

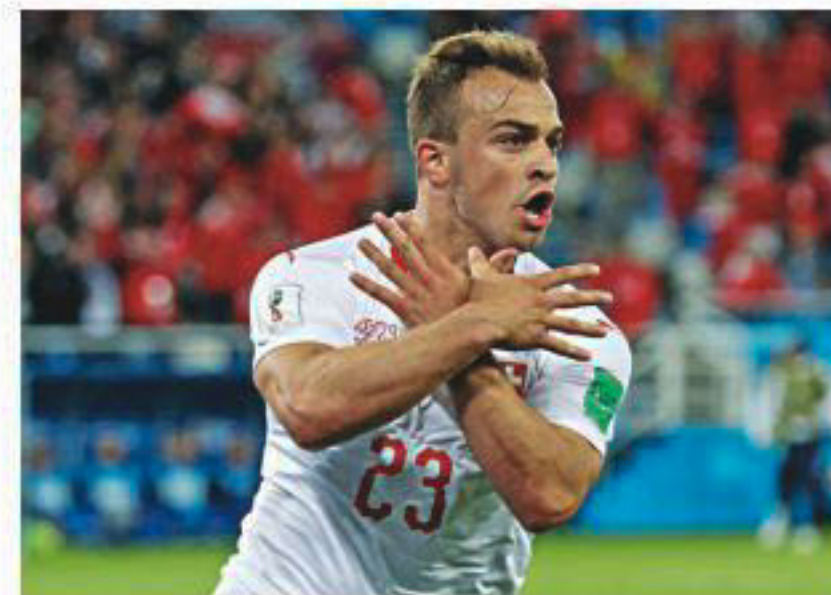
BTV & CHANNEL 9
SAFF Championship
Maldives v Sri Lanka
Live from 7:00pm
SONY SIX
England v India
Fifth Test, Day-1

Live from 4:00pm
Star Sports Select 1
US Open
Men's singles semifinals
Live from 12:30am (Saturday)
TEN 2
UEFA Nations League

Italy v Poland
Live from 12:45am (Saturday)
TEN 1
International Friendly
Scotland v Belgium
Live from 12:45am (Saturday)

'I DOUBT SHAQIRI WILL COME TO SERBIA'

Xherdan Shaqiri will probably avoid travelling to Liverpool's Champions League match at Red Star Belgrade due to the hostile reception he would certainly receive, according to the Serbian club's sporting director Zvezdan Terzic. Shaqiri featured in one of the most controversial moments of this year's World Cup, when he celebrated his winning goal in Switzerland's 2-1 triumph over Serbia by making the two-headed eagle in Albania's flag with his hands. "I think Shaqiri will undergo extraordinary psychological pressure," Terzic said. "I know well that our club is a symbol of Serbia. I do not know if he will be willing to play under these conditions, so I doubt he'll come. If he comes, he'll be smaller than a poppy seed. We have to do everything we can to make Shaqiri feel like he can play." -- AGENCIES



Mash's focus only on the first step

SPORTS REPORTER

ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza knows the pitfalls into which Bangladesh cricket teams often unwittingly stumble. He is also one who keeps expectations low before series, so it was no surprise that his feet were planted firmly on the ground when he talked about Bangladesh's chances in the Asia Cup in the pre-tournament press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

The pitfall is that the confidence of the team seems to disproportionately draw from their most recent performance in a series. Afghanistan and Sri Lanka are in Bangladesh's group, and there are bad memories of the former as Bangladesh succumbed to a 3-0 whitewash in a T20I series at the hands of the minnows when they last met, with leg-spinner Rashid Khan tormenting the Tigers' batsmen in Dehradun in May.

"Of course he [Rashid] is a world-class spinner, especially in these two formats. One positive is that in T20s you have to play more shots due to the pressure of scoring runs, but in one-dayers, maybe you will get two-three overs more," said Mashrafe, but Rashid was not his focus because Bangladesh's first match is not against Afghanistan.

"Before Rashid, I think that it is more important to handle Sri Lanka's pace bowling and spin variety. If we can win the first match, I am pretty sure the confidence we will gain will make it easier to handle Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman or Mohammad Nabi. If the Sri Lanka match is a bad one then it will be doubly difficult. That match will set many things for us."

There were also no forecasts of Bangladesh winning the tournament, despite the fact that they made the final in two of the last three editions, albeit at home.

"Looking at the teams, I think that India are a far better team than the others. Pakistan are playing on their home ground, and so they will have a few advantages, including the presence of many wrist-spinners," Mashrafe said. "If you compare the teams, see the wicket, which players are in form -- I think there are better teams than us. But I don't think the gap is a big one; we can bridge it by playing good cricket and then anything is possible."

New coach Steve Rhodes, sitting beside the inspirational captain, was however not that cautious and that perhaps has to do with him not being there when a single bad performance seemed to let loose an avalanche of losses in 2014 and also in late 2017 and early 2018.

"I think it would be a wonderful achievement for us to win the Asia Cup. We are going there full of confidence," said Rhodes with a smile. "Winning there [in West Indies] gave the team a lot of confidence. We have two games to qualify. We shouldn't assume that we will get into the next group."

However, two months in the job seems to have given him an inkling of the importance of starting well.

"If we play well against Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, then it will add to the confidence. Then if we are in the last stages of the tournament, why wouldn't you believe that you could win?"

But the mood of the presser was set by the captain. "I think the 15th [of September], in particular, will be important."

All eyes, understandably, are therefore on the opener eight days from today and the team will do well to tap into their captain's laser focus.



Bangladesh coach Steve Rhodes (L) and captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza were guardedly optimistic about the team's chances in the Asia Cup during the pre-tournament press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

'No excuses for Shakib'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was asked whether he was happy with the squad he was given for the Asia Cup starting in UAE in September, with the undertone of the question perhaps being the absence of ODI regular Sabbir Rahman who was banned for six months due to disciplinary issues.

"There is no sense in creating a controversy ahead of a tournament," the captain said in the pre-tournament press briefing at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

That may have been wishful thinking on part of the captain, because it was not the disciplinary nightmare that is Sabbir who has created ripples but Test and T20I captain Shakib Al Hasan when he controversially said in an interview with The Daily Star on Tuesday that he was unhappy with his fitness ahead of the Asia Cup.

"When Shakib played in West Indies, if you see his overall performance it was very useful to the team winning. I think if he is on that level of fitness it is more than enough," Mashrafe said. "Obviously the decision is Shakib's; no one else had a hand in it. Once he makes his decision, there is no

I think if he is on that level of fitness [he was in West Indies] it is more than enough. The decision is Shakib's; no one else had a hand in it. There is no scope for excuses. So when he plays, he has to make sure he gives his 100 per cent.

MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

I don't believe he is 20-30 per cent fit -- he is a lot fitter. That sort of statement has hit headlines. He is in no real different state to the one he was in West Indies where he played some fantastic cricket with bat, ball and in the field.

STEVE RHODES

scope for excuses. So when he plays, he has to make sure he gives his 100 per cent."

These words from Mashrafe, who keeps things as close to his chest as anyone in press conferences, indicated that he was none too happy with Shakib saying he was 20-30 per cent fit after giving the okay to be included in the squad. Shakib had sustained an injury to his left little finger during a match against Sri Lanka in January, and it had apparently not healed fully -- to the extent that he had to be administered injections throughout the West Indies tour.

He said after returning from the Caribbean

in August that he will have to undergo surgery, but Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan expressed a desire that he postpone the operation till after the Asia Cup. It seemed that his inclusion in the squad that was announced on August 30 meant that he had agreed to play. The BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury had also said on Wednesday that Shakib will decide on whether to play after consulting a doctor in New York, where the all-rounder is currently vacationing.

However, Mashrafe's use of 'when he plays' instead of 'if' suggests that the rest of the team feel that Shakib is in a state to play

and the recent controversy is a needless one. New coach Steve Rhodes's take on the issue added to that impression.

"I don't believe he is 20-30 per cent fit -- I think he is a lot fitter than that," the coach said when asked of Shakib's assessment of his own fitness. "That sort of statement has hit the headline. He is in no real different state to the one he was in West Indies where he played fantastic cricket with bat, ball and in the field."

"Everybody knows that he does need the operation. He has made that decision after speaking to the [BCB] president. Asia Cup is very important to Bangladesh. If he plays anything like he played in the Caribbean, then that will be a massive asset. Even if Shakib was 60-70 per cent fit, you'd get a lot of cricket out of Shakib Al Hasan."

Rhodes did not think that Shakib being in New York while the rest of the squad are training in Mirpur is a big issue.

"The time-off with family -- I think it is important that everybody does realise that Shakib plays a lot of cricket. In making sure he is playing at his best and freshest, we can give him opportunities to be with his family. It will make him a better player. He has done all the practice when he was younger -- it is not too necessary that he practises all the time."



Novak Djokovic ended John Millman's US Open run on Wednesday with a 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 defeat to reach his 11th semifinal at Flushing Meadows, where the Serb will face Japan's Kei Nishikori.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Djokovic ends Millman fairytale

REUTERS, New York

Novak Djokovic sweated it out behind the baseline to beat Australian John Millman 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 at the US Open on Wednesday and set up a semifinal with Japan's Kei Nishikori.

Djokovic struggled with the humidity at Arthur Ashe Stadium but kept his cool mentally, saving the only break point he faced in the first set and wrapping up the opener in an hour.

"[I was] very tested," Djokovic said. "Almost three hours. It's midnight

now. Credit to John for a great battle." The US Tennis Association said in a statement that Millman was sweating so profusely that the moisture dripping onto court had made the surface too dangerous to play on.

"These night matches the humidity goes through the roof," Millman said. "It is tricky, but it's the same for both people. You're dripping. But that's no excuse or anything. I'd play in a swimming pool if I got to play a quarterfinal every week at a Grand Slam. That would be pretty fun."

In the semifinals, Djokovic will

face Japan's Kei Nishikori, who advanced with a 2-6, 6-4, 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-4 victory over Marin Cilic.

Nishikori and countrywoman Naomi Osaka, who also made the semifinals, were heralded by Japanese media. "There is no stopping the Japanese players," screamed the Nikkan Gendai tabloid after the pair became the first from the country to secure semifinal berths in both singles competitions during a Grand Slam.

Osaka next faces American Madison Keys, who beat Carla Suarez Navarro and win 6-4 6-3.

Mbappe gets 3-match ban

AFP, Paris

French teenage sensation Kylian Mbappe has been suspended for three matches after his red card against Nimes last weekend, the French league announced on Wednesday.

The 19-year-old, who also scored in the 4-2 win, was sent off for pushing over Teji Savanier after the Nimes player hacked him to the ground.

The French champions will be without Mbappe for Ligue 1 games against Saint-Etienne, Rennes and Reims.

The ban does not affect Mbappe's participation in PSC's mouthwatering Champions League opener against last season's runners-up Liverpool at Anfield on Tuesday, September 18.

Savanier, who was also dismissed by referee Jerome Brisard after the incident, has been handed a five-match suspension.

Mbappe had already been booked in the first half of the encounter last Saturday for taking the ball away before a Nimes free-kick.

It is the second red card of Mbappe's young career after he was sent off in January for a bad foul on Rennes' Ismaila Sarr during a French League Cup semi-final.

As he is currently with the France squad preparing for Thursday's UEFA Nations League opener against Germany in Munich, he was not present at Wednesday's disciplinary hearing.

Mominul included as backup option

SPORTS REPORTER



Left-handed batsman Mominul Haque has been included in Bangladesh's Asia Cup squad as backup to Tamim Iqbal and Nazmul Hossain Shanto, who have injury concerns.

Chief selector Minhajul Abedin confirmed Mominul's inclusion yesterday and said that it would now be a 16-member team. The Tigers will fly for UAE on September 9.

"There is no issue with Shakib but as Shanto has a slight injury to his finger and Tamim also has an injury issue. We have included Mominul in case he is needed there," informed Minhajul.

However, earlier Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza hoped that Nazmul would be fit before the tournament.

"We hope that Shanto will recover before

the tournament and that he can start practising before the tournament starts. But if there is a problem, we will talk to the selectors and you will come to know. We are thinking of two players," said Mashrafe.

Nazmul suffered an injury to his right index finger during slip catching practice while Tamim has been suffering from a bit pain on his old finger injury and underwent a scan in Singapore.

26-year old Mominul, who has played 26 ODIs since making his debut in November 2012 against the West Indies, last played a ODI against Sri Lanka in 2015 during ICC World Cup

in Australia and New Zealand. However, the selectors have changed their mind about him and envision him in the 50-over format again, which is why he was sent to Ireland with the Bangladesh A team. Mominul was the top performer against Ireland in that series, which brightened his chances.



Unilever Bangladesh Ltd signed an agreement that will see them sponsoring the Bangladesh cricket teams until the end of January 2020, starting with the Asia Cup later this month. BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury (2nd from R) signed the agreement with Unilever's finance director Zahidul Islam Malita (2nd from L) at the BCB headquarters in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTIVE