



Bangladesh's new Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan (2nd from R) spends some time with his teammates at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on the first day of the conditioning camp ahead of the tri-series against Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka in January.

PHOTO: STAR

Two friends, only one off-spinner

SPORTS REPORTER



The morning was thrilling as Mahedi Hasan joined the national team camp for the first time yesterday at Mirpur. "From taking breakfast to sharing the dressing room, all the experiences were altogether different for me." This was how young all-rounder Mahedi, who was rewarded for his domestic performances, expressed his excitement while talking to reporters about his first taste of a national camp during the Tigers' first day of conditioning and fitness training yesterday in Mirpur.

He however has got a close friend in the dressing room named Mehedi Hasan Miraz who has already become a popular face in Bangladesh cricket and had gone through a similar experience in October last year.

"We have been very close since childhood. We played together for the Under-14 team and in Khulna Division. It feels great as he has gotten a chance in the national camp. And don't forget, his name is also Mehedi," said Mehedi about his childhood friend.

Mehedi also did not forget to wish for his friend's success. Interestingly, Mahedi will likely have to challenge his friend if he wants to grab a place in the national side.



Mahedi Hasan (L) and Mehedi Hasan Miraz are good friends and specialist off-spinners, but there may be space for only one in the national team. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Mehedi had put in a stunning performance upon his arrival on the international stage in October 2016 against England. Although he has a long way to go to fulfil his talent, the former Bangladesh Under-19 skipper provided some evidence that he has come here to survive and will not go into hibernation after a few flashes of brilliance.

Only time will tell if Mahedi will disappear after attending the camp, whether he will get to play a few matches before fading or if he is here to stay. But without doubt

the job in hand is a tough one for Mahedi – performing as a batsman and an off-break bowler.

Thus far, the track record of off-break bowlers has not been a very encouraging one since Bangladesh started their Test journey in 2000. Naimur Rahman not only led the team in the inaugural Test but was also the first off-spin bowler. Naimur however survived for only eight Tests and 29 ODIs. There was then a lot of buzz surrounding Fahim Muntasir when he

replaced Naimur but the off-spinner lasted for only three Tests and as many ODIs. Off-spinner Jamal Babu emerged in 2003 only to play a solitary Test against England. Off-spinning all-rounder Sohag Gazi made a big splash heavy, especially when he became the first and only cricketer to score a century and take a hat-trick in a Test, against New Zealand in 2013 but now he is nowhere near national focus. Another off-spinning all-rounder, Nasir Hossain, has been coming in and going out of the side for quite some time.

This fraught history is the reality for young Mahedi, who loves to bracket him as an all-rounder. "I am confident," said Mahedi in response to a question about how confident he was regarding his chance of making it in the final squad.

"am consider myself an all-rounder," added Mahedi, who got the attention with his off-break bowling in the last BPL after showing his batting prowess in the domestic first-class competition.

On the other hand, his celebrated friend Mehedi, who has so far played 10 Tests and seven ODIs, aims to improve his batting but at this moment he is happy with his identity as a specialist off-spinner in the team. So the route to national team for Mahedi is a tricky one indeed.

Shakib, Mushy in Guardian Test XI

STAR SPORT DESK

Bangladesh's current Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan and his immediate predecessor Mushfiquur Rahim slot in at six and seven in the batting order formed by the journalists of renowned UK newspaper Guardian.

Written by Andy Bull, the article enumerated the accomplishments of the chosen cricketers over the last calendar year. Shakib has scored 665 runs at an average of 47.5, and taken 29 wickets at 33.37, prompting the writer to say that he is the best all-rounder in the world.

Bangladesh's most successful captain Mushfiquur has scored 766 runs at 54.71, taken 12 catches and effected two stumpings and has found a place in the team as a wicketkeeper-batsman.

Proteas thrash Zim in two days

AFP, Port Elizabeth



South Africa crushed Zimbabwe by an innings and 120 runs inside two days in their one-off day-night Test at St George's Park on Wednesday.

Forced to follow on after being bowled out for 68 in their first innings, Zimbabwe were shot out for 121 runs in their second innings. The match ended before the scheduled dinner break on the second day.

Fast bowler Morne Morkel was the destroyer in the first innings, taking five for 21, but medium-pacer Andile Phehlukwayo and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj engineered the second-innings collapse.

Phehlukwayo took three for 13 and Maharaj claimed five for 59.

South Africa were without wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock, who suffered a low grade hamstring strain while batting on Monday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 309 for 9 dec (Markram 125, De Villiers 53, Jarvis 3-57, Mpofo 3-58)

ZIMBABWE: First innings 68 all out (Jarvis 23, Morkel 5-21, Rabada 2-12, Phehlukwayo 2-12) & 36 without loss

Second innings 121 all out (Ervine 23, Taylor 16, Cremer 18 not out; Maharaj 5-59, Phehlukwayo 3-13)

Player-of-the-match: Aiden Markram (South Africa)



South Africa pacer Morne Morkel ran through the Zimbabwe batting to bowl them out for 68 in the first innings on the second day of the one-off 4-day Test in Port Elizabeth yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

DPL wedged into the BCL

SPORTS REPORTER

The sixth edition of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), the country's second first-class competition, will start from January 5, informed Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury yesterday.

However, the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis chairman Kazi Inam Ahmed had earlier informed that the Dhaka Premier League is set to start from January 20.

"So far, the BCL is scheduled to start from January 5 while the Dhaka Premier League is also expected to start from January 20, but the decision regarding the DPL will be taken later," Nizamuddin told the Daily Star yesterday.

It was learned that the BCL will be broken up into two legs to accommodate the DPL. The second leg of the first-class competition – where the best players from the recently concluded National Cricket League will be formed into four zonal teams – will be played after the conclusion of the DPL.

"We have already completed 80 per cent of the four teams," said chief selector Minhajul Abedin yesterday. "We want the performers of the NCL along with the HP [High Performance] players in the teams and are also willing to accommodate national players who will play the Test series," he added.

Among the four teams, two of the franchises have objected to the start of the BCL from January 5 during the meeting with the tournament committee yesterday, citing scant time for preparation.



England's veteran opener Alastair Cook hit a ton after a lean patch and seasoned pacer Stuart Broad [INSET] put in his best performance in more than a year on the second day of the fourth Test against Australia in Melbourne yesterday.

PHOTOS: AFP

I deserved criticism: Broad

REUTERS, Melbourne



The Ashes series may be reduced to dead rubbers, but Alastair Cook and Stuart Broad proved their England careers remain very much alive on Wednesday as they helped Joe Root's team dominate Australia on day two at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Veteran paceman Broad finished with 4-51 in another welcome return to form, hastening Australia's first innings dismissal for 327 shortly after lunch.

There was also satisfaction for the seasoned duo in responding to their critics, some of whom demanded they be axed midway through the series.

Former England captain Michael Vaughan was among them and said Broad should have been dropped for

Melbourne after he went wicketless for 142 runs in Perth, his worst ever Test figures.

Not that Broad noticed as he bunkered down in the leadup, searching for the killer instinct that had deserted him for much of the series.

"It was only two weeks ago that I was on holiday with (Vaughan), so I don't know what he's been saying," Broad told reporters with a smile.

"To be honest I've had one of those weeks where you get your tin hat on and duck down and don't really see much, so I've been very unaware about things being written and things being said.

"You've got to say your opinion, you've got to be critical at times and I deserve criticism after the Perth Test defeat for sure.

"I am not going to hold any grudges or get too disappointed if

people slag me off because at the end of the day in 15 years' time I might be doing the same. Not six months."

Former captain Cook was already under the microscope before arriving Down Under, with doubts swirling about his motivation to carry on for the long haul.

He struggled through 10 innings without a half-century before his breakthrough on Wednesday, his highest Test score in Australia since a knock of 189 in the final match of the 2010-11 series in Sydney.

A stroke of luck helped him on his way, with Australia captain Steve Smith dropping him on 66 when he nicked all-rounder Mitchell Marsh to slip.

Two days after Cook's 33rd birthday on Christmas Day, Smith then gift-wrapped the opener's century by bowling a profligate final over before stumps.

Under-fire seniors shine for England

AFP, Melbourne



Alastair Cook hit a long-awaited century and Stuart Broad snapped up four wickets as England's much-maligned old guard finally enjoyed a day to remember in the Ashes series on Wednesday.

At 3-0 down after three Tests, the Ashes urn is already lost to Australia but Cook and Broad showed their careers are not over yet after critics had questioned their place in the England team.

In scorching heat in Melbourne, England bowled out the Australians for 327, with 113-Test paceman Broad capturing four wickets for 51 runs in his best bowling performance in more than a year.

Cook then ended a 10-innings stretch without a half-century, the longest drought of his 151-Test career, to claim his 32nd Test ton.

At the close, England were 192 for two and trailing by 135 runs with Cook, playing in an English-record 34th consecutive Ashes Test, unbeaten on 104 and skipper Joe Root providing support on 49 in a 112-run partnership.

Cook had a huge and symbolic let-off on 66 when rival skipper Steve Smith put down a two-handed chance after a couple of grabs at the ball in the slips off Mitchell Marsh.

The Australians claimed two wickets with Josh Hazlewood trapping James Vince leg before wicket for 17 and Mark Stoneman out to a blinding one-handed return catch by spinner Nathan Lyon for 15.

Australia, already without the injured Mitchell Starc, had enforcer Pat Cummins on and off the field with a stomach complaint and down on pace and trademark bounce.

England earlier ended Steve Smith's incredible three-year unbeaten run in Melbourne as they bowled out the hosts for 327 just after lunch, claiming the last seven wickets for 67 runs.

Debutant Tom Curran celebrated his first Test wicket as Smith chopped a short, wide delivery on to his stumps on 76, early on the second day.

Smith had not been dismissed in a Melbourne Test match since Boxing Day 2014, and was on track for his third century of the series on a bat-friendly MCG pitch.

It was an overdue slice of luck for Curran, who had David Warner caught on 99 only to have the dismissal overturned for an overstepping no-ball on Tuesday's opening day.

England got more return for bowling wide of the stumps when Mitchell Marsh also dragged on a Chris Woakes delivery for nine after his 181 in the third Test in Perth.

His elder brother, Shaun, lost a leg before wicket review on 61 off 148 balls to Stuart Broad.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 329 all out (Warner 103, Smith 76, Marsh 61, Paine 24; Anderson 3-61, Broad 4-51, Woakes 2-72)

ENGLAND: First innings 192 for 2 (Cook 104 not out, Root 49 not out; Hazlewood 1-39, Lyon 1-44)