

SPORTS



Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim (L) and his South African counterpart Faf du Plessis speak at a press briefing yesterday ahead of their second Test starting in Bloemfontein today.

Mushfiqur looking at the brighter side

SAKEB SUBHIAN from Bloemfontein

Not much has gone right for Bangladesh on their tour of South Africa so far. A day before the test started, if you told skipper Mushfiqur Rahim that Shakib Al Hasan would not be there for the Test leg, that both openers would have injury scares before the first Test, that Tamim Iqbal would recover only to reinjure himself during the Test (which they lost by the small matter of 333 runs) and be ruled out of the second, the skipper would probably have shredded his passport.

Maybe he had travelled the full cycle of despair and come out with renewed optimism, but an unusually chipper skipper took the chair to answer questions from the media on the eve of the first Test starting today at Bloemfontein's Mangaung Oval. He sounded out an optimistic note, and pointed out a few ways to correct the errors that plagued them in the first Test – namely impatient batting and toothless bowling.

"This is like a cricket that they have in their home conditions," said Mushfiqur during the pre-match press conference. "We expected this kind of cricket in South Africa. Even though the first Test wicket was similar to ours, we could not execute and play well. That does not mean that we cannot play well on a tough wicket. This is another opportunity. Even if these are tough conditions, we have played here before [in 2008]. But we will try to correct our mistakes, and hopefully play a good Test match."

Mushfiqur was under no illusions about the difficulty the absence of their two stalwarts placed on them.

"It is a major setback to not have your two best players. We really needed them here," said Mushfiqur, before seeming to draw some inspiration from a bit of trivia when asked how they were possible to gain something from this match.

"If I am not mistaken, the last time we played without them against Sri Lanka in Galle, we managed to draw the match," said Mushfiqur, recalling the 2013 match where Bangladesh achieved their highest Test score and the captain became the country's first double-century. "That too was not very easy for us and Sri Lanka were a much better team than that and they are now. I am not saying that we will play very well, or very badly, but there is an opportunity for other players to put their hands up."

"We have to look after our processes. I said before the first Test that we have to play well session by session. If we lose six or seven wickets in a session, it is tough to turn around from that. We have to make sure that even if a session goes badly, we don't lose more than two or three wickets. While bowling, instead of conceding 200 or 300 for one we have to ensure that we can take five or six wickets."

A downcast Mushfiqur had blamed his bowlers after the Potchefstroom defeat, including at one point that even he could come in and bowl a few deliveries in good areas. But he seemed to have softened his stance yesterday. "It is only natural for people to talk if you've done badly. I am not worried about the outcome. I think about the process. They should do the same – give their best every ball."

"Not just our bowling, our batting unit collapsed in a big way in the second innings. I haven't seen one on such a scale in recent years. It was a warning for us."

Bangladesh will field a brand new opening combination today, the off-form Inmul Kyes and the fit-again Soumya Sarkar. Mushfiqur was optimistic about their chances as well. "Starting every innings is tough but we expect them to give us a good start. I have a lot of confidence in them [Soumya and Inmul] to return among the ranks. They can take a step forward if they can score runs in this game, particularly in the absence of Tamim."

SA look for more dominance

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein

If there is anything that a 333-run margin of defeat says, it is that the victor truly has the measure of the vanquished. And yesterday, on the eve of the second Test against Bangladesh at Mangaung Oval in Bloemfontein, South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis's words proved that they know it too – having seen them in Potchefstroom the Proteas know exactly which buttons to push to take Bangladesh apart.

Even with frontline and long-serving pacers like Morne Morkel, Dale Steyn and Vernon Philander, du Plessis did not miss a dominant team in that contest.

"Just another dominating performance," he said in the pre-match press conference when asked what he was looking to gain from this match. "In conditions like this it's very important that we do that against Bangladesh. Yes, on their day they can be dangerous. But we keep pressure on them and keep denying them opportunities to get on top of us... this game is really important for me – that we show that consistency."

Over five days in Potchefstroom we were brilliant. There wasn't half a session that belonged to Bangladesh. It was pretty much the perfect game. But it's important that we back up here."

