

Questions ahead of today's squad reveal

SPORTS REPORTER



There are quite a few questions surrounding Bangladesh's squad, which will be announced today, for the upcoming T20 tri-nation Nidahas Trophy comprising Bangladesh, India and host Sri Lanka starting on March 6.

The biggest of them is whether Tigers' ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will return to T20Is. The inspirational cricketer retired from the shortest format of the game in April last year in Sri Lanka, and it was then understood that he was persuaded into the decision by the powers that be which included the board president and the then coach Chandika Hathurusingha.

However, the tide has turned and there is much interest and indeed longing for Mashrafe's return to T20Is during and in the aftermath of thrashings at home to Sri Lanka. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan revealed last week that he asked the 'Narail Express' to return during the two-match T20I series against Sri Lanka and added that if needed he will urge him to reconsider his decision for the upcoming Nidahas trophy as well.

Although there were no comments from Mashrafe, the cricketer had instead said in

January that he wants to make a return to the Test side. It was learned that Mashrafe will not be making a comeback from his T20I retirement for the Nidahas Trophy.

The biggest relief for the Tigers' think tank would be the return of Shakib Al Hasan after he suffered an injury on his left little finger during the final of the tri-nation on January 27. The champion all-rounder is recovering from the injury and is expected to resume leading the side. However, there are still concerns about whether Shakib will be able to play from the start of the tournament, and that will depend on the extent of his recovery by the time Bangladesh square off against India on March 8.

On the other hand, it will be interesting to see -- keeping the intensity and difficulty of the tournament in mind -- how many newcomers or rookies are included in the squad after the selectors named five uncapped players for the T20I series against Sri Lanka.

Young pacer Abu Jayed and left-arm spinner Nazmul Islam are expected to be retained in the squad after the two cricketers -- especially the spinner -- performed creditably with the ball. A trickier decision will be whether the selectors stick with youngsters like Afif Hossain, Zakir Hasan, Ariful Haque and Mahedi Hasan or whether they will revert to the relative experience of Taskin Ahmed, Nasir Hossain and Mosaddek Hossain.



Bangladesh ODI and Abahani captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has enough on his plate with today's Dhaka Premier League clash against archrivals Mohammedan, but he will also be weighing up whether to return to the Bangladesh T20I fold as the squad for the Sri Lanka tri-series will be named today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

SL T20 TRI-SERIES Sharma to lead; Kohli and Dhoni rested

AFP, New Delhi

Rohit Sharma will captain India's 15-member T20 squad for the tri-nation series against Sri Lanka and Bangladesh next month, with seniors including regular captain Virat Kohli and wicketkeeper-batsman MS Dhoni being rested for the series, selectors announced Sunday.

"We have kept in mind the workload and upcoming schedule while finalising the team for Nidahas Trophy 2018," MSK Prasad, chairman of the senior selection committee said.

The tri-nation series will be played at Sri Lanka's R Premadasa Stadium.

Squad: Sharma (C) Dhawan (VC) Rahul, Raina, Manish Pandey, Karthik (WK), Hooda, Sundar, Chahal, Axar Patel, Shankar, Thakur, Unadkat, Siraj, Pant.

Tamim's Zalmi lose a thriller

SPORTS REPORTER

Peshawar Zalmi's Bangladeshi opener Tamim Iqbal had a rough outing against Karachi Kings as his side fell to a narrow five-wicket defeat in their Pakistan Super League match in Dubai yesterday.

After being set a modest target of 132, Karachi's lifelless batting saw the game almost slip out of their hands. The Kings toiled harder than most peasants during the Middle Ages before trudging home with two balls to spare.

They required just seven runs from the last two overs despite a disjointed batting display, and could only bring that equation to a nail-biting five required runs from the last over, before an Imad Wasim six took them over the line and spared their blushes.

Earlier, Tamim managed only 11 runs off 12 balls before being dismissed by a peach from the mercurial Mohammad Amir, who was in devastating form. A glorious bit of late movement saw the ball shape away from Tamim and take an edge into the hands of the wicketkeeper.

At the other end Kamran Akmal departed for a five-ball 14. He hit two fours and a six, but was trapped leg before by Amir, who finished with two wickets for a mere six runs from two overs before deciding to rest due to discomfort.

West Indies' Dwayne Smith entertained with an unbeaten 51-ball 71, hitting four fours and five huge sixes, but none of the others could get into double figures.

Musharraf's rebuke to Ganguly in 2004

STAR SPORT DESK



It is well-documented that India's historic tour of Pakistan was one where security was extremely tight, but few will know that one of the security risks on that tour was India captain Sourav Ganguly and that an 'adventure' earned him a 'polite but firm' rebuke from Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf.

This particular revelation is contained in Ganguly's upcoming autobiography 'A century is not enough'.

Having endured the state levels of security Ganguly soon felt suffocated in his swanky hotel room.

"Well past midnight I discovered that my friends were making plans to visit the iconic Food Street for kebabs and tandoori dishes," The Times of India quoted Ganguly as having written in the book.

"I didn't inform our security officer as I knew he would



Then Pakistan president Pervez Musharraf greets India skipper Sourav Ganguly during India's full tour of the country after 15 years in 2004.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

have stopped me. I had only told our team manager Ratnakar Shetty. I slipped through the backdoor with a cap which covered half my face... I knew it was breaking the rules, but I felt I had to get away from the rifles and tanks."

At the restaurant, Ganguly was eventually found out. "A few yards from where we sat was journalist Rajdeep Sardesai. The moment Rajdeep spotted me, he started shouting, Sourav, Sourav."

"People started coming in from all directions and I got gheraoed... While I tried to pay the bill and escape, the shopkeeper refused to accept payment. He kept on saying, 'Bahut achha. We need someone as aggressive as you to lead Pakistan'."

Back at the hotel, there was a call waiting for him. "President Musharraf was polite but firm. He said, 'Next time you want to go out please inform the security and we will have an entourage with you. But please don't indulge in adventures'."

"Facing Wasim Akram's deadly in-cutter was less scary!" was how Ganguly felt about the state call.

The ruins of a great rivalry

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We will have an Abahani-Mohammedan clash on a cricketing plain today. This is a fixture -- be it in football, cricket or hockey -- that has been evoking a lot of adrenalin among fans in this part of the world in the three decades since independence.

But the age-old rivalry that once defined Bangladesh's sporting culture has now turned into a mere battle. The Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis (CCDM), in a circular yesterday, invited all to watch the game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today. The entry will be free but one can hardly expect a decent attendance for a game that guaranteed full houses in the past.

The once-strong fan base of the two camps has gradually deserted them. And in the absence of effort from both clubs, especially Mohammedan, the new generation of sports lovers considers that historic battle as just a myth. This is also the case for those who are sporting the once-famed shirts

of the 'Sky Blues' or 'Black and Whites'.

"I don't know how important the clash was between Abahani and Mohammedan was before. But for the few years I'm playing for Abahani I have not felt that, to be honest. I also haven't seen that many fans in a match between the two teams. We are just preparing for this particular game like any other matches," Abahani's young middle-order batsman Mosaddek Hossain told reporters at Mirpur yesterday.

In the past the line-ups of the two rivals ahead of the mouthwatering clash dominated discussion most and it was widely circulated in newspapers. The respective foreign recruits were also hot topics.

Both Abahani and Mohammedan have foreign recruits in the line-up for today's game, but they are just two average players from India -- Bipul Das for Mohammedan and Manpreet Gony for Abahani. Both were spotted in a shopping mall enjoying their time together yesterday afternoon.

Had it been the case when the battle was much more intense, the sojourn of the two Indians would have created a ripple.

Abahani captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is perhaps the only member on either side who has been a part of that magnificent Abahani-Mohammed rivalry.

But the battles for the last few years have turned more one-sided with Mohammedan refusing to spend enough money to form a competitive team. They have won only once against Abahani in the last five years, let alone winning the coveted league. More embarrassing for them was when many jokingly bracketed them as Abahani's B team in the Premier League last season.

They also did not form a strong team this year, especially compared to Abahani who boast the most impressive side on paper among the 12 teams.

Abahani have already won all five games this season. Mohammedan won three out of five games to occupy the crowded second spot. Abahani are the overwhelming favourites to win the game. Mohammedan have their captain Shamsur Rahman, who hit a century when they beat Abahani by eight wickets in 2014-15 season. And the onus will certainly be on Mohammedan to turn the mere contest back into a rivalry.

Santner spoils Stokes return

AFP, Hamilton



A century by Ross Taylor and lusty late hitting by Mitch Santner delivered a last-

over victory to New Zealand against England in their first one-day international in Hamilton on Sunday.

In a match filled with twists and turns, the outcome hung in the balance until Santner smacked a six in the final over to get New Zealand home with four balls to spare.

Rival captains Kane Williamson and Eoin Morgan both said the initiative "ebbed and flowed" throughout the match.

"There wasn't much between the sides and I think that's reflected in the result," added England skipper Morgan.

Taylor with 113 and Latham (79) paved the way for the New Zealand win and when England produced a middle-order collapse Santner hit a match-winning 45 off 27 deliveries.

Ben Stokes celebrated his return to international cricket with the crucial wicket of Latham to snap a 178-run stand with Taylor and have New

Zealand at 205 for four in the 40th over.

They slipped further to 244 for seven before Santner lashed out to chase down England's 284 for eight.

"When we broke the partnership we knew we were back in the game but taking it towards the end we just didn't have enough in the tank," said Morgan.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: 284 for 8 in 50 overs (Roy 49, Root 71, Buttler 79, Moeen 28; Boulton 2-64, Santner 2-54, Sodhi 2-63)

NEW ZEALAND: 287 for 7 in 49.2 overs (Taylor 113, Latham 79, Santner 45 not out; Woakes 2-47, Stokes 2-43)

Result: New Zealand won by three wickets. **Player-of-the-match:** Ross Taylor.



Mitchell Santner's scintillating 45 off 27 balls delivered a last-over victory to New Zealand against England in the first ODI at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Hafeez wants ICC to retain 'doosra'

PTI, Dubai

Pakistan all-rounder Mohammad Hafeez says the International Cricket Council (ICC) should tweak its rules to ensure the 'doosra' remains part of the sport.

"Really happy to see leg spinners come into international cricket. But I still believe something should happen when it comes to the doosra," Hafeez said on Sunday on the sidelines of the Pakistan Super League.

"Saeed Aijmal has given us a lot of excitement as well as Saqlain Mushtaq. It is one area ICC must look into. Some extension in the rules... doosra should be a part of cricket, not taken away from it," he added.

"This is one area that every team looks forward to. Having leg-spinners in the team provides them with lots of excitement and options to get wickets," Hafeez said.



The Test Championship mace was presented to India captain Virat Kohli (C) by ICC Cricket Hall of Famers Sunil Gavaskar (L) and Graeme Pollock at a ceremony in Cape Town on Saturday.

PHOTO: ICC



AFP, Cape Town

India captain Virat Kohli refused to bask in his team's success in South Africa as he received the International Cricket Council Test championship mace for the second year running.

Somewhat incongruously, the mace was presented to Kohli on Saturday at the end of a triumphant limited overs campaign. India won a one-day international series 5-1 and a Twenty20 series 2-1.

Perhaps it was a reminder to Kohli that second-ranked South Africa had won a Test series at the start of the tour.

"I'd say we are still 80 per cent," Kohli said of the Test team as he looked forward

to major challenges in coming tours of England and Australia later this year.

"When we are able to achieve what we want to in the two tours, we'll be more content. But our 80 per cent is also exciting. To be a world-class side, you have to be 100 per cent."

Although the cut-off date for the ICC rankings only comes in April, India cannot be overtaken. Apart from the mace and the glory India will collect a million dollars in prize money.

Kohli will leave South Africa on Sunday having dazzled with his batting artistry and his no-holds-barred captaincy style. It is doubtful whether any visiting captain in modern times has made a greater impact than Kohli, who stated on arrival that his India team

feared no opposition nor any conditions. "We look at the pitch and adapt to the conditions," he said. "Every game is a home game. It's as simple as that."

His early press conference set the tone for the tour. Articulate, occasionally combative with journalists who challenged, for instance, his selection policies, Kohli stayed true to his mantra of playing positive cricket and not taking a backward step.

He did not complain about the seam-friendly Test pitches prepared for South Africa's fast bowlers, even though ICC match referee Chris Broad rated the pitches for the first two Tests "average" and his successor Andy Pycroft condemned the pitch used for the third Test at the Wanderers as "poor".