

SPORT



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal and his teammates seemed to have gotten over the disappointment of losing the Test series against Sri Lanka and were in high spirits during training in Mirpur yesterday, but that enthusiasm will have to be translated into action in tomorrow's first T20I. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Good start is always important: Tamim

SPORTS REPORTER

In the first three games of the tri-nation ODI series, Tamim Iqbal scored 84 not out, 84 and 76 as Bangladesh looked managed to secure commanding wins. But since then, the left-hander has endured a lean patch and the team too has failed to replicate those performances.

Tamim scored only five and three in the last two games of the tri-series as the Tigers lost both games. Things looked a bit better in the first of the two-match Test series as the left-hander scored 52 and 41 and the Tigers managed to eke out a draw, but then again his scores of four and two in the second Test contributed to the hosts suffering a crushing defeat and a series loss.

It has become a pattern in recent times that whenever the southpaw opener fails to perform, the whole team collapses under pressure.

The upcoming two-match T20I series against Sri Lanka, starting tomorrow in Dhaka, will be an opportunity to buck the trend. The team will have to make do without the regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan, hence it will be all the more important for Tamim to stand up and deliver. The 28-year-old opener, following a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National stadium in Mirpur yesterday, hinted that while emphasizing the need for a good start.

"Obviously the start is very important whether it's batting or bowling part. Whenever

we make a good start, be it with the bat or ball, most of the times we manage to do well, so the start is always important," Tamim said.

Tamim said they are disappointed with defeats in both the ODI tournament and the Test series, reminded that the important thing is to bounce back with a change in format.

"The scenario is different now as we don't play that much T20s, but if you notice in our fixture of the next six months you will see that we are going to play more T20s than ODIs. So I think this is the perfect time to settle the right balance and planning to go forward as the World Cup is in 2020. We still have a long time left and I believe that this is the format where we can do better than what we are doing," Tamim said.

The experienced campaigner also praised the five uncapped cricketers -- Abu Jayed, Ariful Hoque, Mahedi Hasan, Zakir Hasan and Afif Hossain -- who have been included in the side.

"I think specially Rahi [Abu Jayed] is well deserving as he has been performing consistently in the last couple of years alongside Ariful Haque. We have been looking for someone who can finish the game and hit big and he [Ariful] is capable and deserving as well," he said.

Tamim also informed that Mahedi, who was his Comilla Victorians teammate in the Bangladesh Premier League, should be given more time to settle and be prepared for the long run.

Mahmudullah to lead Tigers again

Nazmul gets maiden call up

SPORTS REPORTER

Confusion reigned till yesterday over who would lead the Tigers in the two-match T20I series against Sri Lanka from Thursday until the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced Mahmudullah Riyad as the skipper in stead of the injured Shakib Al Hasan.

Mahmudullah, the vice-captain of the Test side, was also Shakib's stand-in during the two-match Test series after Shakib had injured the little finger on his left hand during the final match of the tri-series.

Interestingly, Tamim Iqbal, who is the vice-captain for the Tigers in T20Is, was overlooked for captaincy yet again.

Meanwhile, the selectors have also drafted in left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam Apu as a replacement for Shakib for the first T20I.

The 26-year-old has been a consistent performer on the domestic scene but it was his performance in the fifth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League -- where he scalped 12 wickets at an economy of 6.53 -- that helped him get a maiden call-up to the national side.

Nazmul's inclusion raises number of uncapped players in the 15-member squad for the first game to six.

Squad: Mahmudullah, Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Mushfiqur Rahim, Sabbir Rahman, Mustafizur Rahman, Rubel Hossain, Md Saifuddin, Abu Hider, Abu Jayed, Ariful Haque, Mahedi Hasan, Zakir Hasan, Afif Hossain, Nazmul Islam.