Du Plessis seemed more pleased with the pitch at Bloemfontein's Mangaung Oval than he was with the flat track laid out in Potchefstroom, and so the question of what he would do if he won the toss was put forward. "I'll leave it to the Bangladesh captain," said Du Plessis to a chorus of laughter during the pre-match press conference. The reference, of course, was to Mushfiqur Rahim winning the toss in Potchefstroom and inviting South Africa to bat on a flat wicket, which Bangladesh never really recovered from.

The pitch had a green tinge on it, but it was not as green as it was two days ago. "It's changed a bit, I think that's the nature of the grass they have here in Bloem, similar to Potch," said Du Plessis. "But there is more grass on the wicket and I think it hasn't been rolled as flat as it was in Potch, so there should be a little more pace and bounce."

There were lots of references to a 'team like Bangladesh', a 'bating lineup like theirs' and even what sounded in Afrikaans like 'no disrespect to Bangladesh' that showed that, although a generous man, Du Plessis fully expected to dominate Bangladesh over the next five days. With Morkel being absent through injury, it will fall to Duanne Olivier to step up and perhaps take the new ball, and Du Plessis thought it was a perfect opportunity to do so.

"It's a nice responsibility, especially for Duanne. He probably prefers to have the new ball in his hand. If Duanne gets his tail up I reckon he's going to click and it's going to be really good to see him go. But with big players missing, especially against teams like Bangladesh, it's important to see what your resources are," Du Plessis said.

"It's a nice thing for us," said the uncompromising du Plessis when asked about Tamim Iqbal's absence. "In a lineup like that you look to a batsman like that to show you how to play in these conditions. It is his best player according to me. So it will be a big loss for them."

'Who is benefitted?'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan said that if the amended 2012 constitution is illegal than all the BCB constitutions before that were also illegal.

Hassan served the latest salvo in the on-going verbal battle involving him and former BCB president Sabir Hossain Chowdhury, who questioned the legality of the BCB's present executive committee following a verdict of the apex court that ruled the amended 2012 BCB constitution illegal.

The court in a landmark ruling in July this year ruled that the NSC has annulled the BCB constitution without lawful authority. The court also ruled that the BCB is at liberty to amend its constitution at any time in line with the recommendations made and subject to the approval of the NSC.

"The highest court ruled that the amendments made by the NSC in 2012 were done without lawful authority. I have documents I can show you that the NSC has not only amended the 2012 BCB constitution but also the preceding constitutions since 2001. In that context aren't the other constitutions including the 2008 amended constitution illegal?" Hassan questioned at the press briefing at the BCB Academy Auditorium yesterday.

At the briefing where he also announced a five-member Election Commission for holding the next BCB polls, Hassan also questioned, "Those who are now challenging the NSC authority were in the board before. Why have they not taken the issue to court then?"

While detailing the whole episode since he took the hot seat in 2012 with the primary purpose of holding the BCB elections, Hassan said that he and his committee, elected in 2013



NAZMUL HASSAN

under the impugned 2012 constitution following a directive of the court, have not done anything beyond its lawful authority.

He said that it was imperative for them to amend the 2008 BCB constitution to comply with the ICC guideline that all of its member associations should have an elected body within 2013. The 2008 BCB constitution and ones before had the clause of a government nominated president or chairman.

He however admitted that it had never dawned on him that the NSC could not amend the BCB constitution.

"The NSC has done it before and we thought it was a practice within the legal framework," said the BCB boss after appearing from an emergency meeting, which he claimed was the last of his 27-member committee whose four-year term ends on October 17.

He said that a vested group led by Sabir were trying to belittle Bangladesh cricket in the world forum.

"Suppose the court rules us illegal. Who is going to be benefitted from this? It's certainly not Bangladesh cricket which is now in a healthy state," said Hassan bitterly while reflecting on the pending court ruling about his legality of holding the office and functioning.

