

# SPORT



Although Bangladesh were expected to be at full strength for the opening ODI against South Africa at Kimberly today with Tamim Iqbal (3rd from L) back in the side, Mustafizur Rahman injured his ankle while playing football in practice and cast doubts on his availability for the opener.

PHOTO: SAKEB SUBHAN

## Mash targets positivity

SAKEB SUBHAN from Kimberley

The return of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, now limited to only ODI cricket, is a welcome one not just because of his experience and quality with ball in hand, but also because his presence in the dressing room signals a change in mindset. In that regard, his presence is especially important now in the aftermath of a 2-0 thrashing in the Tests on the tour of South Africa, and true to his nature he has targeted a change in mindset as the Tigers look for some success in the ODI series starting today at the Diamond Oval in Kimberley.

"At this moment we need to prepare ourselves mentally; I don't think that a few days' practice after the Tests till now will be enough to bring about any big changes," said Mashrafe before the team's afternoon practice session at the match venue yesterday. "The thing that we can do is take the field with a changed mentality; that will help make it easier. We have to try and leave all the negatives outside the field, think positively and try to realise that on the field."

"We know how strong they [South Africa] are in these conditions; big teams have come here and found it very difficult. I think the one we are currently on is this year's toughest tour. If we can enter the match with fresh minds and give our hundred per cent in the battle, then anything is possible."

The refrain in the Bangladesh camp has been to forget about the 2-0 thrashing in the Test series. But there are lessons to learn from the tour so far. From a batting perspective, there have been 10 half-centuries on this tour so far (three in the Tests and seven in the two practice games), but the highest score has been Mominul Haque's 77 in the first innings of the first Test – stats which point to a tendency to throw away good starts that has proven costly so far.

"In ODIs and Tests we have been talking about this for a long time. Particularly from the start of this year we have been trying for

batsmen who get set to play big innings," said Mashrafe. "Not everyone has the same kind of day -- those who score 25 or 30 should carry on to bigger innings. I hope that if we can take the field with a positive mindset, we can do well in this regard."

Since the Ireland tour and the Champions Trophy, the youngsters of the team – Soumya Sarkar, Sabbir Rahman, Mehedi Hasan Miraz – have not really been pulling their weight. Mashrafe called for more mental toughness from them, saying that seniors like Shakib Al Hasan have too much expectations already and can use the youngsters' help.

"I don't want to create any pressure on them obviously; I only want them to play freely. If you are talking about the recent past, I am not too happy with their performance. They have the ability; maybe they have not been able to turn it around mentally. That is also something to think about. I want them to be stronger mentally, so that they can adopt the mentality that the seniors have as soon as possible."

"Obviously the seniors have greater responsibility, but the matches we have won have been through team performances."

The possible return of Tamim Iqbal will solve a lot of issues, as the left-hander -- who is in the final stages of recovery from a thigh muscle tear sustained earlier on tour which forced him out of the second Test -- lends the solidity and firepower at the top that Bangladesh has been sorely missing.

"Tamim will run today [Saturday] and then we will take a final call. We are positive about his chances of making a comeback tomorrow [Sunday]," Mashrafe informed.

Staying true to his talk of maintaining a positive mindset, Mashrafe said that attacking the South Africans was the only way. "Far from playing defensive cricket, if we approach the match with a mindset that says of 'we can defeat them on our day', then I think we will not even get a chance. From the first ball, whether we bat or bowl, the only way to get out of this is to play attacking cricket."

## 'Expecting a different Bangladesh'

SPORTS REPORTER from Kimberley

The change in format has had a corresponding effect on South Africa skipper Faf du Plessis. It makes a huge difference that Bangladesh come into the three-ODI series starting in Kimberley today with a track record of being a dangerous team in the 50-over format. While the gulf was huge in the Test matches, as reflected in their respective rankings of second and ninth in Tests, the chasm is not as great in this format. Perhaps with that in mind, the rhetoric has been toned down by the aggressive Du Plessis.

"I think Bangladesh have proven in white-ball cricket that they can perform outside of their own country, just as recently as the Champions Trophy where they made the semifinals," said Du Plessis on the eve of the first ODI yesterday.

"Their record in Test cricket away from home is completely different, but in white-ball cricket they have shown that they are a very dangerous side when it comes to one-day cricket. So, for us, obviously the Test-match victory was nice and we dominated them, but we are expecting a completely different challenge in the one-dayers."

Du Plessis was talking on the ground itself and not inside a media room, as had happened before the two Test matches – a function of there not being enough local media people who made the trek to the small town and also the reality that there are seemingly no designated media areas at the Diamond Oval. At any rate, it was a struggle just to be standing out there in gusty conditions as winds upwards of 37 kmph whipped the ground, and that is forecast to continue today.

"I think wind in general is not a nice thing for both teams. But you have to adapt to it. Especially from a strategic point of view, it's really impor-

tant how you use the wind as a captain, also when you bat or bowl, how you use the wind to your advantage. I think that's going to be a crucial thing tomorrow if it's like this -- which team makes the best decisions with the wind in mind," said the South African skipper.

Even with greater expectations now than before the Tests, that Bangladesh are still underdogs was evident in Du Plessis saying that they have an eye to the future, and specifically the 2019 World Cup, during this and subsequent series. But for now, the focus is to continue the good work done in the last season.

"We want to prove a point when it comes to one-day cricket. Last year was a really good year for us, bar the Champions Trophy. There were a lot of good things we did, we got ourselves to number one in the world, are playing some good dominating cricket and are looking to do more or less the same this year."

## LOOKING UP DOWN SOUTH

### The Big Hole



PHOTO: SAKEB SUBHAN

A view of The Big Hole in Kimberley, arguably the biggest manmade hole in the world, where from 1872 to 1914 millions of carats of diamonds were mined.

SAKEB SUBHAN from Kimberley

Kimberley is not a place bursting with tourist attractions, and it did not seem particularly promising that the one attraction they have is called The Big Hole. But we felt duty-bound to pay the Hole a visit on our three-day stopover in the small town.

Kimberley derives part of its identity from the Hole, and particularly the reason it was dug. Diamonds. The Tigers will play today at the Diamond Oval, where they will be looking to climb out of a hole they have dug for themselves. Happily it is not as deep as the big one in Kimberley, which was originally 240 metres deep and is nearly half a kilometre wide.

Diamonds were discovered here in 1872 and the place was sucked dry of 2800 kilograms of the stuff (13,600,000 carats if you are interested in that sort of thing) by 1914, since when it has been a testament to human vision, toil, and greed. It took 50,000 miners to dig the Hole, many of whom -- a plaque informed us as we walked the shaky gangway to the viewing platform -- had died doing the job to 'earn money for their people so that the land which had been forcibly taken from Bafokeng [a Setswana-speaking traditional community historically residing in the area] could be brought back'.

As usual, the result of historical cruelty can be pleasing to the eye. The Big Hole was awe-inspiring, especially the pool of water that has collected over a century and now bears an emerald hue lent by the fallen rock when it was still a mine.

A lift that has quite terrifying sound effects took us down a floor -- but the door remained closed for a long while to simulate the miners' journey down into the depths. It finally opened into a replica of the mine as it must have been back then. The dank, claustrophobic passages led to a brightly lit museum -- an apt metaphor for the suffering that led to riches -- that showcased the details of the diamond making process and some actual diamonds.

The team hotel is walking distance from the Hole and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Rubel Hossain and Taskin Ahmed were seen there. Now Mashrafe can say, whatever the result of the ODI series, that at least they are not down there mining.

## 'Maturity impacted my batting'

SPORTS REPORTER



Batters continued their dominance on the second day of the fifth round of the 19th National Cricket League but Rangpur's Naeem Islam hogged the spotlight as he registered his maiden double hundred in first-class cricket against Dhaka Division at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday.

Naeem, who notched a Test century against the West Indies during his brief international career as well, completed his 23rd first-class hundred before going on to score 216 runs off 349 balls featuring 23 fours and five sixes. The cricketer from Gaibandha is just one ton shy of



PHOTO: COLLECTED

**Naeem Islam continued his run-spreed in the ongoing National Cricket League, this time notching up a double hundred. He scored 216 runs off 349 balls.**

Tushar Imran's benchmark of 24 centuries in Bangladesh's first-class competitions.

This is Naeem's second hundred plus score in the ongoing tournament, as opposed to his four tons from the last edition of the Bangladesh Cricket League.

After becoming the seventh Bangladeshi to score 7,000 first-class runs the previous day, the 31-year-old returned on 120 and continued his

dominating performance. He fulfilled a long-cherished dream of hitting a he double century in the post-lunch session, reaching the feat off 341 balls in his 119th first-class game, far surpassing his previous best score of 185 runs.

"It's been a long wait to register my maiden double hundred and I was determined to achieve it this time. Obviously it feels good to smash a double century and I think my game has improved significantly over the past few seasons. I think maturity had a good impact on my batting and I want to utilise this form as much as I can without thinking of anything else," Naeem told The Daily Star yesterday.

He commanded a 182 run fifth-wicket stand alongside Ariful Haque before Rangpur declared their first innings at 560 for eight but not before Ariful completed his own century, the third ton of the innings after Suhrawadi Shuvo's 145 on the opening day.

In reply, Dhaka finished the day on 54 for one and trail by 506 runs.

At the Shahid Kamruzzaman stadium in Rajshahi, the encounter between Khulna and Barisal saw Ziaur Rahman smash his second hundred of the league, scoring 152 runs off 222 balls with 11 fours and half a dozen sixes, but eventually retired hurt as his side Khulna declared their first innings on 511 for eight. Off-spinner Shohag Gazi picked up four wickets for the bowling side before Barisal ended the day on 94 for 4, trailing by 417 runs.

Meanwhile, Rajshahi's Mizanur Rahman smashed a consecutive hundred in the NCL against Chittagong as his side scored 229 for five at stumps after bundling out the port city outfit for 260 on the first day at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra. The right-hander faced 163 balls for his 102 runs, which included 13 fours and two sixes.

At the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong, Dhaka Metro skipper Marshall Ayub missed out on his century by just two runs, being sent back for 98 as Sylhet's left-arm spinner Enamul Haque denied the batters big scores and picked up his 31st first-class five wicket haul.



Members of the Bangladesh A team pose with a well-earned trophy after they defeated their Irish counterparts in a one-off unofficial Test match. PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Bangladesh A ease to victory

SPORTS REPORTER



A clinical approach in all three departments helped Bangladesh A seal a five-wicket victory against Ireland A in their solitary unofficial four-day match at the Sylhet International Cricket stadium yesterday.

The home side resumed the fourth and final day at 27 for two after a brief delay to due rain and needed another 105 to win but struggled early on as Ireland off-spinner Andy McBrine dealt a double-blow akin to the one on the previous day when he cheaply dismissed both overnight batsmen Shadman Islam and Al Amin.

Shadman was bowled for 25 while Al Amin was trapped leg before after adding 24 as Bangladesh struggled on 60 for four. However, Yasir Ali and wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan ensured that there were no more hiccups, adding 71 runs for the fifth wicket to help clinch a comfortable win.

Sadly for Nurul, he was dismissed just one away from the win after scoring 31 runs off 41 balls with three fours and a six while right-hander Yasir remained unbeaten on 47 runs off 68 balls, which featured seven fours and a six. As for the Irish bowlers, McBrine picked four of the five wickets that fell while Nathan Smith scalped the other. Earlier, Ireland had posted 255 in their first innings riding on a ton from Simi Singh. However, after that Bangladesh kept things tight for the visitors. Nazmul Hossain's side then took a first innings lead, scoring 337 as left-hander Shadman struck his third first-class century. Ireland eventually faced the music when left-arm spinner Sunzamul Islam bagged five wickets along with Mahedi Hasan's three to bundle out the visitors on 213 in the second innings and set the hosts a small target of 132 runs.

The teams will now move to Cox's Bazar to play a five-match one-day series which starts on October 17 at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket stadium.

## Mohammedan down Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club comfortably beat arch rivals Abahani Limited by seven wickets in the Women's Premier Division Cricket League in Savar, BKSP yesterday.

After being asked to bat, Abahani were bundled out on just 89 runs courtesy of some brilliant bowling from Mohammedan. Bristy Roy picked up four wickets from her seven overs for 19 runs while Salma Khatun bagged three and Khadijatul Kubra took two wickets to restrict their opponents to a low total. Only three Abahani batters were able to reach double figures with opener Sharmin Sultana's 23 being the highest score.

Mohammedan reached the target in 25.4 overs for the loss of three wickets as Fatima Abidi remained unbeaten on 57 off 66 balls including 11 fours while Taj Naher added an unbeaten 20 to clinch the easy. Suborna Islam picked up two and Jahanara Alam took a wicket for Abahani.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

<b>BARISAL VS KHULNA DIVISION</b> KHULNA: 511 for 8 declared in 140.4 overs (Ziaur 152, Robiul 114; Gazi 4-148) BARISAL: 94 for 4 in 37 overs (Salman 53, Rabbi 30; Razzak 1-13) Barisal trail by 417 runs	<b>RANGPUR VS DHAKA DIVISION</b> RANGPUR: 560 for 8 declared in 147.2 overs (Naeem 216, Sohrwardi 145, Ariful 100; Shuvagata 3-125) DHAKA: 54 for 1 in 29 overs (Majid 25, Rony 21 not out; Abdur Rahman 1-11) Dhaka trail by 506 runs	<b>RAJSHAHI VS CHITTAGONG</b> CHITTAGONG: 260 all out in 72.4 overs (Sazzadul 95, Sayeed 70; Forhad 4-86, Shariful 3-49, Delwar 3-69) RAJSHAHI: 229 for 5 in 69 overs (Mizanur 102, Delwar 62; Hasan 1-5) Rajshahi trails by 31 runs
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