

## Number eight is a starting point



Bangladesh's rise to number eight in the Test rankings have come about because of some rare highs, such as (Clockwise from Top L) the win over England in Mirpur in October 2016 and the memorable away win over Sri Lanka in March 2017, but the home series loss to Sri Lanka in February this year is a useful reminder that a lot of work needs to be done to maintain this high.



PHOTOS: STAR FILE

SPORTS REPORTER

On May 1 news arrived that for the first time in their near 18-year Test history, Bangladesh moved up to number eight in the Test rankings. It is cause for celebration because for the first time the Tigers can look down from their position on the ladder and see someone other than the troubled cricketing nation of Zimbabwe. They can now see West Indies along with Zimbabwe and new Test entrants Afghanistan and Ireland.

It is an achievement because over the last three years -- the period on which the rankings are based -- Bangladesh have performed better in the longest format than the once-mighty West Indies. There is however a danger that a cricketing culture that has one foot perennially placed in the self-congratulation boat will lose sight of the fact that their long awaited improvement in Test cricket is one that coincided with West Indies' continued downward spiral, and that a lot of improvement is still needed.

This tendency was on display in the words of former captain Akram Khan yesterday. "The way we started in Tests many from different quarters said that ICC should withdraw Test status from Bangladesh. Our players gave their answer in the right way," said the chairman of BCB's cricket operations committee. In other words -- no real consideration



of recent failures as he emotes about the achievement.

The rankings are renewed every year in May, and the period in consideration for the 2018 placements was the one between May 2015 and April 2018. In that three-year period Bangladesh played 18 matches, winning three and losing 10. West Indies played 28 matches, winning five and losing 18.

The ranking points accrued during the first two of the three years -- in this case 2015-17 -- are weighted at 50 per cent while the latest period between May 2017 and April 2018 is given 100 per cent weightage. Over the last three years, Bangladesh have had their best results in Tests. In the first year, they had rain-affected drawn home series against South Africa and India in June-July 2015, and before that, a 1-0 loss against Pakistan at home in a two-Test series

in April-May 2015. They then played out 1-1 draws against England at home in late 2016, away against Sri Lanka in March 2017 and back home against Australia in September 2017. Only the last of those series, against Australia, enjoyed 100 per cent weighting.

The warning signs here are that Bangladesh have lost 2-0 in South Africa (September-October 2017) and 1-0 at home against Sri Lanka (January-February 2018). While this downturn has not affected their rise, it is a downturn nonetheless. A loss in South Africa is par for the course -- even if the drubbings in the two Tests are not -- but the home loss against Sri Lanka reversed an auspicious trend of creating a fortress at home.

It is also notable that in those good results Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad (to a lesser

extent) had big parts to play, both in terms of performance and leadership. Along with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza in ODIs, these players are the five pillars of the country's cricket but it should not be taken for granted that they will carry the weight indefinitely. Mehedi Hasan Miraz was tremendous in the 2016 England series as a debutant off-spinner, but has since declined sharply, as have young hopefuls like Soumya Sarkar and Sabbir Rahman. Successors to the big five are thin on the ground and work needs to be done to ensure that this rise is not a blip to be enjoyed only in 2018.

Appropriately, Bangladesh's next Test series is away against West Indies in July-August before they host the Caribbean outfit at home in December. A home series against another lower-ranked opponent, Zimbabwe, will follow in January 2019. So there may not be any obvious immediate danger of losing their current position, but considering the way the rankings are structured Bangladesh can ill afford to rest on this lowly laurel. In the next cycle the results from 2015-16 will drop off and in the one after that their most profitable 2016-17 season will be a thing of the past.

In that light the promotion to number eight, while notionally a cause for celebration, is really the start of the battle to stay there and it will be tougher than ever because West Indies are more capable of rising than Zimbabwe.

## Fahima's magical spell fashions big win

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh women's cricket team warmed up in the best possible way for their demanding five-match ODI series against South Africa when they thrashed North West Women by 90 runs at North-West University Ground at Potchefstroom yesterday.

Chasing Bangladesh's impressive 270, North West were bowled out for 180 in 45.4 overs thanks to a magical spell from leg-spinner Fahima Khatun.

The 25-year-old cricketer from Khulna took eight wickets for just five runs in a mesmerising spell of 10 overs that yielded six maidens. With an experience of eight ODIs and best figures of two for 13, Fahima's leg spin was too hot for North West's batters to handle. Although her effort will not count in the ODI record books, her effort served as a morale booster ahead of their demanding series against South Africa that starts on Friday.

There were also some individual milestones for an exposure-starved women's team, who have not played any competitive matches since the away series against Sri Lanka in February last year.

Bangladesh captain Rumana Ahmed and one-down Fargana Hoque struck tons after the visitors decided to bat first. Rumana struck 136 off 144 balls, an innings that contained 20 fours. Fargana played 143 deliveries for her 103 and hit 10 fours. The compelling aspect of the innings was that the pair put on 266 runs for the unbroken third wicket after Bangladesh lost both openers with just four runs on the board



**Bangladesh women's team leg-spinner Fahima Khatun finished with astonishing figures of eight wickets for five runs in their practice match against North West Women in Potchefstroom yesterday.**

PHOTO: BCB

inside four overs.

The partnership and the two centuries are certainly something new in the annals of Bangladesh women's cricket, which is yet to deliver an ODI centurion.

**SCORES IN BRIEF**

**Bangladesh:** 270 for 2 in 50 overs (Fargana 103 not out, Rumana 136 not out; Bosch 1-31)

**North West:** 180 all out in 45.4 overs (Brits 62, Nape 20, Fourie 64 not out; Fahima 8-5)

**Result:** Bangladesh women won by 90 runs.



**Bangladesh skipper Rumana Ahmed (R) and batter Fargana Hoque hit 136 and 103 respectively in their 90-run warm-up win over North West Women in Potchefstroom yesterday.**

PHOTO: BCB

## Kiwis mulling return to Pak

REUTERS, Wellington

New Zealand are weighing up playing cricket in Pakistan for the first time in 15 years after an invitation from the south Asian nation's cricket board.

New Zealand have not played in Pakistan since 2003 due to security concerns but had been asked to play Twenty20 matches in the country later this year, governing body New Zealand Cricket said.

"NZC has received a request from the PCB chairman for New Zealand to play in Pakistan," an NZC spokesman said.

"At the moment NZC is doing due diligence on the request and consulting with security providers, the government, and the players.

"We will respond to the PCB when this process has been completed."

## Karunaratne in doubt for Windies tour

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka opener Dimuth Karunaratne has fractured a finger in practice, officials said Wednesday, and is in doubt for a West Indies tour starting this month.

Sri Lanka's cricket board confirmed Karunaratne sustained the injury while batting in the nets on Tuesday to prepare for a limited-overs tournament.

It did not comment on whether he would join the three-Test series in the West Indies, but sources said the 30-year-old opener was unlikely to be ready.

## 'Good that the bad times came quickly'

SPORTS REPORTER



Soumya Sarkar has seen the other side of the coin very quickly in his international career with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) recently delivering the message, by excluding him from the central contracts, that opportunities for any player cannot be unlimited and that consistent performances are required to keep one's place.

Soumya however said that, even though he is going through a bad phase, he believes that he can take it in a positive way. "Yes, a bad time has come but I think it's good as the bad time came quickly in my career and it will be good for me if I can move past this phase," Soumya told reporters



SOUMYA SARKAR

yesterday in Mirpur.

The 25-year old batsman, who has already played 75 international matches since making his debut against Zimbabwe in December 2014, added that he was now placing more emphasis on skills along with his focus on fitness.

"I am working on my fitness. Now the weather is too hot and if I can keep my fitness then rest of the things will be easy for me. I am talking with my

former BKSP teachers as well as [Nazmul Abedin] Fahim sir and I am following their advice so that I can correct my mistakes. I am focusing more on skill," said Soumya, adding that there was no point in him thinking about the exclusion from the central contract as it was not in his hands.

The left-hander was happy with the news that Bangladesh jumped to number eight in the ICC Test rankings for the first time but he was not going overboard with the achievement. "Absolutely, it's a matter of pride as we are now at least ahead of two teams, whereas we were once the bottom-ranked side. The other thing is that I was also a part of the team at that time. But the most important thing is to keep this position and also to improve further," opined the young batsman.

## Warner still has a future: CA chief

AFP, Sydney



Disgraced David Warner still has a future in Australian cricket, the sport's chief executive James Sutherland says, handing the explosive opener a lifeline after a cheating scandal.

Warner was identified as the mastermind behind the plan to use sandpaper to tamper with the ball during the third Test in South Africa this year that shocked the sport.

While former skipper Steve Smith was charged with knowledge of the plot, Warner was charged with developing it and instructing Cameron Bancroft to carry it out.

Smith and then vice-captain Warner were banned for 12 months while Bancroft was exiled for nine months.

But Sutherland said the door remained open.

"I think everyone deserves their chance and their own personal redemption story is very much in their own hands now," he told Melbourne radio station SEN late Tuesday.

"Each of them have to go about that during the time they're out of the game and prove that they're worthy (and) prove to the Australian selectors that they should want them back.

"They deserve that opportunity."

Sutherland added that he felt for the players, whose reputations have been trashed.

"I feel forgiveness for all of them. I feel sympathy for them and I want to see them all come back and play their best cricket. I believe they all can," he said.

## Mariners thrash Police 10-1

SPORTS REPORTER



Defending champions Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club notched up a huge 10-1 win over Bangladesh Police in the lone encounter of the Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Mariner Youngs, who had started their campaign with a 4-0 win over Victoria SC in the league opener, toyed with the newly-promoted opponents and scored five goals each on either side of the break.

National striker Moinul Islam Koushik completed his hatrick in the second half after giving Mariner Youngs a lead in the very fifth minute before forward Pushkor Khisha Mimo doubled the margin in the ninth minute. Afterwards, Rezaul Karim Babu, Naim Uddin and Mamunur Rahman Chayan scored one goal apiece.

After resumption, Koushik converted a penalty in the 38th minute before completing his treble in the 60th minute. Before Koushik's treble, Hasan Jubair Niloy struck a brace and Chayan scored one against Bangladesh Police, who also suffered a massive 10-0 defeat to Club Cup champions Abahani.



**Players of Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club celebrate their massive 10-1 win over Bangladesh Police in a Premier Division Hockey League match at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.**

PHOTO: STAR

## Delhi stay cool to beat Royals

STAR SPORT DEK

Delhi Daredevils survived a late Krishnappa Gowtham assault and prevailed by four runs through the Duckworth-Lewis method in a rain-affected Indian Premier League game against Rajasthan Royals in Delhi yesterday.

The match was first reduced to 18-overs-a-side because of evening rain before the toss, which Rajasthan won and chose to field first, and then Delhi's innings stopped at 17.1 overs because of more rain-fall. By then they had hammered 196 for six with Rishabh Pant playing an electric 29-ball 69 with seven fours and five sixes. He put on 92 runs for the third wicket with Shreyas Iyer, who hit a 35-ball 55.

Jaydev Unadkat picked three wickets for Rajasthan, but they came at a heavy price as he leaked 46 runs in four overs. Rain continued into the innings break and Rajasthan's target was revised to 151 from 122 overs.

They made an excellent fist of it, with opener Jos Buttler exceeding Pant's pace in a 26-ball 67 with four fours and seven sixes. He put on 82 runs with D'Arcy Short in just 6.4 overs. But Buttler's wicket, stumped off Amit Mishra, precipitated a collapse as they stumbled to 118 for four in 9.4 overs.

Gowtham (unbeaten 18 off six) then came in and hit furiously to bring the equation down to 15 needed from the last over bowled by Trent Boult. There was a wide, the run out of Rahul Tripathi and a four from Gowtham, but Boult held his nerve as, needing six off the last ball, Gowtham could only manage a single.