

SPORT

Tigers embark on pacey challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket team will embark on arguably their toughest overseas tour in recent times when 14 members of a 15-man Test squad, along with backroom staff, depart for Johannesburg today for a two-Test series against South Africa. The Tigers will leave in two batches, with five members taking off at 10:30am and the next batch of 11, which will include skipper Mushfiqur Rahim, scheduled to leave at 7:30pm.

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal will not be part of today's South Africa-bound flights as the left-hander played the last of the three T20Is as part of the World XI against Pakistan in Lahore yesterday. Bangladesh's highest run-scorer will return tomorrow morning and leave for Johannesburg tomorrow night. The talismanic Shakib Al Hasan has asked to be rested from the Tests, so there will be more pressure than usual for Tamim to perform.

Bowling coach Courtney Walsh is the only member of the coaching staff with the Tigers at the moment, and he will depart with the team today. Also with the team will be chief selector Minhajul Abedin. Head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, assistant coach Richard Halsall and trainer Mario Villavarayan will join the team in South Africa from their respective home countries at or around the time the team reach there. Bangladesh will play a three-day tour game against a South Africa Invitational XI in Benoni from September 21.

Bangladesh have so far played four Tests in South Africa -- two in 2002 and two in 2008 -- and the inauspicious fact is that they suffered innings defeats in all four matches.

The first Test will get underway from September 28 in Potchefstroom and the second Test will be played in Bloemfontein from October 6. The two-Test series will be followed by a three-match ODI and a two-match T20I series on October 26 and 29.

It will be a tough assignment for the Tigers as the seaming and bouncy pitches in South Africa are the most difficult for subcontinent batsmen raised on low, spinning tracks. It will also be a world away from the Tigers' recent drawn home series against Australia played on a Mirpur dustbowl and a Chittagong flat track that transformed into a sharp turner by



Bangladesh pacers Rubel Hossain (L) and Taskin Ahmed, often used to playing second fiddle to spinners, will have to come to the fore on their tour of seam-friendly South Africa, for which the cricketers will depart today. PHOTO: STAR FILE

the end of the match.

The focus will now turn to Bangladesh's growing strength in pace bowling. Five pacers in Mustafizur Rahman, Shafiqul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Subhasish Roy and Rubel Hossain will try to take the attack to the second-ranked team in Test cricket.

"Yes, the pacers will probably have more importance on this tour," said Taskin yesterday in Mirpur. "They [South Africa] will obviously prepare wickets according to their strength but I don't think they will make wickets that are too dangerous -- if they think they can blast out our batsmen on such wickets, I don't agree. Our pace attack is also good and better than before, and

we are gradually improving.

"If we can play our best, we can win even in South Africa," said a confident Taskin, adding that after a month of working hard on his swing and accuracy, the right-handed quick has targeted the number one spot in the wickets column.

His fellow pacer Rubel was also similarly confident about their chances in South Africa. "Our batsmen have done well in Australia and England, so I don't think they will be in big trouble in South Africa. We will also have time to adjust to the conditions. On the bowling front, we often get excited when we see a green pitch, but we have to remember the importance of line and length."

Teams to be shaped today

SPORTS REPORTER



A total of 140 local and 208 overseas players were named for the Bangladesh Premier League players' draft which will take place at the Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka today, with the fifth edition of the tournament set to kick off from November 4 in Sylhet.

Among the local players, Bangladesh fast bowling sensation Mustafizur Rahman is the only one to be placed in Grade A-plus (Tk 45 lakh) while veteran left arm spinner Abdur Razzak was placed in Grade A (Tk 25 lakh).

There are seven foreign players in Grade A (70,000 dollars) category.

England players form the largest contingent of foreign players with 62 cricketers, Pakistan have 46 and there are 26 players from Sri Lanka among the 208 foreigners.

The foreign players are divided into six categories -- Grade A to F. The A category players have been priced at 70,000 dollars and the F category players are priced at 10,000 dollars. The local players have been divided into five categories (A-plus, A, B, C and D) with the players in category D priced at Tk 5 lakh.

While Barisal Bulls has been removed from this edition of the BPL, Sylhet makes a return after a year's gap.

According to new regulations each team can have five foreign players in the playing eleven while the franchises have to pick a minimum of seven local players and two overseas players.

Bangladesh Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim has joined Rajshahi Kings as its icon player for this edition of the BPL while the Tigers ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has signed on for Rangpur Riders as their icon player.

Comilla Victorians roped in Tamim Iqbal while defending champions Dhaka Dynamites and Khulna Titans retained Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad respectively as icon players. Sabbir Rahman and Soumya Sarkar will take part for Sylhet Sixers and Chittagong Vikings for the first time as their respective icon players for the upcoming season.

Two coaches murdered in South Africa

AGENCIES, Pretoria

Two cricket coaches were found murdered and two others severely assaulted at the Laudium cricket clubhouse in Centurion on Thursday morning.

They were identified as Given Nkosi, 24, and Charlson Maseko, 26.

Gauteng police spokesperson Captain Augustinah Selepe said the bodies were discovered by a community member around 7:00am and alerted the security guards, who then contacted the police.

The man used to train with the coaches. He discovered their bodies in the men's bathroom on the clubhouse's premises, Selepe said.

All four men were staying at the stadium's living quarters.

The other two men were found severely assaulted in one of the rooms they stayed in.

The motive of the murder and assault was still unknown.

Essex end county title drought

AFP, London

Essex won their first English County Championship title since 1992 on Friday in their first season back in the top division.

Ryan ten Doeschate's team put themselves on the brink of the title by thumping Warwickshire by an innings inside three days at Edgbaston on Thursday but had to wait for the result from Taunton, where second-placed Lancashire were in action.

A seven-wicket win for Somerset means Essex, with eight wins under their belt, cannot be caught, even with two games to go.

It is their seventh title, all their previous successes coming between 1979 and their last one in 1992 when they retained the championship during the all-conquering years of England stars such as Graham Gooch, Nasser Hussain and Derek Pringle.

Coach Chris Silverwood said he hoped his players could build a legacy to match former club greats.

Philander doubtful for first Test

AGENCIES, Cape Town



Proteas seamer Vernon Philander is doubtful for the first Test against Bangladesh later this month after Cricket South Africa (CSA) pulled the seamer out of the first round of first-class fixtures starting next Tuesday.

Philander was due to play for the Cape Cobras against the Knights in a four-day game, but Cobras coach Ashwell Prince confirmed that Philander is not available as per a CSA directive.

Prince told the IOL website: "Vern is not available for our first game in Bloemfontein. It is frustrating because we are not in control of the situation when it comes to national players. We adhere to Cricket South Africa's guidelines, and we have been informed that a call will only be made on September 25."

Philander has not played any cricket since the third Test against England at the end of July and with the first round of domestic fixtures the only game time the Proteas will have before the start of the international season, Philander is a doubtful starter for the first Test against the Tigers, set to begin in Potchefstroom from September 28.

New Proteas coach Ottis Gibson has insisted that all Proteas players make themselves available for the four-day fixture and will not be happy that Philander again has fitness concerns.

The seamer came in for severe criticism from former SA captain Graeme Smith on the tour of England when Smith questioned whether Philander was working hard enough to stay on the field.

Fast bowler Dale Steyn has already ruled himself out of playing in the opening four-day fixture for the Titans, saying the workload of a long-format game has come to soon after he had been out since November 2016.

The Proteas Test squad will be announced at the conclusion of the first round of four-day games.

Eventful start to NCL

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Two of the opening day matches of the 19th National Cricket League belonged to the batsmen with three centuries being struck, the bowlers ruled the roost in another encounter, while rain also played its part as no play was possible in the Tier 1 game between Dhaka Division and Barisal Division because of a wet outfield in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

After a below-par comeback in the domestic circuit since returning to cricket following a three-year ban for match-fixing, Ashraful started his second season back in fine fashion as the right-hander struck a hundred for Dhaka Metro against Chittagong Division in the Tier 1 game at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium in Chittagong.

The 33-year-old struck his 19th first-class hundred and first since his 190 against Sri Lanka in Galle in March 2013. He had scored his last domestic ton earlier in January 2013, when he hit 133 for Central Zone against North Zone in the Bangladesh Cricket League.

The former Bangladesh captain added 174 runs for the fifth wicket with Mehrab Hossain Jnr after Dhaka Metro were in a spot of bother at four for 74 runs after electing to bat.

Ashraful was finally caught behind for 104 off 194 balls featuring 12 fours and two sixes, becoming the second victim of left-arm seamer Mehedi Hasan Rana while Mehrab remained unbeaten on 65 alongside Sharifullah as Dhaka Metro finished the day on 257 for five.

At the Sheikh Abu Nasir Stadium in Khulna, twin centuries from skipper Naeem Islam and wicketkeeper-batsman Dhiman Ghosh positioned Rangpur Division towards a big first innings total against holders Khulna Division in the other Tier 1 match.

Home pacer Al Amin Hossain picked up the early wickets of Jahid Javed and Mahmudul Hasan. Opener Saymon Ahmed scored a fifty, but he became the first of three victims of veteran left-arm spinner and Khulna skipper Abdur Razzak to leave



ASHRAFUL...104



NAEEM... 120 not out

the side struggling on 94 for three.

But national discard Naeem, who played his last international game in 2014, continued his brilliant run in the domestic circuit and started to repair the early damage. However, Rangpur kept losing wickets at the other end -- Nasir Hossain fell to Razzak for a duck and Ariful Haque was dismissed by Al Amin after scoring 30. Naeem then paired up with Dhiman Ghosh and added 148 runs for the sixth wicket, with both batsmen striking centuries.

Dhiman smashed his 12th first class hundred and was finally dismissed by Razzak after scoring 105 off 117 balls with 14 fours and a six. Naeem, on the other hand, was composed and remained unbeaten after facing 225 deliveries for his 120, studded with nine fours and a six, as Rangpur ended the day on 325 for six.

National ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was also in action in the match, playing his first competitive game since July's Champions Trophy, but his 13 overs on the first day did not yield a wicket and conceded 56 runs.



The Pakistan team pose with the winners' trophy after sealing the three-match series against the World XI with a 33-run victory in the third T20I at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore yesterday, but a bigger victory had already been achieved before a ball was bowled as the series marked the return of big-time cricket to the country. PHOTO: AFP

Pak rejoice with series win

AFP, Lahore



Pakistan celebrated the return of international cricket with a thumping 33-run win to clinch the final Twenty20 match and the series against a World XI team at Lahore's Gaddafi stadium Friday.

The hosting of the short series is a major step towards convincing international teams to begin touring Pakistan again, with Sri Lanka already due to play a Twenty20 match in Lahore on October 29.

Foreign teams have refused to tour Pakistan since a militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore in March 2009.

Under Sarfraz Ahmed, Pakistan outplayed the World XI -- with cricketers from seven countries -- in Friday's decider to match the important occasion by claiming the series 2-1.

World XI captain Faf du Plessis hailed the series as a big step and success.

unity for coming here."

Batting for World XI, only Thisara Perera, with a 13-ball 32 including three sixes and two fours, and David Miller, who hit a 29-ball 32, made significant contributions. Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal wasted his third start of the series, scoring 14 off 10 balls with three boundaries before being bowled by pacer Usman Khan in the second over of the chase.

Others never got going in a shaky chase which saw three World XI batsmen run out. Pakistan pacer Hasan Ali finished as the best bowler with figures of two for 28.

Earlier, Pakistan's 183 for four after being asked to bat by du Plessis was built around opener Ahmed Shehzad's 55-ball 89 and a 31-ball 48 by Babar Zaman. The two added 102 runs for the second wicket after Pakistan lost Fakhar Zaman for 27.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: 183 for 4 in 20 overs (Fakhar 27, Shehzad 89, Babar 48, Malik not out 17; Perera 2-37)

WORLD XI: 150 for 8 in 20 overs (Perera 32, Miller 32, Sammy 24, Amla 21, Tamim 14; Hasan 2-28, Rumman 1-20, Usman 1-26)

Taylor back to Zim fold

AGENCIES, Harare

Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) has formally contracted Brendan Taylor to play domestic and international cricket in and for Zimbabwe following his release from English county side Nottinghamshire.

Taylor retired from international cricket following the 2015 World Cup to take up a Kolpak deal with Nottinghamshire, ruling him out of representing his country.

The right-handed batsman could be available for next month's two-match Test series at home against the West Indies.

Commenting on the development, Zimbabwe head coach Heath Streak said: "I am elated to have Brendan Taylor back in a Zimbabwe jersey."