NAZMUL ISLAM

What Mahmud's outburst tells us

SAKEB SUBHAN



Among the grievances that the public and players may have against former national coach Chandika Hathurusingha, the Sri Lankan now in charge of his country's national side never did what Bangladesh's current technical director Khaled Mahmud did on Monday when he blasted his players and also the media for their poor results against Sri Lanka. Furthermore, he actually seemed to be rethinking his future in Bangladesh cricket after one bad string of results and the resultant media backlash.

After Hathurusingha left his post prematurely last November, former national captain Mahmud -- who holds numerous posts within the Bangladesh Cricket Board and is also Abahani's coach -- was made technical director, effectively the interim coach for the ODI tri-series and the Test and T20I series against Sri Lanka. Initially, before a ball was bowled, there were fighting words from Mahmud saying that they were aiming to win the ODI and Test series.

Fast forward a month later, during which there were humiliating losses in the tri-series and the second Test, and Mahmud was throwing his toys out of the proverbial pram during an animated exchange with the media during team practice on Monday. At one stage during the talk with reporters when asked about whether he will be in his position for next month's T20I tri-series in Sri Lanka, he gave a quite confusing answer: "The board will determine that, because the board gave me this position. I never want to say that I will not work, but if a Bangladeshi is performing the role that is the biggest problem. That I am still here after the Bangladesh loss is the big thing. A lot of big coaches, including Chandika, had bad results at first."

Having repeatedly said that the coaches are not the ones on the field and Bangladesh's players could not handle the pressure and played bad cricket, he finally admitted that there could have been problems in coaching as well. "I can take bad results; it can happen that Bangladesh played badly because of some mistakes in the coaching plans, but there are other aspects as well."

"Personally, I am not interested anymore. Actually I don't feel like working in Bangladesh cricket anymore; it is seeming dirty to me."

When pressed on what exactly seemed 'dirty', he directed his ire at the media. There was an article in ESPNcricinfo on the first day of the second Test that, while querying the inexplicable decision to rest Mosaddek

Hossain -- who helped draw the first Test through a patient innings -- in favour of the unreliable Sabbir Rahman, pointed out Mahmud's dual role as national technical director and coach of Abahani, for whom Mosaddek played after being released from the national squad.

"By dirty I mean... the way things are written in the media. A big obstacle in our cricket... there is also an issue with the media as we are becoming fishy. Whether our cricket is stuck because of the media, we have to look into that as well," Mahmud said on Monday.

It is not immediately obvious, or even after deeper contemplation, how the media can actually adversely affect performance on the field. If the aforementioned article was in fact responsible for drawing Mahmud's ire, does it not fall in the media's purview to inform the public of existing conflicts of interest, even if those conflicts did not play a part in the Mosaddek decision?

The bigger question, of course, is that even if any report had defamed Mahmud,



does it warrant that someone holding a high office in the country's cricket will throw a tantrum? Hathurusingha oversaw all-loss tours of West Indies, New Zealand and South Africa and by the last tour, the media was criticising him extensively. Indeed, one of the complaints against him in South Africa was that he was not facing up to the media. That seemed like an evasion of accountability by the man in charge, but at least he did not play the blame game and reveal instability to the public.

Mahmud's outburst, on the other hand, seemed to have confirmed what most suspected -- that there was a scarcity of cool heads in the dressing room after setbacks and that the man in charge was as culpable as anyone.

Lankans look to cash in

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka have every right to be in a confident mood heading into the two-T20I series against Bangladesh starting with the first match in Mirpur tomorrow. Having won the ODI tri-series and the Test series, they will look to make it a clean sweep by winning the T20Is and tying the knot on a dominant tour.

An important component in that plan will be their explosive all-rounder Thisara Perera, who was the player-of-the-series in the tri-series because of his hard-hitting innings and incisive pace bowling. The burly all-rounder thought that to be successful they will just have to cash in on the momentum generated on the tour so far.

"I think as one-day players we gave good momentum to the Test players," Perera said during training in Mirpur yesterday. "I think they [Test players] grabbed the momentum also. Now we have to do that in our T20."

