

SPORT

A celebration not quite complete

SPORTS REPORTER

Will it be like a 100-year-old man reminiscing on the past? It may sound a bit harsh, but if we call a spade a spade, then the grey look of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium (SBNS) outfield lend such an impression. The present appearance of the ground is in no way an ideal one to celebrate the occasion of celebrating the 100th ODI match today at the country's premier cricket venue.

After major renovation work last year, through which around six inches of topsoil from was replaced, the ground is yet to regain its beautiful greenish look; instead, it was slapped with a demerit point from the game's governing body after match referee Jeff Crowe had rated the outfield poor during the Bangladesh-Australia Test in August last year.

So there will be no blame on the fans if they clamour for a green-SBNS for the special occasion, nor if they ask why their beloved home team are not featured on the historic day.

It is fine to celebrate special occasions and if it is something like a century milestone, there is reason to put some special emphasis on it. So, when the country's premier cricket venue is going to host its hundredth ODI match today with the game between Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe, it deserves special attention.

It is a venue that has been the



The Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, the spiritual home of Bangladesh cricket, will mark its 100th one-day international today and will become the quickest one to do so.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

scene of a lot of joy and sorrow for the Tigers in international cricket apart from their daily association with the venue, and in that light it is reasonable to be upset about their absence from the momentous day.

Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza would have been the right person yesterday to express his emotions ahead of the occasion, rather than Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews and

Zimbabwe batsman Hamilton Masakadza having to recall fond memories of this venue.

"This has been a happy hunting ground for us, especially in 2014, when we had a great outing in Dhaka. But that's history now. We have to start fresh tomorrow. We have a different team as well. We have had so many fond memories and we are looking forward to some more," said Mathews.

"Obviously it's a great feeling to be a part of something that historic as you said we were the team which played the first game here. Yes, it's great to be a part of a history and to be present for it," said Masakadza.

The vital question surrounding this landmark and Bangladesh's absence is whether anybody at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was aware of the occasion?

BCB however has been trying to

make amends. Groundstaff are going to wear T-shirts commemorating the occasion and they were also working to convince match referee David Boon, who is interestingly also going to celebrate his hundredth match as a match referee, so that Mirpur's oldest groundsman - Abdul Matin, current assistant groundsman and one of those present for the first match - can be present during the toss.

Five Mirpur memories

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December 9, 2006: Bangladesh v Zimbabwe

Against a depleted Zimbabwe, the first four matches were comfortably won, with the fourth being the first match at the venue the previous day. The fifth and final match, however, was a tougher affair. Zimbabwe had mustered 193 for eight and an 86-run opening stand between Mehrab Hossain Jr and Shahriar Nafees seemed to put the matter beyond doubt, but Bangladesh lost their next six wickets for 55 runs. It was then left to skipper Habibul Bashar and a fresh-faced Mushfiqur Rahim to take the team through to their first white-wash over a Test nation, with three wickets and just an over to spare.

October 17, 2010: Bangladesh v New Zealand

Although Bangladesh came into the match with an unassailable 3-0

lead, it just seemed that it was only a matter of time before New Zealand would reassert their superiority. That seemed to be happening in the last match when they had the hosts all out for 174, but Bangladesh were not to be denied a clean sheet against the Kiwis. Rubel Hossain and Abdur Razzak brought them down to 20 for five and after a recovery from Daniel Vettori and Grant Elliott it all came down to eight required off the last over with one wicket left. Kyle Mills hit a four off the first ball from Rubel, but a searing yorker played his stumps in the third ball and Rubel's sprinting celebration was the cherry on top of Bangladesh's graduation into a force to be reckoned with at home.

March 16, 2012: Bangladesh v India

The match will forever be remembered for Sachin Tendulkar reaching his long-awaited 100th international century, but it was also one in which Bangladesh chased down India's 289 for five in style. It was a



Shakib Al Hasan's inconsolable tears after the Asia Cup final defeat against Pakistan in 2012 is perhaps the most haunting image for all Tigers' fans.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

true team effort, with Tamim Iqbal setting up the chase with an accomplished 70, before every batsman in the middle order - Jahurul Islam (53), Nasir Hossain (54), Shakib Al Hasan (49) and Mushfiqur Rahim (46 not out) - made their presence felt as they won by five wickets.

