

Shakib void being felt

SAKER SUBHAN from Potchefstroom

Only three among the current Bangladesh squad touring South Africa have had experience of playing Tests in the country – Mashfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal and Imrul Kayes. There could have been a fourth, but he withdrew from the tour to rest his mind and body from the demands of continuous cricket. He may have been physically absent, but Shakib Al Hasan was the name ringing out in the pre-match press conferences, both South African and Bangladeshi, yesterday.

"That's a big loss for them. Shakib is a fantastic player. He has been the top all-rounder in the world for quite some time. He is a senior player, and someone who performs well in different conditions. So it will be a huge loss for them," said South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis, before adding with a laugh: "I am very happy that he will not play."

Shakib is singularly crucial in the context of his country's cricket. Very few other players become a two-in-one player for their side to the extent that the left-artery has over the past decade. He is the second-highest run-scorer in Bangladeshi cricket history, and the top wicket-taker by a margin of 88. With Shakib in the side, Bangladesh are virtually playing with 12 players, and his absence on such a crucial tour has the coach Chandika Hathurusingha seemingly at a loss.

"You only can play with 11 players, not two," said the coach when asked who he was looking at to fill the gaping hole left by Shakib both in the batting and the bowling. "We are looking at either a batsman or bowler to replace him. That's the challenge we have. So we will decide tomorrow or the day after. I think Shakib has been the best player of run rate, probably the [second] highest run-scorer in Test cricket. That's why we have a coach at this stage."

Shakib was instrumental in Bangladesh's most memorable recent Test wins – his bowling against England in October 2016, the victory in the 100th Test in Colombo and the recent win in the first Test against Australia. In fact, Shakib has featured in every one of Bangladesh's 10 Test wins except the first one against Zimbabwe in 2005, before its debut.

"A player of his calibre, everyone is going to miss him. And definitely we don't have another player like him to replace him will be a big test for us," said Mashfiqur. "He's been playing a lot of fresh. And after the break hopefully he will return fresh and do the same job he has done over the past 10 years. He's been representing our country and he has also been playing in T20 franchises overseas. He has been a great ambassador for Bangladesh, playing overseas, and also I think that for Bangladesh cricket will be known in other parts of the world."

Evidence of that was that, for a change, foreign journalists were asking after a Bangladeshi cricketer.



Bangladesh cricketers do a warm-up training with a football at the Senwes Park in Potchefstroom yesterday, ahead of their first Test against South Africa which starts at 2:00pm today.

PHOTO: SAKER SUBHAN

'Can win if we're at our best'

SPORTS REPORTER from Potchefstroom

CRICKET
SOUTH AFRICA
M O C D
between the lead-up to Bangladesh's previous series against Australia and the one to get underway with the first Test against South Africa at Senwes Park.

Bangladesh's home series against the equally mighty Australia started with forecasts of 2-0. It was a forecast that, halfway through the two-match series, was halfway to coming true and there it remained. Yesterday, however, the bluster had departed with the home comforts of the Tigers left behind.

However this was not the wide-eyed, awed Bangladeshi team that had emerged haphazardly when they completed the second pair of innings defeats in the country. Skipper Mashfiqur Rahim was sure of Bangladesh's place in the cricketing world, and while agreeing with counterpart Faf du Plessis's suggestion that Bangladesh will be out to prove their newfound prowess by performing overseas, also issued a reminder that Bangladesh have played well away from home in recent past.

"In the last few years we have been playing so well and consistently at home; this is our next challenge," said Mashfiqur responding to a question on his team's comments at the pre-match press conference yesterday. "I would say we have not been doing badly in the couple of Tests we played this year. In Sri Lanka we drew the series. In India we were competitive for three days. In New Zealand we were very good in the first Test."

"It's difficult for subcontinent teams because when you are used to playing on slow and low wickets back home and when you are compared to play on bouncy tracks, it is not going to be easy. But I don't think it's going to be too difficult if we can apply ourselves which we have done in a couple of Test matches against New Zealand, especially in Wellington."

"We are not among the top three teams in world cricket and it's not like that we will go and show everyone, and win the match. We are down with the ladder. It's a challenge for each of us and we have to represent ourselves differently. We have to give our 200 per cent to win. But we have the ability," said the Bangladeshi captain.

Perhaps by necessity, the pre-series rhetoric has been toned down, but beneath the modest utterances, there was still confidence to be found. When asked

whether beating South Africa will be Bangladesh's biggest ever statement, he said: "I think so; in the last two years we have given big examples [statements]. Many may say that coming to South Africa and beating them is impossible. In truth, I don't think so. If we can play to our best, we can beat any side in the world. We had never beaten Australia or England before

even at home, but that happened."

Part of the confidence may stem

from the pitch at Senwes Park,

which Mashfiq had a good look at before coming to the press conference.

"It's a different track, looks like it's a bit more spin and will probably come into play in the days to come. We'll have a look and our group, we have a couple of quick bowlers also who can bowl a consistent line and length so we are looking forward to this challenge," Mashfiq said when asked about the pitch.

Coach Chandika Hathurusingha, sitting beside the captain, seemed to be looking at the positives and opportunities of the challenge ahead, perhaps uncharacteristically so for a man known for his conservative tendencies in pressers. "I think this is the best time that I think this is the best time. They've got a new coach, a few injuries."

"They always try to win, as Mashy used to play to every second of the ball. If we can continue to play good cricket for long periods, then winning is not out of the card."



Bangladesh captain Mashfiqur Rahim (L) and coach Chandika Hathurusingha speak at a press conference yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

We want pace and bounce: Du Plessis

SPORTS REPORTER from Potchefstroom

CRICKET
SOUTH AFRICA
M O C D
For all the talk about Bangladesh's steep upward curve in international cricket, there is a Jekyll-and-Hyde situation going on. Despite being a team that is playing Bangladesh's home or away. Over the last two years, visiting teams coming to Bangladesh often talk about how tough it is to play there. The scenario is a little different when Bangladesh are the visitors.

A clue may lie in the fact that Bangladesh's current tour of South Africa will skip the big-money cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. As visitors, Bangladesh are not quite up there yet, and that is an assessment with a lot of merit – Bangladesh's desperately poor away record proves it.

South Africa captain Faf du Plessis gave his opponents due respect, but there was enough in his words to suggest that South Africa do not really expect to be beaten by Bangladesh in the next two tests, the first of which starts today at Senwes Park, Potchefstroom.

"Bangladesh's cricket has really improved in the last two years and they are as tough as any other team to play against. Every single nation will tell you that. We have been there [to Bangladesh] and it's really, really, really tough going there. This tour will be a real opportunity for them to show to the world that they can perform outside of their home. And that's also the challenge. You only get measured when you play well away from home," said Du Plessis, told reporters at the pre-match press conference yesterday.

"I think the first two are out of our gun when they opposition will beat you. So we are preparing like we prepare ourselves against any other country."

"We are not taking any Bangladeshi player lightly. We know we have to play well to beat them. If we play to our full potential in these conditions then it could be difficult for Bangladesh and similarly if Bangladesh play to their full potential and we don't, then it will be good competition."

In other words, if both teams play to their respective potentials, then it will be South



South Africa captain Faf du Plessis gives the thumbs up.

PHOTO: STAR

Africa on top. And that view is reflected in high definition in the Test rankings -- South Africa are second while Bangladesh are second from last among current Test nations.

From South Africa's point of view, at the start of a new season under a new coach, it is time to fill their boots against a lower-ranked opposition and get a much-needed confidence boost after a Test series defeat against England last season.

"For a start, just to draw a line in the sand after the England series," said Du Plessis when asked what he was looking for from this series. "We've played some really good cricket the last year and that one tour, one tough conditions, to do what we change the quality that we have in our setup."

Expecting to beat Bangladesh does not mean taking them lightly, however. "We've asked for a wicket with some pace and bounce in it... I am hoping that that happens. You have to make sure that you test the opposition with the conditions that they are not accustomed to. When we go to the sub-continent we get spinning pitches. So you have to make sure that when you get the opportunity to play against subcontinent teams, you take them out of their comfort zone a little bit."

U-19s begin Afghan series today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Under-19 team's wait for international matches will end today when they take on their Afghanistan counterparts in the opening game of the five-match Youth ODI series at the Syed Sultan International Cricket Stadium (SSCS).

The U-19s are preparing for the ICC Under-19 World Cup to be held in New Zealand from January 13 next year. The Bangladesh U-19 team will play against England, Namibia and Canada in the Group C matches of the World Cup.

The board-reared Australian Damien Wright to fill the position of head coach and nurture the youths for the tough challenge ahead, where they will face trying conditions in New Zealand.

With another World Cup fast approaching, the U-19 boys were lacking in international matches -- which can provide valuable experience ahead of the looming challenge in the mega-entrepeneur in January next year -- although the youths started their preparations for the tournament more than 10 months ago.

The Bangladesh U-19 team had a tremendous build-up to the last ICC Under-19 World Cup, which took place in Bangladesh in January 2016.

Expecting to beat Bangladesh does not mean taking them lightly, however. "We've asked for a wicket with some pace and bounce in it... I am hoping that that happens. You have to make sure that you test the opposition with the conditions that they are not accustomed to. When we go to the sub-continent we get spinning pitches. So you have to make sure that when you get the opportunity to play against subcontinent teams, you take them out of their comfort zone a little bit."

"We are not taking any Bangladeshi player lightly. We know we have to play well to beat them. If we play to our full potential in these conditions then it could be difficult for Bangladesh and similarly if Bangladesh play to their full potential and we don't, then it will be good competition."

In other words, if both teams play to their

England seal series despite Lewis show

AFP, London

England beat West Indies by six runs under the Duckworth-Lewis method to win the rain-affected fourth one-day international at The Oval on Wednesday.

Victory saw England take an unbeatable 3-0 lead in the five-match series, with just Friday's finale in Southampton to come.

England, set 357 to win after West Indies made 356 for five, were 258 for five when rain stopped play 35.1 overs.

That left them just ahead of where they needed to be on 371/1 to win at that stage.

Moeen Ali, who made a blistering 102 in England's win in the fourth ODI in Bristol on Sunday, helped get England above the required run-rate with a dazzling 48 not out.

Together with Jos Buttler (43 not out), he put on an unbroken 77 in eight overs after recalled opener Jason Roy made 84

on his Surrey home ground.

Defeat was cruel on the West Indies for whom Evin Lewis (176, retired hurt) and Alzarri Joseph (five for 56) produced ODI-best performances.

England had been denied on 122. Lewis was on course for a double century until, in the 47th over, he deflected a delivery from paceman Jake Ball into his ankle and collapsed to the turf.

Writhing in agony, the 25-year-old Trimid-left-handed opener required prolonged on-field treatment before being wheeled off on a stretcher to sympathetic applause from a capacity crowd.

SCORES IN BRIEF

WEST INDIES: 356 for 5 in 50 overs (Lewis 176 rd hurt, Mohammed 46, Holder 77, Powell 28 not out; Woakes 3-71)

ENGLAND: 258/5 in 35.1 overs (Roy 84, Buttler 43 not out, Ali 48 not out; Joseph 5-56)

RESULT: England won by six runs on D/L method and lead 5-match series 3-0.



West Indies opener Evin Lewis had to be stretchered off after injuring his knee while batting on 176 not out off 130 deliveries during the third ODI against England at the Oval in London yesterday. The injury left-hander was in a marauding form as he hit 17 fours and seven sixes before retiring hurt.

PHOTO: REUTERS

First Pak-SL Test starts today

AFP, Abu Dhabi

Rival captains Sarfraz Ahmed and Dinesh Chandimal hope the recent two-match Test series starting on Thursday between Pakistan and Sri Lanka will give them a new beginning.

Pakistan want to turn the page after the retirement of their two greats Younis Khan and Misbahul Haq while Sri Lanka will look to lift their recent poor showing in the longer format.

Ahmed, who will lead Pakistan for the first time in Tests, is confident that his team will avail the first opportunity.

Chandimal said they can benefit from the retirement of Younis and Misbah.

Aus to play fourth ODI for pride

PIN, Bengaluru

The ODI series is out of their hands, vice-captain David Warner has said his side will not give up on trying to force a turnaround against India and make a statement before the upcoming Ashes. The reigning world champions lost the opening three ODIs against the hosts to surrender the five-match series.

However, the Steve Smith-led side is looking at the last two ODIs and subsequent three T20 Internationals to make an impression before the Ashes, starting November 23 in Brisbane.