"I played most of the games of my career in Bangladesh," said Perera, who is a regular feature in the Bangladesh Premier League, with a smile. "It's good for me. Last time I played very well during the BPL. It's good not only for me but also for the team."

He was diplomatic when asked who the favourites in the series were.

"Cricket is a game where you can't tell who will win or lose. But the team that commits fewer mistakes in the match will be victorious," he said. The left-handed batsman who bowls right-handed curiously also said that he hoped Bangladesh will come back strongly. "I know Bangladesh will try to come back strongly because they lost two back-to-back series. I hope they come better than the last two series."

When pressed on the issue, his real thoughts were revealed. "Obviously, I am Sri Lankan and I'll always say that Sri Lanka are favourites."



Thisara Perera will look to ensure Sri Lanka's second series win on the trot against Bangladesh. PHOTO: STAR

Five tons, three in vain

SPORTS REPORTER



There were centuries galore in the third round of the Dhaka Premier League yesterday as five hundreds were struck in three games. But unfortunately for Kalabagan Krira Chakra, their twin tons from disgraced former national captain Mohammad Ashraful (104) and Taibur Rahman (114) went in vain following a terrific unbeaten 143 by Prime Doleshwar's Liton Das.

Defending Champions Gazi Group captain Jahurul Islam also saw his 102 go in vain as Khelaghar SKS posted a comprehensive five-wicket win, their first after two defeats.

Title contenders Abahani however thrived on a fine 108 from Saif Hasan to post a massive 136-run win against Brothers Union. The victory gave Abahani the solo lead in the 12-team table of the country's List A competition with three wins in as many games. It was Brother's first defeat after two wins and they now share second spot with Prime Doleshwar and Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club, who have however played one match less.

Off the three games, Prime Doleshwar's spectacular run chase at the BKSP in Savar was the most entertaining.

Kalabagan, thriving on Ashraful and Taibur tons, posted a commanding 290 for four in 50 overs. Ashraful's first big knock following his return to the domestic front last year after serving a five-year fixing ban gave Kalabagan hopes of ending the losing streak. The right-hander struck 11 boundaries in his 131-ball knock. He also shared 188 runs for the fourth wicket with Taibur, whose 109-ball 114 contained nine fours and three sixes. Muktar Ali provided the late thrust with a 16-ball 40 that contained three massive sixes and a couple of fours.

But Liton's power-packed 143 off 123 balls and his unbroken third-wicket stand of 170 with Marshall Ayub, who scored a robust 73-ball 91, enabled Prime Doleshwar to reach the victory target of 291 for the loss of only two wickets and with five overs to spare.

A prolific scorer in the domestic front and just returned from Test duty, Liton hammered 14 runs and three sixes.

In the other game at the country's lone sports institute, Khelaghar thumped a five-wicket defeat on holders Gazi Group.

Sent in bat, Gazi posted a fighting 247 for five with Indian recruit Rajat Bhatia scoring an unbeaten 61 apart from their captain's century. Mominul Haque, Bangladesh's first batsman to score centuries in both innings of a Test, also chipped in with a 47-ball 46. However, one-day and Test opener Imrul Kayes scored a disappointing 14.

Jahurul's 142-ball 102 contained five fours and a six. But after the departure of Mominul at 94 for two, their middle order failed to carry on the momentum.