March 22, 2012: Bangladesh v Pakistan

It will be difficult to recall a Mirpur more frenzied and excited than it was for this match - the Asia Cup final. Having beaten Sri Lanka and India in the round-robin stage, Bangladesh were within touching

distance of winning the region's biggest cricket prize. It was the closest match of the tournament. 237 was the target. Shakib and Tamim had hit half-centuries. Nine runs were required off the last over with Mahmudullah Riyad and Abdur Razzak at the crease, but to the crushing disappointment of a full house, the Tigers fell two runs short. The players wept openly on the outfield - one of the iconic images of Bangladesh cricket.

December 12, 2012: Bangladesh v West Indies

The West Indies, recent World Twenty20 winners, had levelled the five-match series after losing the first two. In the decider, Bangladesh had done half the job by restricting Chris Gayle and Co to 217. But they also went from 188 for five to 204 for eight. Nasir Hossain held firm and after the chaos of thinking that he had hit the winning boundary when the ball did not reach the fence, Nasir put the next ball away for a famous win.

MIRPUR VITALS



The familiar face of this fan, who used to cheer on the Bangladesh team in every match at the SBNS, will be sorely missed.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

With 11 years, 1 month and nine days between the first match and the 100th, Mirpur is the fastest international ground to the 100-ODI mark

Zimbabwe has the distinction of playing the first match at the venue on December 8, 2006, and also the 100th today, against Sri Lanka

Bangladesh have won 40 and lost 43 of the 84 matches they have played at the venue

The highest score at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium was India's 370 for four against Bangladesh in the 2011 World Cup opener on February 19

Bangladesh's highest total in Mirpur was 329 for six against Pakistan on 17 April, 2015

The lowest total at the venue are a pair of 58 all outs, with Bangladesh being bundled out for the score by West Indies on 4 March, 2011 and by India on 17 June, 2014

The highest individual score at the venue was Australian all-rounder Shane Watson's unbeaten 185 against Bangladesh on 11 April, 2011

The highest score by a Bangladesh batsman was Tamim Iqbal's 132 against Pakistan on 17 April, 2015. The opener is also the top run-scorer in Mirpur, with 2389 runs from 72 matches

Ace Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has the most wickets in Mirpur, with 106 wickets. The best figures, meanwhile, belong to India's Stuart Binny, who scalped six Bangladesh wickets for just four runs on 17 June, 2014

Mushfiqur Rahim has the most dismissals as a wicketkeeper with 81 (61 catches, 20 stumpings)



PHOTO: STAR FILE

Rubel Hossain went into an overdrive of ecstasy as the Tigers whitewashed New Zealand 4-0 in 2010.

India up against it

AFP, Centurion

New fast bowling discovery Lungi Ngidi plunged India into deep trouble as they struggled in pursuit of a victory target of 287 on the fourth day of the second Test against South Africa at SuperSport Park on Tuesday.

India were 35 for three at the close, having lost both openers and the key wicket of captain Virat Kohli on a pitch with uneven bounce.

The hosts will head into the final day confident of picking up the seven wickets they need to wrap up

an impressive victory in the three-match series, after a 72-run win in the first Test at Cape Town.

The unpredictability of the wicket contributed to the dismissal of Murali Vijay, who was bowled off an inside edge by a ball from Kagiso Rabada which cut back at him and kept low.

Debutant Ngidi, who came on as first change, took a wicket with his first ball of the innings when Lokesh Rahul played a loose forcing shot off the back foot and was caught at backward point.

That brought Kohli, who made 153 in the first innings, to the wicket.

Ngidi, 21, forced India's champion batsman to play defensively before he scored his first runs with an edge for four which flew wide of third slip.

Kohli had scored five when he went back on his stumps to a ball which cut back sharply and struck him on the pad. Kohli sought a review of umpire Michael Gough's decision but replays showed the ball was crashing into the top of middle stump.

India had been reduced to 26 for three. Ngidi caused more damage when the left-handed Parthiv Patel was struck in the ribs and collapsed on the turf. Patel recovered and battled to five not out at the close.

Ngidi, playing in only his tenth first-class match, took two for 14 in six overs.

South Africa could have had a fourth wicket when Cheteshwar Pujara was beaten by a ball from Mome Morkel.

