

U-19s embark in positive mood

SPORTS REPORTER



After a few disappointments, such as losing to Afghanistan and Nepal, the Bangladesh Under-19 team recovered well by reaching the final of the tournament in the Asia Cup in Malaysia and that will be the confidence booster for Saif Hasan and his troops, who left for New Zealand to take part in the ICC Under-19 World Cup at midnight yesterday. The team will reach Christchurch tomorrow and will travel to Dunedin on the same day.

Skipper Saif and Pinak Ghosh are the only two players who were part of the previous Under-19 World Cup at home in 2016, when they reached the semifinal for the first time and achieved a third-placed finish, their best in the tournament.

Keeping in mind the unfamiliar conditions of New Zealand, where none of the members have earlier visited, Saif and Co will have an 11-day camp in Dunedin to adjust before moving on to the main tournament.

Bangladesh will play three warm-up

matches against Otago XI on January 1, 3 and 5 in Dunedin which will be followed by two more warm-ups against Pakistan and Afghanistan before taking the field against Namibia on January 13 in the opening Group C match. The remaining two group matches against Canada and England will be held on January 15 and 18 respectively.

Skipper Saif's initial target is to reach the second round of the tournament, but he also mentioned that they will look forward match by match. According to the right-handed batsman the communication and the balanced team combination are the main strengths of his side.

"The conditions will obviously be difficult for us but we had a good preparation and we also made a good comeback in the last Asia Cup. We will also play three practice matches during the camp where we will try to get the best out of ourselves," Saif told reporters yesterday.

With the conditions in mind, the selectors included four pacers in Robiul Haque, Qazi Onik Islam, Roni Hossain and Hasan Mahmud while Nayem Hasan and Tipu Sultan are the spinners alongside vice-captain Afif Hossain.



Members of the Bangladesh youth team take a selfie at the BCB Academy ground prior to their departure for New Zealand yesterday. They will take part in the ICC Under-19 World Cup that commences on January 13.

PHOTO: STAR

Rivals enter Boxing Day with change in pace

AFP, Melbourne

Young paceman Tom Curran will make his Test debut in England's only change for the fourth Ashes Test against Australia starting in Melbourne on Tuesday.

The Surrey 22-year-old fast bowler replaces injured Craig Overton, who succumbed to a rib injury when the tourists relinquished the Ashes to the Australians in last week's third Perth Test.

Australia have already reclaimed the Ashes after taking an unassailable three-nil lead in the five-Test series and are chasing a 5-0 whitewash over the beleaguered tourists.

Curran got his chance when Steve

Finn left the tour early with knee cartilage problems and now has a Test opportunity following Overton's injury setback.

Captain Joe Root said he was backing Curran to make the most of his opportunity in the showpiece Boxing Day Test before huge crowds.

"Tom offers a lot and is a real competitor," Root told reporters when announcing the team on Monday. "He's also very skilful and hopefully he can have a really good week here."

"Under-fire senior players Alastair Cook and Stuart Broad held their team spots, while out-of-sorts Moeen Ali was preferred to young leg-spinner Mason Crane as the sole spinner."

Meanwhile, Australia skipper Steve Smith has confirmed paceman Jackson Bird will replace Mitchell Starc. Starc,

Australia's leading wicket-taker in the series with 19, withdrew from the team on Sunday.

Smith also admitted he still had pain in his right hand after being struck in the nets on Sunday but would play in the MCG showpiece.

"It was a little bit sore today playing a few different shots," Smith said. "But I'll be able to deal with it and I'll get on with it."

Smith, who was part of the Australia team that swept their home Ashes series against England 5-0 four years ago, said he was determined to keep up the pressure on tourists.

"We've now got an opportunity to keep winning. That's been my message to the boys, don't worry about 5-0 at this stage," Smith said. "You've got to win this one first."

'I will act as coach'

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mahmud will act as head coach of the Bangladesh national team for the upcoming tri-nation ODI series,

featuring hosts Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, followed by two Tests and an equal number of T20Is in the home series against Sri Lanka.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is yet to appoint a permanent coach after the resignation of Chandika Hathurusingha despite having interviewed a couple of high profile names such as Phil Simmons and Richard Pybus.

The board seems unwilling to rush the appoint of a new coach but BCB president Nazmul Hassan previously informed that

Mahmud is likely to play the role of Technical Director in the forthcoming series.

"It can be said that there will be no head coach in the upcoming series but my role will be more of a head coach. May be the name from coach will be changed to Technical Director but my job will be the same. Whenever I was given any responsibility I tried to fulfil that and for me the role or the position is not as important as working for Bangladesh itself, which is a huge thing for me," Mahmud told reporters at the National Cricket Academy premises yesterday when asked to elaborate on his role.

"It's a big opportunity for me and I will try to grab this with both hand and I will try to utilise my knowledge and coaching skills in the upcoming series," the chairman of the BCB game development committee added.



KHALED MAHMUD

Rise of the southpaws

SPORTS REPORTER

There once was a time when the Bangladesh national team had a shortage of left-handers in the playing eleven but over the past few years, southpaws began to dominate the Tigers' top order.

From Tamim Iqbal to Imrul Kayes, Soumya Sarkar and Shakib Al Hasan, the Bangladesh batting line-up has a firm presence of left-handers for international cricket.

Likewise the Bangladesh Under-19 team, which departed last night for New Zealand to take part in the ICC Under-19 World Cup, also comprises three left-handers who are vital members of the playing eleven.

The three southpaws -- vice captain Atif Hossain Dhrubo, opener Pinak Ghosh and top order batsman Naim Sheikh -- are the main contributors to the young Tiger's batting strength alongside skipper Saif Hasan, who is the only right-hander in the top order.

The emerging left-handers could possibly try to follow in the footsteps of their seniors though as Shakib, Tamim and Soumya went on to play for the national team after featuring in the Under-19 World Cup. Therefore the young cricketers will most certainly look to make a big impact on the mega event which has produced so many future stars.

Lehmann to step down in 2019

AFP, Melbourne

Australia cricket coach Darren Lehmann will not seek to renew his contract when his current deal expires at the end of 2019, he said in an interview aired Monday.

Lehmann outlined his plans to Fox Sports, declaring the English summer season in 18 months will be his last hurrah.

Australia will seek to defend their World Cup title in the first half of the 2019 English season before playing an Ashes Test series.

"That will be it," Lehmann said when asked whether he will seek a new contract beyond 2019.

"It will be a case of too much time, too much travel."

Lehmann has been at the helm since the 2013 Ashes when he replaced sacked coach Mickey Arthur following a disastrous tour of India.

In Lehmann's time as coach, Australia have won two Ashes series at home and lost two in England, while also winning the 2015 World Cup.



CRICKET ON ICE: Former cricket stars such as Jacques Kallis, Shahid Afridi, Daniel Vettori and Graeme Smith will play St. Moritz Ice Cricket in the picturesque, sub-zero environs of the Swiss Alpine resort town on February 8-9.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Kallis, Akhtar, Sehwag to play on ice

PTI, New Delhi

Graeme Smith and Shahid Afridi have joined a host of former stars for the inaugural St. Moritz Ice Cricket in Switzerland from February 8-9.

The other big names confirmed for the event are Virender Sehwag, Mohammad Kaif, Shoaib Akhtar, Mahela Jayawardene, Lasith Malinga, Michael Hussey, Jacques Kallis, Daniel Vettori, Nathan McCullum, Grant Elliott, Monty Panesar and Owais Shah.

"I don't know what to expect but I am really excited to play in a beautiful part of the world. I hope the event is a huge success," said former South Africa captain Smith.

Organisers VJ Sports have claimed that the event has the approval of the ICC.

PRAN boost for Narail Express

SPORTS REPORTER

The Narail Express Foundation, a non-profit social welfare venture of inspirational Bangladeshi captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, got a PRAN boost on Sunday.

The foundation, established in Mashrafe's home town Narail in an attempt to help the destitute in every sector of life, will get a monthly financial package over the next two years from PRAN Beverage Limited, which signed a two-year deal with Narail Express Foundation at the cricketer's Mirpur abode on Sunday night.

Under the agreement, the logo of the foundation will be used on the bottles of PRAN drinking water. While talking to the Daily Star yesterday, Mashrafe said that the monthly pay package was yet to be sorted out. He was understandably expecting a considerable amount.

"My dream is to see a better Narail by the grace of the foundation where the district will get prosperity in all sectors including education, health, ICT, tourism, sports and culture. I thank PRAN Drinking Water authority for supporting us," Mashrafe told reporters after the agreement signing ceremony with Anisur Rahman, Executive Director of PRAN Beverage Limited.

"Mashrafe is a big-hearted person. We are happy to be engaged with his foundation," Anisur said in a statement.

Mashrafe launched the foundation in September this year. PRAN is the first big business house that has come forward to assist the foundation after Mashrafe's BPL franchise Rangpur Riders gifted an ambulance earlier this month.



Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (2nd from R) and Anisur Rahman, executive director of PRAN Beverage Limited, exchange documents of their agreement at the Bangladesh ODI captain's Mirpur residence on Sunday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Selection a 'good nightmare' for SA

Four-day Test against Zimbabwe starts today

AFP, Port Elizabeth

Selection is likely to be South Africa's biggest challenge ahead of their one-off day-night Test against Zimbabwe, starting at St George's Park on Tuesday.

Zimbabwe are unlikely to stretch the home side but South Africa, ranked second in Test cricket, will want to establish their best XI in this four-day Test ahead of a three-match series against India, starting in Cape Town on January 5.

With the return of AB de Villiers and Dale Steyn after long absences from

Test cricket, and with all South Africa's front-line fast bowlers fit for the first time in more than a year, coach Ottis Gibson described the selection issue as "a good nightmare".

"India are the number one team in the world at the moment and we know we need to be at our best if we are going to compete with them and beat them, which is our ultimate goal," said Gibson.

The situation is complicated by South Africa's unique racial balancing act, with Cricket South Africa committed to having an average of six players of colour, including two black Africans, in their starting teams.

Three black Africans - batsman

Tembu Bavuma, all-rounder Andile Phehlukwayo and fast bowler Kagiso Rabada - played in South Africa's most recent Test matches, two one-sided encounters against Bangladesh.

But with batsman De Villiers and fast bowlers Steyn, Vernon Philander and Morne Morkel back in the mix, only Rabada of the three seems guaranteed to start in what should be another lop-sided contest.

Assuming captain Faf du Plessis is

passed fit after recovering from shoulder surgery, it will be difficult to fit Bavuma into the batting line-up, while Phehlukwayo's medium-pace is unlikely to be required.