Khelaghar reached 249 for five with nine balls to spare with player-of-the-match Mohidul Islam scoring 85 off 109



LITON... 143 not out



SAIF... 108

SCORES IN BRIEF
ABAHANI V BROTHERS UNION ABAHANI: 266 all out in 50 overs (Anamul 41, Saif 108, Nazmul 38, Nasir 31; Khaled Ahmed 2-44, Roni 2-66) BROTHERS UNION: 130 all out in 35.4 overs (Mizanur 24, Junaid 24, Yasir 35 not out; Mehedi 3-24, Sunzamul 3-28, Sajib 2-8) Result: Abahani won by 136 runs.
GAZI GROUP V KHELAGHAR GAZI GROUP CRICKETERS: 247 for 5 in 50 overs (Jahurul 102, Mominul 46, Bhatia 61 not out; Saddam 1-42, Rafsan Ali Mahmud 1-12) KHELAGHAR SKS: 249 for 5 in 48.3
overs (Robit 32, Nafees 28, Mahidul 85, Amit 24, Menaria 51; Mominul 1-12, Nayeem 2-48) Result: Khelaghar SKS won by 5 wickets.
KALABAGAN V PRIME DOLESHWAR KALABAGAN KC: 290 for 4 in 50 overs (Jashimuddin 24, Ashraful 104, Taibur 114 not out, Muktar 40 not out; Manik Khan 2-44, Sunny 2-49) PRIME DOLESHWAR SC: 291 for 2 in 45 overs (Imtiaz 40, Liton 143 not out, Marshall 91 not out; Saxena 2-57) Result: Prime Doleshwar won by 8 wickets.

balls. He shared a match-winning 103 runs for the fourth wicket with Ashok Menaria, who hammered a 50-ball 51 to fashion a spectacular victory for a youthful team.

At the Khan Saheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, Bangladesh Under-19 captain Saif Hasan hit a superb 108 off 132 balls as Abahani, sent into bat, posted a challenging 266 all out in 50 overs. Saif hit six fours and five sixes in his polished knock. He shared 84 runs for the opening stand with Anamul Haque, who chipped in with 41. The young right-hander also put on 93 runs for the second wicket with Nazmul Hasan (38) before being dismissed in the 40th over, leaving the scoreboard at 203 for three. But Abahani failed to exploit the last 10 overs, scoring just 64 runs and losing seven wickets.

However, the total proved more than defensible as Brothers were crushed for 130 in 35.4 overs by the two-pronged spin attack of Sunzamul Islam and Mehedi Hasan Miraz. Left-arm spinner Sunzamul, who removed both Brothers openers Mizamu Rahman (24) and Junaid Siddiqui (24), finished with three for 28 in his 10 overs. Right-arm off-spinner Mehedi mopped up the tail to finish with three for 24 in his six overs.

India seal series

REUTERS, Port Elizabeth



Rohit Sharma's century helped India wrap up the ODI series against hosts South Africa with a 73-run victory at St George's Park on Tuesday.

India took an unassailable 4-1 lead in the six-match series as Sharma finally came good with the bat, scoring 115 after India were asked to bat first and amassed 274 for seven wickets in their 50 overs.

South Africa, who needed victory to keep alive their hopes of levelling the series, were all out for 201 in response.

India replace South Africa at the top of the International Cricket Council's ODI rankings. India's ODI series victory came after they lost 2-1 in the three Tests played between the two countries last month.

Sharma had struggled with his batting on tour but got India off to a storming start as he finally found form. He was dropped on 96 by Tabraiz Shamsi before going onto make his 17th ODI century, reached off just 107 balls.

"It was a long time coming. I just had to keep myself in a good frame of mind. I didn't feel I had to change a lot and I knew that the runs would come," he said after being named player of the match.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: 274 for 7 in 50 overs (Dhawan 34, Sharma 115, Kohli 36, Iyer 30; Ngidi 4-51)

SOUTH AFRICA: 201 all out in 42.2 overs (Amla 71, Markram 32, Miller 36, Klaasen 39; Pandya 2-30, Yadav 4-57, Chahal 2-43)

Result: India won by 73 runs and lead the six-match series 4-1.

Player-of-the-match: Rohit Sharma.



Opener Rohit Sharma's 115 off 126 balls powered India to a 73-run victory against South Africa in the fifth ODI at St. George's Park in Port Elizabeth yesterday. PHOTO: BCC