

Selection will show intent

SPORTS REPORTER

There was speculation ahead of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Chittagong that hosts Bangladesh would go for an all-out spin attack on spin-friendly wickets, a strategy that brought success against England and Australia over the last two years when the home spinners utilised the helpful pitches to great effect.

But Shakib Al Hasan's absence due to injury from the Test series raised the question of who will lead the spin attack, with the biggest concern being the lack of proven wicket-takers in the side. That they eventually backed out from their initially stated intent to be aggressive was evident in the pitch that was laid out at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong, which produced 1533 runs for just 24 wickets in a high-scoring draw.

Having initially picked six spinners in the squad, the Tigers opted for three in the team. There were two left-arm spinners in Taijul Islam and debutant Sunzamul Islam and an off-spinner in Mehedi Hasan Miraz. Mustafizur Rahman was the only pacer in the lineup.

Unlike the Chittagong pitch which has historically been either a raging turner or a flat road and nothing much in between, the wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur -- the venue for the second Test from tomorrow -- has always had something for the bowlers. Of the 16 matches held at the venue, only three have ended in draws compared to six stalemates out of 17 matches in Chittagong.

According to sources close to the team, the Tigers are eyeing a result in the second Test. If they really want to play for a win, the inclu-

sion of a second seamer to add variety to an attack weakened by Shakib's absence may be the way to go. With Mustafizur playing the role of the attacking seamer, Kamrul Islam Rabbi can be the workhorse as he has the ability to bowl long spells both with new ball and old. It will also be a statement of intent that they want to bowl Sri Lanka out twice.

However, selection decisions for the second Test hint that, like before the first Test, there may well be a difference between what those in the think-tank say they want to do and what they actually end up doing.

Sunzamul was excluded as was pacer Rubel Hossain -- hinting at pace not being high on the priority list -- while batsman Sabbir Rahman made a comeback to the squad. Mosaddek Hossain, making a comeback in Chittagong after a lengthy absence due to an eye problem, was dismissed in an ugly fashion in the first innings of that Test when he came charging to left-arm spinner Rangana Herath at a crucial moment, and he may have to make way for Sabbir.

Veteran left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak is unlikely to make a late-career Test comeback. Sunzamul's exclusion opens up a space and the players in the running seem to be Razzak, Rabbi and Nayeem Hasan -- the 17-year-old off-spinner who may be a left-field selection along the lines of Mehedi when he was blooded against England in October 2016 with great results.

There are options aplenty for the selectors and the team presented at the toss tomorrow will be a good indication of whether the want a Chittagong something more positive.



New father Mushfiquur Rahim was in playful mood during training yesterday, especially when he caught a stray Tiger in the form of Tinga who broke loose from the mascot unveiling ceremony of the Prime Bank National School tournament and came onto the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium turf.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Memories embolden Mushy

SPORTS REPORTER



When Mushfiquur Rahim came to his home venue of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday to train for the second and final Test against Sri

Lankan starting tomorrow, he was perhaps not the same man that he was even 48 hours ago.

The joy of fatherhood was manifest in the smiling face of the 30-year-old former Bangladesh Test captain, who was blessed with his first child on Monday.

After the very auspicious development in his personal life, Mushfiquur also provided very encouraging news for the home fans when he stated: "We have a very good opportunity to win the series 1-0."

During a press conference, he drew inspiration from two memories to support his hopes of winning the second Test: the first is their fine performance in the first Test in Chittagong which delivered, according to Mushfiquur, a confidence-boosting draw; and the second is the fact that they won their last two Tests, against Australia and England, in Mirpur.

Mushfiquur however also knew that if they want to repeat those successes, the wicket has to be different from the dead one at Chittagong to make sure the bowlers can get some help from the surface in the effort to take 20 wickets.

"For any Test team the bowling department is important. No matter how many runs you put on the board, the bowlers have to take 20 wickets to win the Test match. It wasn't easy in South Africa and then there was no extra help in Chittagong. It was not like the previous two Tests there.

"We are hoping the Mirpur wicket is going to be different. We believe in our bowlers. We have good memories in Dhaka against England and Australia, which will give us some confidence and we are also in good shape after that creditable draw in Chittagong," said Mushfiquur.

The former Test captain also assured that the home batsmen will not face too many problems if the Mirpur pitch does in fact offer something for the bowlers.

"I am no longer close to the team management but it wasn't too long ago that we had two good memories in Dhaka. If the bowlers get

some help, let it be hard for the batsmen. We are capable of getting something out of it, which we showed on the fifth day of the Chittagong Test [when they lost just two wickets and scored 225 runs on the last day]. It will definitely give us some confidence," said a confident Mushfiquur when asked to give an idea about the Mirpur pitch.

"The wicket will be the same for both teams. We don't want to spend too much time thinking about it. The wickets on which we beat England and Australia weren't easy ones.

"Regardless of the wicket, we have to apply ourselves better. The batsmen did well in Chittagong, because of which we could draw the game," he added.

The premier Bangladesh batsman, who made 92 and two in the Chittagong Test, also promised to score more runs in the second Test.

"There's always pressure but as a captain, I was an automatic choice. Now as a top-order batsman, I have to perform. I tried to give my best in the last game. I was unlucky in the second innings, the ball wasn't that great. I will keep trying, and get more runs in the next game."



If picked for tomorrow's second Test against Sri Lanka in Mirpur, Sabbir Rahman (L) will hope to emulate the feats of concentration Mominul Haque displayed during the first Test in Chittagong.

PHOTO: STAR

Windies to host first D/N Test in June

AFP, Colombo

The West Indies will host their first ever day-night Test when Sri Lanka tour the Caribbean in June, officials said Tuesday.

The final Test of the 3-match series will be a day-night encounter at the Kensington Oval in Barbados starting June 23.

Sri Lanka depart for the West Indies in late May and will play a two-day warm-up match before the opening Test starting June 6 at the Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad and Tobago.

The second Test gets under way June 14 at St. Lucia.

India eye historic lead Third ODI against South Africa today

PTI, Cape Town



India will have their sights set on an unprecedented 3-0 lead when they take on a South Africa, which has quite literally fallen apart due to injury blows, in the third ODI of the six-match series, here on Wednesday.

The visitors won the first two matches of the series in Durban and Centurion by six and nine wickets respectively.

Twice previously, India have managed to win two ODIs in a bilateral series in South Africa -- in 1992-93 and in 2010-11.

In the latter instance, the visitors shot into a 2-1 lead, only to lose the five-match series 3-2 in the end. They had also lost 5-2

in the other instance.

But given the hosts' current travails, history repeating itself would be a major disaster for the Men in Blue.

This is because the Proteas are beset with injury problems. AB de Villiers was ruled out before the first ODI, Faf du Plessis before the second (both suffered finger injuries).

And the list has only grown with Quinton de Kock (left wrist injury) ruled out before the third ODI.

Cricket South Africa didn't name a replacement for him, and Heinrich Klaasen, who finished as the third highest run-getter in the domestic one-day tournament here, is expected to make his ODI debut.

South Africa will be hoping for a better and fast-paced start from the in-form batsman, if he is asked to open along with Hashim Amla.

'Playing for WI the ultimate goal'

ESPNCRICINFO



Sunil Narine has dismissed suggestions that he is not interested in playing for West Indies. The off-spinner said that playing for West Indies remains an "ultimate goal" for him.

Recently Narine, who has been working on his remodelled bowling action, told selectors he wanted to focus on his bowling and get his confidence back and hence he would not want to feature in the World Cup Qualifiers that will be played in March.

Now Narine is playing for Trinidad & Tobago in the Regional Super50, the local one-day tournament. On Monday, he became the highest wicket-taker during the course of a hat-trick he picked up against Windward Islands. He also has the best economy rate so far in the tournament (2.33), and the best match figures as well: 5 for 10, against Combined Campuses and Colleges.

