



## Tigers get a taste of the bounce

SAKEB SUBHAN from Potchefstroom



On Sunday, Bangladesh fast bowler Taskin Ahmed had said that the pitch for their tour game in Benoni was almost like the slow and flat wickets back home, and added that he had not expected the South Africans to offer a pitch that would prepare the tourists for the strip they will encounter in the first Test starting at Senwes Park in Potchefstroom on Thursday.

A day later, perhaps more through error than design, the ground staff at Senwes Park obliged Bangladesh's desire for bouncier conditions in the form of the four net wickets adjoining the stadium and a stone's throw away from the Tigers' current home at the NWU Puk Sports Village. Taskin took a break from bowling yesterday, but fellow pacer Rubel Hossain and a slew of local bowlers certainly relished the opportunity.

Although it was valuable practice for the Bangladesh batsmen, at times it got a bit hairy. The first batch of four batsmen to hit the nets in overcast, cool conditions were Mahmudullah Riyad, Mominul Haque, Liton Das and Tamim Iqbal, who was taking fast throwdowns from coach Chandika Hathurusingha for the first time since sustaining a thigh muscle injury in Benoni.

Soon Tamim put up a hand to stop his coach mid-throw and swivelled around with a concerned look to see if Mahmudullah was okay. The experienced right-hander had been pinged on the right thumb, it seemed, by a net bowler who got the ball to rear off just short of a good length. Thankfully for a Bangladesh batting line-up already impoverished by the absence of Shakib Al Hasan, Mahmudullah took some time off in the sidelines to inspect the affected area and returned to the nets within five minutes. Meanwhile, Tamim muttered to his coach that the pitches seemed underprepared and requested fast bowling coach Courtney Walsh to have a word with the curator.

The legendary Walsh's words were not unheeded, and soon an industrial roller fired up with the noise of a tractor roaring to life, and three of the batsmen batted on as the tractor roller noisily moved up and down the pitch where Mahmudullah was batting.

Mominul and Mahmudullah were given extended sessions at the nets, but were eventually replaced by Imrul Kayes, skipper Mushfiqur Rahim and Sabbir Rahman. Soumya Sarkar, who is suffering from a stiff shoulder, was the only Bangladesh batsman to sit on the sidelines throughout the session. Sabbir was hitting the ball hard, Imrul negotiated the bounce well, but it was expectedly Mushfiqur who seemed in command. Apart from under-edging a ball that kept low, he was on top of the bounce and batting comfortably. Of all the Bangladesh batsmen, the skipper bats with most purpose at the nets. At one point after playing a back foot defence down near his toes, he shouted a loud 'No!'.

It was then the turn of off-spinning all-rounder Mehedi Hasan and the other bowlers, and that includes Subhasish Roy. As Mushfiqur was leaving, he shouted out to Subhasish to bring his bat back after the fast bowler was done with his net session. Then he paused and added, "Don't you go and bat with it." A chorus of laughter followed, and if you are aware of Subhasish's batting prowess, you would know why.

The centre wicket for the Test may not be as bouncy as the net wickets; the word was that it was neither the bounciest nor fastest in South Africa. But considering that the Tigers will be facing up to Morne Morkel and Kagiso Rabada, they will be thankful for the practice yesterday and over the next two days.

Bangladesh players bat on the Senwes Park nets in Potchefstroom yesterday, ahead of their first Test against South Africa which begins on Thursday.

## 'Need to readjust our lengths'

SPORTS REPORTER from Potchefstroom



If the words pace and bounce seem to have become buzzwords on Bangladesh's tour of South Africa, fans better get used to it because unless South Africa put out a flat track for the first Test on Thursday, the buzz is set to continue. This puts Bangladesh's inexperienced pace line-up on the spot and Rubel Hossain, with 24 Tests under his belt, is thrust into the role of senior pacer.

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The coach showed us the wicket, and pointed out that it had a white appearance, meaning that it will have the good bounce," Rubel explained. "We have to adjust our lines and lengths as these conditions are different. Because on bouncy wickets if we bowl back of a length, like we do in the subcontinent, it becomes easier for the batsmen to play. So we have to readjust our line and length and the pacers are giving importance to that during

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Rubel was recently the subject of an immigration kerfuffle, reportedly because he was confused with another Rubel Hossain who was on a blacklist. The confusion caused him to miss the tour game, but he seemed to be making up for lost time at the nets yesterday, bowling with good pace and, true to his word, concentrating on keeping the ball up, an effort of will for a bowler known to hit the deck.

"I am practising hard after reaching here. I am also working on fitness. The main key is to adjust to the conditions quickly," Rubel said, adding that the pace group is trying to glean as much knowledge from bowling coach Courtney Walsh as possible. "Walsh has a lot of experience in South Africa, so we are trying to acquire his knowledge about how to bowl in these conditions."

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