He said that they held the AGM and EGM following the court's directive that stated that BCB's smooth functioning should not be disrupted. The BCB passed the amended 2017 BCB constitution in the AGM and EGM, which voted in favour of assuming more of the authority that previously lay with the NSC.

The amended 2017 BCB constitution empowered its executive committee to form an election commission and choose 10 former national cricketers as councillors, both of which were a prerogative of the NSC before.

A revealing net session?

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein

South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis said yesterday that when Bangladesh batsmen who folded for 90 in the middle of the Mangaung Oval, on the strip beside the one that will be used for the second Test against Bangladesh today, he got a feel for the bounce and pace that will be on offer.

The two strips out in the middle looked pretty similar, with the practice one having a bit more grass on it. Du Plessis had also said that there were two sides to there being a greenish pitch, on the one hand that was the case in the second innings of the first Test on a flat wicket – would find the going tough, but their pacers would enjoy the help that was missing in Potchefstroom.

That, in a nutshell was Bangladesh's training session yesterday. The pacers were getting good bounce and even good length balls were climbing up to head height by the time it cannoned into the nets after beating the batsmen. That was the other thing – the batsmen were beaten a lot. With Wednesday's rain relegating them to the indoor nets, Bangladesh have barely had a chance to get a taste of the county conditions.

The training session probably also held clues about Bangladesh's combination today. Left-arm spinner Tajul Islam was seen given an extended spell in the practice net and although Shaiful Islam barely bowled all three of Mustafizur Rahman, Rubel Hossain and Subashish Roy enjoyed lengthy outings yesterday. Taskin bowled more than Shaiful, but less than the other three.

Selectors' hopes on Saifuddin

Nasir, Mominul return to ODI fold

SPORTS REPORTER

The national selectors picked Mohammad Saifuddin in the ODI squad for the three-match series against South Africa in an attempt to examine whether the 20-year old cricketer can fill the void of a seam-bowling all-rounder in the team.

Saifuddin, who drew the selectors' attention after his impressive performance in the 2016 Under-19 World Cup, has already played two T20s in April this year and was the only fresh inclusion in the 16-member squad. All-rounder Nasir Hossain was recalled to the side as Mosaddek Hossain is yet to fully recover from his eye infection.

Initially the board had announced a 15-member squad but in a separate message later the Bangladesh Cricket Board confirmed that Mominul Haque was also included in the ODI side. The left-hander, who has been tagged as a 'longer-term specialist' by the team management, last played an ODI in February 2015 against Sri Lanka.

"We have got a settled one-day team except for a quality seam-bowling all-rounder. We are desperately looking at a seam-bowling all-rounder. We have tried few before but did not get the desired results. Now Saifuddin looks better among our available resources," selector Habibul Bashar said.

"I saw him during the High Performance team's last tour to England and he has the ability. But he has to long way to go. We want to see how this young all-rounder responds on the international stage," he added.

Bashar informed that they did not have much to think about in recalling Nasir when Mosaddek was injured. "Nasir was always in our consideration and we know we can depend on him as a senior campaigner. But the arrival of Mosaddek has created a huge competition for his place in the team."

The selectors made four changes to the squad from the last ODI team, which played in the 2017 ICC Champions Trophy in England as wicketkeeper batsman Imrul Das, Nasir Saifuddin and Mominul were included in place of Sunzamul Islam, Mosaddek and pacer Shaiful Islam.

ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Nasir and Saifuddin are scheduled to fly for South Africa tomorrow while Shaiful, Tajul Islam and Subashish Roy are expected to return home after the Test series.



SAIFUDDIN

'We've ability to bounce back'

Shakib named in MCC Cricket Committee

SPORTS REPORTER

The Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) has today appointed Bangladesh's premium all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan as a member of the World Cricket Committee.

Some of the greatest names in cricket are current or ex-members of the committee including players like Kumar Sangakkara, Steve Waugh, Sourav Ganguly and Ricky Ponting.

Shakib posted a picture of the letter of appointment that was sent to him by the MCC and captioned it 'Thank you for bestowing me with such an honour.'

The letter read that Shakib's membership will come into effect from October 1, 2017.

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PHOTO: STAR

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