

SPORT

No Tension with Digestion

Tamim uncertainty reveals unsure mindset

SAKEB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein

With the 333-run defeat in the first Test being their worst start to a Test series in recent times, things have just gotten much tougher for Bangladesh as news broke yesterday that their best batsman and highest run-scorer in Test cricket, Tamim Iqbal, will in all likelihood miss the second Test against South Africa in Bloemfontein starting tomorrow. The Bangladesh team management have not made an official announcement yet -- there is likely to be one today -- and informed that there is still a slim chance that he will play, but in light of the evidence that stance reveals more of the team's despair than any signs of optimism regarding Tamim's condition.

It was learned from a reliable source yesterday that when he slipped while fielding on the second day of the first Test last Friday, the left-hander aggravated a thigh muscle tear sustained during the tour match at Benoni, played between September 21 and 23. According to the source, a specialist in Bloemfontein had been consulted on Tuesday and the upshot was that it would take up to four weeks to fully heal.

While players have played with niggles, and Tamim did that to the first Test, the specialist had reportedly advised against playing in the longer-version match as it places a greater demand on players' bodies than limited-overs cricket. The specialist was however of the opinion that, with rehabilitation work over the next 10-12 days, Tamim may have an outside chance of recovering in time for the first ODI on October 15 in Bloemfontein.

Less than 48 hours before the toss, the signs during Bangladesh's rain-marred practice session at the Mangaung Oval yesterday were far from promising: Tamim was gingerly and slowly walking along the boundary's edge while the rest of his teammates were warming up by playing football. He had then gone up to



the dressing room, and was not part of the team's practice session in the indoor nets. It was also learned that Tamim was touch-and-go for the first Test as well, a notion lent support by coach Chandika Hathurusingha's concern while delivering throwdowns to the opener during the first day of practice in Potchefstroom, three days before the Test, as the Sri Lankan asked Tamim on more than one occasion if he was okay. Tamim faced only throwdowns the next day as well, and faced up to bowlers only on the eve of the Test.

Whether not playing him in the first Test would have given him the requisite rest to fit for tomorrow is a subject of idle speculation, but it is obvious that a team management already without the talismanic Shakib Al Hasan -- who sought and was granted a break for the Test leg of the tour -- is desperate to the point of thinking about risking an already vulnerable player with barely a day's practice, that too in a five-day match.

The desperation is understandable given the mauling they underwent in the first Test. But they can draw courage from the fact that that Bangladesh went into a Test without Tamim or Shakib, they scored their highest Test total against Sri Lanka at Galle in 2013.

To say, least, it is not the best message being sent out to a team that, as evidenced by their decision to field first in Potchefstroom, has a tendency to get spooked before a ball is bowled. If the management are thinking about keeping the opposition in the dark, talking about fiddling a player who was unable to even jog less than 48 hours before the start of play only betrays Bangladesh's unsure and intimidated mindset.

When asked about Tamim's possible absence, South Africa pacer Duanne Olivier said yesterday that Bangladesh have other good batsmen and so will not be much affected if he does not play. It remains to be seen whether the Tigers share that confidence.



WILL NASIR TRAVEL TOO? Bangladesh's ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) runs alongside all-rounder Nasir Hossain and wicket-keeper Nurul Hasan (R) during a light warm-up session at the BCB Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday. While Mashrafe will leave for South Africa later this week, it remains to be seen whether any of the other two will accompany him.

PHOTO: STAR

'They won't be smiling'

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein

If Bangladesh locked out in Potchefstroom with a dry wicket at Senwes Park, there seems to be no such luck in the offing at the Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein. That Bangladesh's batsmen scorned that luck and were out playing hasty shots resulting in a horrid 90-all denouement only serves to underline the hardships awaiting store for here.

Nico Pretorius, head groundsman at the Mangaung Oval and a former first-class fast bowler who partnered no less a legend than Allan Anthony Donald for Free State, left Bangladesh journalists in no doubt about the challenge facing the tourists.

"It will bounce more than Potchefstroom, I can tell you that," said Pretorius yesterday afternoon. "Since it is the first match of the season, it won't be a greentop or as much of a greentop as it will be two months later, but there will be bounce."

To that, a Bangladesh journalist quipped that Bangladesh batsmen will be smiling if that is the case. "They won't be smiling here," came back the jocular yet mildly threatening retort from the former pacer.

South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis was not all that happy with the pitch in Potchefstroom, saying that as a home captain he wants more help from the pitch, especially when playing against a team from the subcontinent. According to Pretorius, it really was not the Senwes Park groundsman's fault as during the

start of the season, the grass on the pitch needs some time and moisture. Otherwise, when it is rolled, the grass breaks and dies.

In Bloemfontein, the grass has had a bit more time, and with the rainfall that seemed to arrive along with the Bangladesh team like a bad omen, there's moisture in the air that will keep the pitch from drying up like it did in Potchefstroom, where there was little or no rainfall leading up to the Test. A look at the top five wicket-takers here -- Shaun Pollock, Jacques Kallis, Makhaya Ntini, Dale Steyn and Allan Donald -- suggest that the fast men love the Mangaung Oval.

The sixth man on that list is a spinner by the name of Shakib Al Hasan, and his absence from the Bangladesh team is one more reason for Bangladesh fans to be wary.

'Pitch much better than Potch'

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein

While the batsmen may be feeling the heat from all the talk of the pace and bounce in store for Bangladesh in Bloemfontein's Mangaung Oval, the venue for the second Test against South Africa, a bouncier and fast pitch may bear succour for the Bangladesh pacers who were under the whip during the first Test in Potchefstroom where the hosts piled on 496 for three and 248 for six without much bother.

While Shaiful Islam and especially the wicketless Taskin Ahmed were taken to the cleaners, Bangladesh's most promising pacer Mustafizur Rahman escaped the shelling with some creditable economical bowling that yielded three wickets across the two innings. In typical Mustafizur style however, he was stung by his words and his opinions when talking about the second Test.

"I don't get excited when I see the wicket," he told reporters after practice at the venue yesterday. "I am not excited by the fact that the ball will zip off the surface; if I play my job it is to bowl well and contribute to the team."

However, he did say Mangaung's was a good wicket. "I didn't really look closely at the wicket; I walked past it. It is a much better wicket than the one we had for the last match."

The Tigers seemed in good spirits during fielding practice before rain ushered them indoors, with Mustafizur especially seeming much more animated than he has ever been before microphones and cameras. "Wins and losses happen," he said when asked about the team's morale after the chastening 333-run loss in the first Test. "Everyone is good. There is one more Test; everyone is trying to prepare in a way that will help them do well."

Mustafizur took the high quality wickets of Dean Elgar in the first innings in Potch, and those of Aiden Markram and Hashim Amla while bowling around the wicket in the second innings.

"The wicket was slow, and we can't bowl at 140 kmph like when [South Africa pacers], so I tried to use my variations like the cutters and bowling around the wicket," the 22-year-old pacer quipped.



Captain Mustafizur Rahim runs around the Mangaung Oval ground in Bloemfontein yesterday where Bangladesh will play their second Test against South Africa from Friday.

PHOTO: SAKEB SUBHAN

Tigers perturbed

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein

There seems to be no end to the bad news for Bangladesh. Already without their second-highest Test run-scorer in Shakib Al Hasan, they are highly likely to lose their chart-topper in Tamim Iqbal for the second Test against South Africa at the Mangaung Oval.

On top of that, if they were hoping that the early-season pitch in Bloemfontein will offer them the same generosity that the uncharacteristically dry and slow wicket in Potchefstroom did, yesterday foiled what little chance there was of that wish coming true. The dark clouds seemed to have followed the Bangladesh team from Potchefstroom to Bloemfontein, where they unloaded their burden during Bangladesh's practice session yesterday morning, thereby lending the pitch the moisture it needs to provide the home pacers with bounce and movement.

To top it all off, there has been trouble with their accommodation as well. Put up at the Protea Hotel by Maties in Bloemfontein, and not the higher quality Southern Sun Bloemfontein where the South Africans are staying and where previous Bangladesh teams have stayed, the Tigers reportedly had wi-fi troubles during the first night. That had reportedly perturbed the team, as well as the coach.

One wonders if that was the reason why the touring Bangladesh media were not allowed to enter the indoor training facilities and watch the net sessions from the viewing area on the first floor. According to a South African journalist, that was not the norm when the home side practised -- it is an unusual practice in cricket and is more common in football where formations are closely guarded secrets. Maybe the tigers are working on something special; we will have to wait till tomorrow to find out.

BCB heading towards election

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is heading towards its elections after the National Sports Council (NSC) on Tuesday approved the newly-drafted constitution passed by the board at its EGM and AGM.

The BCB received copy of the approval from the NSC yesterday with the only major change being that the quota of directors from the NSC was decreased from three to two.

According to BCB president Nazmul Hassan, the board will take a decision to form the election commission in an emergency executive committee meeting today.

"After receiving approval from the councilors -- we sent that immediately to the NSC and they have given us approval. If you notice the verdict of the appellate division according to the verdict and the order of the Supreme Court, the NSC can only approve or disapprove the constitution. As they are unable to do anything

SA pick Paterson for ODI series

AGENCIES, Cape Town

Dane Paterson is the only new cap in the South Africa's ODI squad for the three-match series against Bangladesh to be played later this month.

Paterson was included after Morne Morkel could not be considered because of injury.

"Dane did very well in the T20 international series against England earlier this year, particularly when it came to death bowling," commented Cricket South Africa (CSA) national selection panel convener Linda Zondi.

Kagiso Rabada will lead the bowling attack, which also includes allrounders Wayne Parnell and Andile Phehlukwayo. Imran Tahir is the only specialist spinner in the group. Chris Morris, who was part of the Champions Trophy squad, was not available for selection as he continues to recover from a back problem, while Keshav Maharaj was left out.

Shakib to spearhead T-10 league

AGENCIES, Dhaka

Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan is set to spearhead a revolutionary form of cricket when he features in a T-10 league at the Arab Emirates in December.

The top-ranked all-rounder will feature in the newest format alongside high-ranking Shabid Afridi, Pakistan's former captain Misbahul Haq, Virender Sehwag of India, Sri Lanka's Kumar Sangakkara and England's Eoin Morgan.

Shakib has played in 59 T20 international matches, scoring at a strike rate of 121.6 and an average of 23.68. He can use the long handle when necessary and has struck six 50s in T20s.

The ten-over-a-side matches will be spread over 90 minutes (45 minutes each side) in Sharjah.

Pacer Mustafizur Rahman speaks to media at the Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR