



Out-of-form opener Soumya Sarkar will look to regain his touch as he returns to the Tigers' setup in the first T20I against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

PHOTO:
FIROZ AHMED

'Have to overcome fear of failure'

SPORTS REPORTER



An opportunity to win a maiden trophy in a multi-team tournament or a tri-series in the 50-over format was dashed and a good chance to win a Test series at home was shattered. Now 'Tigers' stand-in skipper Mahmudullah Riyad said they had the opportunity to make a big statement in the T20I format when the first match of the two-match series against Sri Lanka takes place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

"There exists a question mark on our ability in T20 cricket. We have to give a statement to the rest of the world. It's a very important series for us and we want to make a statement," said Mahmudullah, exuding confidence during a pre-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

As the squad for the first T20I is marked with the inclusion of a significant number of new faces, the Bangladesh skipper believed that it is also an opportunity for young players to make a statement of their own.

"They [young players] have a good opportunity to make a statement that they are here to grab their place and I hope if they can play their best cricket they will be able to establish their place in the side," said Mahmudullah, who was firm in his belief that the youngsters deserved the national call-up following good performances in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

At different times Bangladesh cricket embraced new mottos like 'positive cricket', 'aggressive cricket', 'fearless cricket', 'intent in approach', etc. and Mahmudullah yester-

day added two new ones to the book when he asked for 'fearless cricket without fear of failure' and 'on-the-spot intelligence' from his players during the two-match series.

"In T20 cricket you have to understand the tactical issues. You need to examine the intention of any batsman or bowler and you have to explore everything on the spot. We have some experienced players in the team besides some new faces and we will try to play our best cricket," said Mahmudullah.

"You should play fearless cricket in the T20 format. If you think about failure, the success rate will be diminished in this format and if you can overcome it you will get a good result. I am trying to give every member of the team this message: 'don't fear failure'," he added.

Mahmudullah was quite successful as a captain when he led Khulna Titans in the BPL and that experience has led him to believe that it is important to motivate players and give them freedom to bring the best out of them.

"I always believe that players will not perform well if you don't give them the freedom and motivate them and I will try to do the same on and off the field so that we can ensure that we play our best cricket," said Mahmudullah.

The Bangladesh captain was also hopeful that his side will be able to make a turnaround in the T20 series after their poor showings in the tri-series and Test series.

"I must put our team ahead of any opponent in our home conditions. Although we failed to perform to our expectations in the Test and ODI series, we are hopeful. I hope we can make a turnaround by playing good cricket," he added.

Confident SL eyeing good conclusion

SPORTS REPORTER



A tour that started with the hosts as favourites in the ODI tri-series is very close to wrapping up with visitors Sri Lanka eyeing a clean sweep of series in their Bangladesh expedition. While there will be tough words from Bangladesh ahead of the first of two T20Is today, Sri Lanka's representative at the pre-match press conference -- opener Upul Tharanga -- just seemed quietly confident about their prospects in the series.

Not only have they won the ODI tri-series and the subsequent Test series against the hosts, they also have a 5-2 record against Bangladesh in the shortest format.

"We have done well so far, in the one-day tournament and the Test series also," Tharanga said yesterday. "We have confidence. We've got good momentum and we want to carry that forward. Everyone is looking forward to that."

There is one unknown whenever there is a match in



Sri Lanka's Upul Tharanga speaks during a press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

A glimpse of the next generation?

MAZHAR UDDIN



The first match of the two-T20I series against Sri Lanka today in Mirpur may be the start of a new era for Bangladesh cricket as the selectors included six uncapped players in Afif Hossain, Mahedi Hasan, Abu Jayed, Nazmul Islam Apu, Ariful Haque and Zakir Hasan.

The inclusion of so many new names in the squad is part of a plan to use the format as a venue for experimentation for the future, and this may well be the beginning of that era.

These six cricketers have been performing in the domestic circuit for some time now and can be termed, to differing extents, as the success stories of the last season of the Bangladesh Premier League.

While it is highly unlikely that all six will feature in today's match, the following is a look at the paths these cricketers took towards the national team.

AFIF HOSSAIN

Afif, perhaps the favourite to make his debut today and the brightest future prospect, burst onto the scene when he became the youngest to take a five-for, including the wicket of Chris Gayle, with his off-spin on his debut for Rajshahi Kings against Rangpur Riders in the 2016 BPL. Afif was the vice-captain and the outstanding player of the Bangladesh Under-19 team's campaign in the recently concluded ICC Under-19 World Cup in New

Zealand, where the left-hander hit four half-centuries with two coming against England and South Africa. The 18-year-old was also instrumental with the ball, picking up a five-for and a three-wicket haul. He immediately received a maiden national call-up and is undoubtedly the player to watch.

ABU JAYED

There have been a shortage of fast bowlers who can bowl a consistent line and length and right-arm pacer Abu Jayed may just be the one to fill the gap with his control allied with some raw pace. The 24-year-old cricketer from Sylhet has remained among the top wicket-takers' list for the past few years in the domestic circuit but his performance in the fifth edition of the BPL for Khulna Titans has given him the final push towards a maiden call to the national side. The fast bowler was the second highest wicket-taker in the BPL with 18 scalps and his courage while bowling against the explosive T20 cricketers was noteworthy.

ARIFUL HAQUE

He had been part of age-level sides but Ariful has been out of the scene for quite some time before last season's BPL. A pace bowling all-rounder with a reputation of being a big hitter late in the order, Ariful displayed glimpses of his hard-hitting ability for Khulna, managing to clinch a few games for his side single-handedly. He may fill the Tigers' long-standing need for a batsman who can clear the boundary with ease down the order and will add further value



At least two of these three uncapped players -- (from L) Nazmul Islam Apu, Afif Hossain and Abu Jayed -- are expected to make their debuts when Bangladesh take on Sri Lanka in the first of two T20Is in Mirpur today.

PHOTO:
STAR

with his handy medium pacers.

MAHEDI HASAN

Known more as a batsman than as a bowler, Mahedi Hasan lifted his game when it mattered. During the BPL last season, Mahedi was the trump card for Comilla Victorians with his off spin, and he even outfoxed Gayle when he bowled the Jamaican hitman after some controlled bowling with the new ball. According to his Comilla Victorians captain Tamim Iqbal, Mahedi has a big heart and the ability to absorb pressure in crunch situations. The

23-year-old is also a genuine batsman, illustrated by the 160-ball 177 he struck in the National Cricket League last season.

NAZMUL ISLAM

It is a case of 'better late than never' for left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam, who has been a prolific domestic performer over the past eight years or so. With 174 wickets in 51 first-class games Nazmul's snake-dance celebration after picking wickets became famous. He is also a tough bowler to go after. The 26-year-old took 12 wickets for Rangpur Riders at an

economy rate of 6.53 and can play a big role in Shakib Al Hasan's absence.

ZAKIR HASAN

Young wicketkeeper-batsman Zakir Hasan has been in the age-level setup before his batting exploits in the last season's BPL caught the eyes of the selectors. With good technique and timing, the left-hander played some cameos for Rajshahi Kings in the BPL. The 20-year-old can be a future prospect behind the stumps and the youngster will definitely want to prove his worth if he gets an opportunity.

BANGLADESH IN T20IS					
Span	Mat	Won	Lost	Tied	NR
2006-2017	69	21	46	0	2
AGAINST SRI LANKA					
2006-2017	7	2	5	0	0

Mirpur, and that is the pitch. Slapped with a demerit point by the ICC yesterday for being too bowler-friendly in the second Test held from February 8-10, the

Sher-e-Bangla

National Stadium wicket was also unpredictable in the tri-series with it becoming harder as the tournament wore on.

"We can't be sure of it until tomorrow. Hopefully it will be a good wicket. In the one-day series also we got different wickets," Tharanga said. "In the first two games the wicket was good and then in the latter part of the series the wickets were getting really slow. In the Test match also we got a bowling track. We hope for a really good wicket tomorrow."

It is not just the Sri Lanka squad that has new players; Bangladesh have included six uncapped players in their squad. Tharanga said that with people in the Sri Lanka squad -- including the opener himself, Thisara Perera and Jeevan Mendis -- having played in the Bangladesh Premier League recently, there should not be too many surprises.

"A few of the players have been playing BPL. We've got an idea of how they are doing. They are new to the side and have done well during the BPL. We have seen a few videos about them. We've got an idea about them."

"This series is also very important for us as a team. We haven't been consistent in the last one-and-a-half to two years. We've got the hope to finish the series very well."



Now retired from T20I cricket, Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) met up with his teammates at the launch of journalist Sayeed Uz Zaman's book 'Brazil' yesterday, and seemed to have a few words of wisdom for current T20I skipper Mahmudullah Riyad.

PHOTO:
STAR

Demerit point for Mirpur too

SPORTS REPORTER



The Mirpur pitch was rated 'below average' by match referee David Boon according to an ICC media release yesterday, meaning that the Test series against Sri Lanka has seen two of the major venues in Bangladesh slapped with a demerit point each.

The match referee's report said that there was evidence of the ball breaking the pitch surface from Day One, adding that the surface favoured bowlers and did not give the batsmen a fair chance during the match which ended on the third day.

The demerit point will remain active for a rolling five-year period and if the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium reaches the threshold of five demerit points during the period, it will be suspended from staging any international cricket for a year.

On February 6, the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium in Chittagong was handed a demerit point. However, the pitch was on the opposite end of the spectrum as it was deemed to be too batting-friendly during the drawn Test.