Regardless of this form, Narine does feel he is not ready to bowl for West Indies in ODIs yet. While he played the solitary Twenty20 in England last September, the last time Narine represented West Indies in ODIs was in October 2016, in the UAE, against Pakistan.

Since then Narine has been busy playing domestic T20

leagues even while asking selectors not to pick him for ODIs. According to Johnny Grave, Cricket West Indies' chief executive officer, Narine told the selectors that he is not yet fully confident about his bowling action, and would like to carry on working with specialist coach, Carl Crowe, on his action. Grave said he could understand Narine's position and was willing to grant the player a bit more time.

"It's nothing like that [not wanting to play for West Indies]," Narine told Line & Length, a Barbados-based weekly cricket TV programme. "I just don't want to rush back into international cricket and the 50-over game. I think I need to play some [domestic] 50-overs cricket, get accustomed again [instead of] rushing back and making a mess of myself."

According to Narine, he wanted to "enjoy" his game; that way he could build his confidence before returning to the bigger stage. "It's about my self-performance, and about self-belief, going out there and trying to perform for Trinidad and Tobago; once I can do that, I will be available for West Indies again.

"I think playing for West Indies is the ultimate goal. I think you have to enjoy cricket, no matter where. So I will see how these [domestic] games go in the 50-over [format] and if I am comfortable and enjoying it, why not."



SUNIL NARINE



Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) was delighted to meet Dr. David Young, who helped prolong his career by operating successfully on the fast bowler's knees on seven occasions, during the latter's visit to the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'A true friend of BD cricket'

SPORTS REPORTER

Though Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has undergone a total of seven surgeries on both his legs, the Tigers' ODI captain overcame those obstacles to return stronger than ever. However the person Mashrafe gives credit to for his long career is Doctor David Young, who was a true friend of Bangladesh cricket when it mattered.

Young, who reached Bangladesh on February 1 to attend a three-day workshop arranged by the Bangladesh Orthopaedic Society, visited Mirpur yesterday and shared his knowledge on the injury rehabilitation programme of the Bangladesh Cricket Board while he also had a discussion with Mashrafe and a few other cricketers.

"Six of my big surgeries were performed by him [Young] and the almighty is there but I can say that he is the reason why I am still able to play cricket. Young knows everything [about my case] and he has given all the

instructions on rehabilitation after the surgeries. Not only me, he has done surgeries on half of the injured cricketers of our team. I can say that he is an invisible and a true friend of Bangladesh cricket," Mashrafe told reporters in Mirpur yesterday.

The Bangladesh skipper also informed that he has not faced any difficulties since his last surgery in 2011 but a humble Young attributed the success of the surgery to Mashrafe's determination rather than his own skill.

"Mashrafe is a professional athlete who is determined to this game and also to his country. I have very less contribution in his career and the way he has done the rehabilitation programme since the surgery I am amazed to see," said Young.

Asked whether Mashrafe is fit enough to play Test cricket, Young replied: "He is always a leader and he will always have a place in the Test squad. I suspect yes is my answer."

Demerit point for ZACS pitch

SPORTS REPORTER

The pitch for the first Test between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in Chittagong was rated 'below average' by ICC match referee David Boon, resulting in the cricket's global governing body handing the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium a demerit point yesterday.

The demerit point will remain active for a rolling five-year period and if the venue reaches the threshold of five demerit points over the next five years, it will be suspended from staging any international cricket for 12 months.

1533 runs were scored by the two sides while only 24 wickets fell over the five days of the drawn Test that ended on February 4. There were a total of five centuries and six half-centuries, with Bangladesh scoring 513 and 307 for five in their two innings and Sri Lanka piling up 713 for nine in their only innings.

"The pitch provided no seam movement to the fast bowlers with the new ball and also lacked carry and bounce throughout the match," Boon's report, which was also forwarded to the Bangladesh Cricket Board, said. "The pitch did offer occasional slow turn for the spinners early on, but it did not deteriorate as much as would have been expected as the match progressed, resulting in a pitch that too heavily favoured the batsmen across the five days."