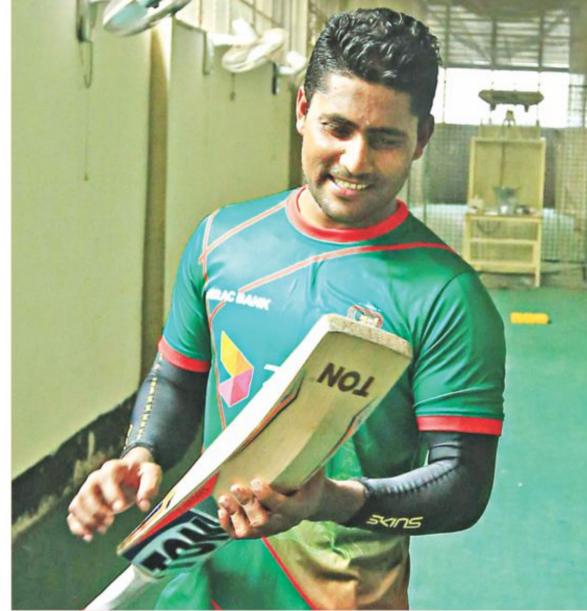
Thereafter, however, the 24-year-old lost his way and failed to form a consistent partnership with Tamim, as scores of 10, 8, 15, 33 and nine in his last five innings testify.

Hathurusingha however has great belief in the stylish batsman.

But the question still stands whether the team management is heading towards a settled opening pair but it seems like there are hardly any back-up option in the opening spot as Imrul is expected to bat at number three yet again in South Africa.

Just nine Tests old, Soumya averages 32.11 including four fifties. He has displayed his ability on bouncy tracks and the elegant left-hander will have to prove his worth in the Bangladesh opening slot.

Hathurusingha has been known to say that he wants competition for every spot, but the current situation displays a lack of it, especially in the opening and number three positions. Mominul Haque -- a regular number three until the second Test against Sri Lanka earlier this year -- is in the squad and also not sure about his position as he batted at four and eight in the second Test against Australia. So, with neither Imrul nor the currently unsure Mominul looking like a solid number three and considering that Soumya seems to be the lone option beside Tamim, the coach's mantras rings a little hollow.



I always try to stay away from Facebook when there is criticism. I take criticism positively as people also praise during good times. Whether it is good or bad the people ultimately talk about me and thinking this way I try to be confident. There is only one way to silence the critics, and that is scoring runs. It will be a tough series in South Africa but you will get more respect if you can perform in tough series and it will also boost your confidence. It will be an altogether different feeling if I can perform in their conditions. During the series against Australia I could negotiate the ball but for one particular shortcoming I got out. Now I am working on that and trying to find out whether they bowled well or I made the mistake.

Soumya Sarkar

Every series is challenging for me. I know if I failed in one series it will only put pressure on me for the next series. It is better not to ask questions regarding the opening pair. I would like to bat at any given position. I have no particular choice. As a human being you have to change and you have to adjust with any position. I had a discussion with coach [Chandika Hathurusingha] after the Australia series he told me that 'you continuously scored in Test cricket for last two-three years and we cannot drop someone for failing in two-four innings'. He also said 'you continue with your game'... there is no problem. I want to thank the selectors as they kept faith in me despite the fact that I failed to perform in the last series. Now I want to repay that faith.

Imrul Kayes

SA pick squad for tour match against Tigers

AGENCIES, Benoni

Talented youngster Aiden Markram is all set to lead the South Africa Invitation XI as they face Bangladesh in a three-day tour match.

The match is scheduled to be played at Willowmoore Park in Benoni from September 21 to 23.

While the South African national team is yet to taste the success of a World Cup, Markram already has, having led the Proteas to the U-19 World Cup triumph in 2014.

The convenor of Cricket South Africa's National Selection Panel said, "We have chosen a squad consisting largely of CSA Academy players balanced by a few franchise players to provide the necessary experience."

SQUAD: Aiden Markram (C), Tladi Bokako, Okuhle Cele, Matthew Christensen, Michael Cohen, Isaac Dikgale, Zubayr Hamsa, Heinrich Klaasen, Migael Pretorius, Yaseen Valli, Shaun von Berg, Lwandiswa Zuma.

Japan test for Bangladesh girls

ANISUR RAHMAN from Thailand



After a morale-shattering 9-0 drubbing by North Korea in their opening AFC U-16 Women's Championship game on Monday the Bangladesh girls will brace for another rough ride when they take on Japan at the Institute of Physical Education Stadium in Chonburi today.

The Japan fixture will be as challenging as the North Korea one, where the inexperienced Bangladesh girls had a mental breakdown and failed to put up any fight against one of the top age-level teams in world football.

And ahead of the match against Japan, who thumped Australia 5-0, the effort from the team management was not necessarily to tell the girls to play their natural game but a serious mentoring so that they could get over the shock of a demoralising yet expected defeat.

On the field, the coaching staff worked hard on how to thwart the attacks from Japan in yesterday's one-hour training held some 26 kilometres away from team hotel. The focus was on the defence



BFF's technical and strategic director Paul Smalley (R) and Bangladesh under-16 women's team's head coach Golam Rabbani Choton (L) impart instructions to the players during a practice session at the Physical Education Centre in Chonburi yesterday. Bangladesh will take on Japan in their second match of the AFC U-16 Women's Championship today.

PHOTO: BFF

organisation, which was vulnerable against North Korea, and the motto was understandably damage limitation.

Bangladesh are likely to field five defenders with tall Akhi Khatun set to return to her previous position as central back from

the midfield, paving the way for Monika Chakma to play as midfielder while number one goalkeeper Mahmuda Akter is likely to replace Ruksana Begum, who made a few fumbles against North Korea.

Meanwhile, the girls are taking

inspiration from their Japan visits in the build-up to the main event when they played about 10 practice matches against different academies, age-group and school teams. But their main focus is not to commit the mistakes they made against North Korea.

"We made a few mistakes in the opening match against North Korea. Japan are as strong as North Korea but our target is not to commit the same mistake. It is true that we played very well in the qualifying phase but playing against top teams at this level is completely different. But we will definitely try to play our natural game against Japan," said midfielder Misrat Jahan Mousumi after the training at Institute of Physical Education Centre in Chonburi.

Coach Golam Rabbani Choton said that they were trying to motivate the girls to play the way they have been playing.

"We wanted the girls to play their own game against North Korea but they could not do that. We want them to play their own game against Japan who we know will come hard with their world-class performance", said Choton.

Bangladesh lost to Japan 24-0 in the inauguration edition of the AFC U-17 Women's Championship in 2005, which now has turned into a U-16 event. The biggest fear for Bangladesh this time is that Japan will have an eye on goal advantage to stay on top of the group.

Windies to tour Pakistan in November

PTI, Karachi

Pakistan are set to host the West Indies in a short three-match Twenty20 series in Lahore at the end of November this year, a top Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) official said.

"The agreement with the West Indies Cricket Board has been finalised and done and they have confirmed they will come to Lahore in November to play three T20 Internationals," PCB chairman Najam Sethi said.

The itinerary for the matches against West Indies would be announced soon.

He informed that Sri Lanka has also confirmed to play a lone T20 international on October 29 in Lahore.



NAJAM SETHI

"I am still trying to convince Sri Lanka to play at least two matches in the coming series in Lahore," Sethi said.

Hours after Pakistan defeated the World XI in the first game by 20 runs, marking the revival of international cricket in the country, an elated Sethi said the World XI will tour Pakistan every year for the next two years also.

"The World XI series is now planned for every year for three years. This is the first of the three series and there will be two more in the next years."

No top Test playing nation has visited Pakistan due to security concerns since the deadly attack on the Sri Lankan team in which at least six Pakistani policemen were killed.

Although the PCB did manage to bring Zimbabwe to Lahore for a short limited over series in May, 2015, those matches were not approved by the International Cricket Council.

World XI make it 1-1

AFP, Lahore

World XI beat Pakistan by seven wickets in the second Twenty20 international to level the three-match series at 1-1 at Lahore's Gaddafi stadium on Wednesday.

Hashim Amla (72) and Thisara Perera (47) batted with aggression to help the visitors reach a 175-run target in 19.5 overs to set up an intriguing final match on Friday.

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal and Amla had given the visitors a rollicking start before Tamim fell to a sharp catch by Shoaib Malik off the bowling of Sohaih Khan. The left-handed opener had hit two fours and a majestic six during his 19-ball 23.

While Tamim was dismissed, Amla held one end, and with the help of big-hitting Perera at No. 5, World XI scrambled home with one ball to spare.

Pakistan had scored 174-6 in their 20 overs.

Babar Azam (45), Ahmed Shehzad (43) and Shoaib Malik (39) had good starts but none of them went on to score big, as Pakistan found it tough going on a slow and low pitch.

Sri Lankan paceman Perera and West

Indian spinner Samuel Badree claimed two wickets apiece for the World XI.

The Twenty20 match, accorded international status by the International Cricket Council, is only the second time Pakistan has hosted an international match since militants attacked the bus of the visiting Sri Lankan team in March 2009, killing eight people and injuring

seven players and staff.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: 174 for 6 in 20 overs (Fakhar 21, Shehzad 43, Babar 45, Malik 39; Badree 2-31, Perera 2-23)

WORLD XI: 175 for 3 in 19.5 overs (Tamim 23, Amla 72 not out, Perera 47 not out; Imad 1-27)

Result: World XI won by 7 wickets



Bangladesh's Tamim Iqbal scored a 19-ball 23 for World XI, who chased down a 175-run target against Pakistan in the second Twenty20 at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Assaulted referee recovering

SPORTS REPORTER



Golam Morshed Nayan, a referee who was assaulted by a group of officials of Youngmen Fakirerpool Club on Tuesday night, returned to his home in Chittagong yesterday evening after receiving treatment at the Islami Bank Hospital in Shahjahanpur.

The incident took place when Nayan, a FIFA referee who recently officiated in the SAFF U-15 Championship final in Nepal, was returning to Hotel Al Shams in Fakirerpool after standing in the Bangladesh Championship League match between Fakirerpool and Uttar Baridhara. Fakirerpool lost that match by 1-0.

"I was returning to my hotel after officiating the match between Fakirerpool and Uttar Baridhara. The match had ended peacefully and no arguments had taken place," Nayan told The Daily Star over phone last night.

"Suddenly as I was passing the club

tent, a group of people led by Fakirerpool club's assistant manager Piklu brutally assaulted me and took away my belongings, including a mobile phone and money. I rushed straight to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) office, and the federation officials then took me to hospital where I received treatment," informed Nayan, adding that he lodged a case with the Motijheel Police Station on Tuesday night against Piklu and his associates.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag informed that they had sent a show-cause notice to the Youngmen's Fakirerpool club, mentioning Piklu and a few unnamed others, and asking why any action should not be taken against the club in regards to the assault on the referee. A reply within 48 hours is expected.

The reply, along with media reports and other available documents, will be sent to the disciplinary committee for final decision on the matter, Shohag informed.



GOLAM M NAYAN