The slowness and uneven bounce of the pitch made for slow going as South Africa ground out 258 in their second innings.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 335
INDIA: First innings 307
SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings 258 all out (Elgar 61, De Villiers 80, Du Plessis 48, Philander 26; Bumrah 3-70, Sharma 2-40, Shami 4-49)
INDIA: Second innings 35 for 3 (Vijay 9, Pujara 11 not out, Kohli 5, Patel 5 not out; Ngidi 2-14)

Afghans to play maiden Test in June

AFP, New Delhi

Afghanistan will play their maiden Test match in the southern Indian city of Bangalore on June 14, cricket officials announced Tuesday.

India's cricket board said it welcomed the opportunity to host its "friends" for their first Test since they gained full status last year.

The war-torn nation have played the majority of their home games in India, which has supported the minnows in their quest for Test status.

"It will be a historic day for Afghanistan and everybody is waiting for it," Afghanistan cricket board chairman Atif Mashal said in New Delhi.

Afghanistan have emerged as a competitive international team, with strong performances in the limited-overs format including two one-day series victories in Zimbabwe.

Last year, spinner Rashid Khan and former captain Mohammad Nabi became the first Afghans to be picked in the lucrative Indian Premier League auction.

Afghanistan and Ireland were granted five-day status in June last year by the International Cricket Council, becoming the 11th and 12th Test-playing nations.

'Chandika can't score runs'

SPORTS REPORTER



Halfway through the Tigers' disastrous tour of South Africa, Chandika Hathurusingha tendered his resignation from the post of Bangladesh national team head coach and went on to take up the same position for Sri Lanka.

Hathurusingha may now have a few tips and tricks for his new side on how to handle Bangladesh when the two face off, in their Tri-nation ODI series encounter on January 9, but Tigers' assistant and fielding coach Richard Halsall believes that it is the cricketers and not the coaches who actually get the job done, just as they had in their win against Zimbabwe in the first game of the competition.

While speaking to reporters before a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National stadium, Halsall was asked about how the team management feels to have Hathurusingha as an opponent, the Englishman replied: "He is a very good coach, but as you saw last night, it is Tamim Iqbal who scores runs and Shakib Al Hasan who takes wickets. Chandika can't score runs or take wickets."

The 49-year-old also mentioned that though the Sri Lankans are not up the mark in recent times, they still have some experienced players in the side.

"Sri Lanka are a very strong

side when they perform at their best. We saw that in the Champions Trophy when they beat India. We know how they can play, but they haven't played like that recently. That doesn't mean they won't play really well in three days time. They have some excellent players like Mathews and Lakmal. They have had a rough year, but they are a good side," Halsall said.

In their first game of the year, it was a clinical effort from

finally made a fantastic comeback to the side against Zimbabwe last Sunday by using his devastating cutters to great effect and picking up two wickets for just 29 runs from his ten overs.

"If you look at elite baseball, lots of their pitchers have a similar injury. Pitchers throw at 90 mph, but it takes them two years to throw at 90mph. I think it's been 18 months since Mustafiz's injury. He bowled the cutters and his pace is creeping back up to 85mph. His cutter is brilliant as ever. His top-end is going up a mile an hour every week. It makes the cutter more effective. His confidence is coming back. What is great is to see how hard he is working. He is constantly working at his skills. To see someone who is in love with his skill and passion, it is fantastic to see. We are used to seeing Tamim and Mushfiq in the nets, but to see a bowler behaving as he does in every training session is very encouraging," Halsall added.

Halsall also reserved praise for Rubel Hossain's role as third seamer, which gave the team management cover over a few scenarios of the game.

Asked whether the Tigers will opt for more spin after their success in the first ODI, with two spinners and three seamers in the team, Halsall said that Bangladesh are blessed at the moment and could go in a different direction to strike a proper balance.



RICHARD HALSALL

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and his troops that outclassed Zimbabwe in all three departments to clinch a comfortable eight-wicket win and according to Halsall, it was a pleasing performance from the team that everyone was proud of.

There were concerns over Mustafizur Rahman as the left-arm seamer seemed to have lost his flow following a surgery on his left shoulder last year.

The 22-year-old even injured his ankle later in South Africa but



South Africa pacer Lungi Ngidi celebrates the dismissal of India captain Virat Kohli on the fourth day of the second Test at Supersport Park in Centurion yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP