



Despite carrying a rib injury and a chance to be rested for today's Afghanistan game, Bangladesh batsman Mushfiqur Rahim (R) was his usual serious self during practice in Dubai yesterday. Youngsters such as Abu Hider, Mominul Haque and Nazmul Hossain Shanto were having a look at the veteran, with a chance of getting into the playing eleven.

PHOTO: BCB

We don't have 24 players: Mash

Tigers face Afghans in Abu Dhabi today

SPORTS REPORTER from Dubai

Even when Bangladesh seemed to be doing everything right, circumstances have conspired against them. They take on Afghanistan today in their last Asia Cup Group B match in Abu Dhabi AT 5:30pm Bangladesh time, having already qualified for the next stage. Their match is set to end about 15 hours before their next match, a Super Four encounter against mighty India in Dubai, where the Sri Lankans and Afghans reached at around 1:30am after their match on Monday. Their highest run-scorer is now in Dhaka trying to heal a fractured left hand suffered in the 137-run win over Sri Lanka on Saturday.

With the Asian Cricket Council's shenanigans with the fixtures, today's match is meaningless as it will not even determine which team will play which in the next round. But it will have consequences just by being held as it will severely tire out each team for their respective second-round matches -- Afghanistan's against Pakistan and Bangladesh's against India.

"The most important matches are on the 21st, 23rd and 25th [26th], and we will start it having played back-to-back matches," said Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. "It's not like we have 24 players and can rest 11 for one match. If we field second tomorrow [Thursday] and field first on the 21st, there

won't even be 10 hours to recover."

In that are a few clues -- there may well be quite a few changes to the team for today's match. Mushfiqur Rahim, who scored 144 in the first game, is nursing a rib injury. Mominul Haque may come in for Mushfiqur, while the uncapped Nazmul Hossain Shanto will likely take Tamim's place. Mashrafe's words also strongly imply that, abandoning consequences for the match itself, both teams are likely to field first if they win the toss.

There is also a good chance that they will rest one of the pacers, meaning Abu Hider gets a game.

The biggest threats from Afghanistan are leg-spinner Rashid Khan and off-spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman, who rode roughshod over Bangladesh in the 3-0 T20I series win in June.

"I don't think that we can come up with effective solutions thinking about it for one or two days," Mashrafe said. "But we have to play with a positive mindset and according to the situation. There will be risk when trying to attack world-class bowlers like them. But batsmen get in trouble thinking about the risk; they have to play positively."

Mashrafe was intent on giving a free rein to whoever comes in.

"Instead of putting pressure on them, let them play their game, the way they play in the Dhaka League. If they play with that mentality, feel the situation and play accordingly and are able to challenge themselves, of course they will do well."

Bangladesh are coming here to play for the first time, but we have been playing here for a long time. I think we are favourites.

MOHAMMAD NABI
AFGHANISTAN ALL-ROUNDER



Things should be even for all teams: Sarfraz

AGENCIES, Dubai

Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed expressed his frustration of having to shuttle between Dubai and Abu Dhabi to play their matches. While India are playing all their matches in Dubai, their cross-border nation will have to play at least two matches in Abu Dhabi which is an hour drive from Dubai.

The Asia Cup is being played in two cities - Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Given the unrelenting heat, travelling to Abu Dhabi takes a lot out of the teams. "Travelling is an issue. If you've to travel for one-and-a-half hours between matches, then

it's difficult for you," Sarfraz said.

"I believe things should be even for all teams, whether that's India, Pakistan or anyone else. If matches are played in Abu Dhabi, then all teams must play a game or two there. Now I don't know what the ACC has done regarding this," a clearly unimpressed Sarfraz stated. "Obviously, whatever the concerns, PCB will be looking at it."

When Sarfraz was reminded that India are playing back-to-back games within a week of completing a three-month England tour, he hit back: "They're playing back-to-back games but they've got to play later than the rest, no? There will be pressure as they're coming after not playing a series too well in Tests (England)."



Asian Cricket Chaos

Schedule change brings tournament integrity into question

SAKEB SUBHAN from Dubai

What increasingly appears to be favouritism towards cricketing powerhouse India has turned the Asia Cup into a near farce. Even with two group matches left and Group A and Group B champions yet to be decided, on Wednesday morning the Asian Cricket Council has published the fixtures list of the Super Four stage starting on Friday.

That should not have been possible, because the original schedule had Super Four matches set as 'Group A winner vs Group B runners-up', 'Group A runners-up vs Group B winners' and so on. Therefore, unless group champions are determined -- as they will be after Wednesday's India vs Pakistan encounter and Thursday's Bangladesh vs Afghanistan Group B match, it is not possible as per the original schedule to name the matches for the Super Four stage.

The four teams have already qualified, but it should have all come down to the last group matches to determine the standings and the shape of the second-stage.

India had expressed a desire to play all their matches in Dubai and not visit Abu Dhabi during the tournament. It seems they have gotten their wish, and the fixtures have been set in such a way that while other teams will have to adjust their plans, India will play all their matches in Dubai.

"We knew nothing of it," said Bangladesh Cricket Board CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury, now in Dubai. "We have verbally sought an explanation from the ACC, and if not satisfied we will take it up in the ACC board meeting after the tournament."



Despite being frustrated with the Super Four schedule of the Asia Cup, Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza conjures a light moment during a practice session in Dubai yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

SUPER FOUR FIXTURES			
Date	Match	Venue	Time
Sept 21	India vs Bangladesh	Dubai	5:30pm
	Pakistan vs Afghanistan	Abu Dhabi	5:30pm
Sept 23	India vs Pakistan	Dubai	5:30pm
	Afghanistan vs Bangladesh	Abu Dhabi	5:30pm
Sept 25	India vs Afghanistan	Dubai	5:30pm
Sept 26	Pakistan vs Bangladesh	Abu Dhabi	5:30pm
Sept 28	Final	Dubai	5:30pm

"It is very disappointing," said Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza yesterday after learning of the change when they arrived for practice at the ICC Academy. Bangladesh and Afghanistan were the most disadvantaged even in the original schedule because they will have to play on successive days in heat that exceeds 40 degrees Celsius in the daytime. The organisers made sure that neither marquee names Pakistan, India or Sri Lanka -- had they made it through -- would not suffer that fate.

However, the reason this latest tweak will rattle both sides -- apart from the fact that favouring one side at the expense of three others

destroys the credibility of the tournament -- is that if the Super Four matches have already been decided, then today's match becomes completely academic and unnecessary if it will not even determine who the winner plays to start the next stage.

As such, a day before matches infinitely more important, the players are well within their rights to feel aggrieved and abused as they will play a full match with less than 15 hours of recovery time before starting the next one.

"Basically we were made the second team in Group B even before we played the last game. It is frustrating," Mashrafe, normally a very diplomatic public speaker, said.

"We'll play -- of course it is an international match where we are representing our nation, so of course it's important. But whether you are talking about group stage matches or other matches, there are certain rules within which they operate. We are getting away from the rules, so it's disappointing.

"Even a mad person would be upset," said Mashrafe when asked whether this state of affairs has upset the team.

ACC officials, meanwhile, have been tying themselves up in knots to explain the farce.

"We asked them for an explanation and they said that this was how it was originally intended -- Bangladesh would be B2 and Afghanistan B1," Bangladesh team manager Khaled Mahmud said. "When asked what would have happened if Sri Lanka qualified, they said that it was Sri Lanka/Afghanistan in the original schedule."

That means that they presumed Bangladesh's qualification -- a generosity of estimation not reflected in the scheduling. Another official said that it was written in the small print when the fixture was first released that India, if they qualified, would be A1 as they expressed a preference to play in Dubai. The fixture list the media received at the start of the accreditation process contained no such small print.

Roshini Jayakrishnan, the media consultant of the ACC, was asked in the Dubai International Stadium press box yesterday whether the organisation had any explanations for the change. She said that she would ask the BCCI, although the decision was supposedly made by the ACC.

The bias towards India in cricket is now common knowledge; it was only the nakedness of its presence in Dubai that surprised.

A session lost

SPORTS REPORTER



The last session of the first four-day match of the new season, between two High Performance (HP) squads, was called off due to a poor outfield at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday.

After electing to bat, the Green team posted 177 runs for six wickets after 52 overs and went for tea. However due to the underprepared outfield, the coach and match officials decided to call it a day keeping in mind the risk of injuries and decided to play again from the second day.

The outfield in Khulna was damp from the start and a few of the Red team fielders bruised their arms and legs.

Any injury to a player in the HP squad would also adversely affect the national team as players like Afif Hossain, Abu Jayed, Shadman Islam, Soumya Sarkar and Imrul Kayes are considered back-ups for national players.

The venue manager, Abdus Sattar Kochi, admitted: "There was some risk of injury to the players. The outfield was damp due to recent rain, which is the reason for the underprepared ground," he said.

According to AEM Kaiser, the manager of the Bangladesh Cricket Board's game development department, the damaged area of the ground has been repaired. He added that the game would resume from 9:00am today.

It is certainly not a good sign with less than a month to go until the start of the National Cricket League, the country's first class competition.

Skipper Imrul Kayes top-scored with 58 before he was dismissed by pacer Taskin Ahmed as Green team kept losing wickets at regular interval. Pacer Al Amin Hossain was the pick of the bowlers and took three wickets for Red team.

Pandya sustains injury

PTI, Dubai



India all-rounder Hardik Pandya was Wednesday stretched off the field during the Asia Cup group league encounter against Pakistan after sustaining an "acute lower back injury".

The incident took place in the 18th over of the Pakistan innings when the all-rounder was bowling his fifth over. It was the fifth delivery and Pandya, after complet-

ing the follow through, immediately felt his lower back and lay on the ground in pain.

He was stretched off and taken for a medical examination.

"Hardik Pandya has an acute lower back injury. He is able to stand at the moment and the medical team is assessing him now. Manish Pandey is on the field as his substitute," BCCI's media team updated.

Pandya's figures were 4.5-0-24-0 after Shoaib Malik's catch was dropped by Mahendra Singh Dhoni when the batsman was on 32.

India all-rounder Hardik Pandya is carried off the field after injuring himself while bowling yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP



IND-PAK SCOREBOARD

PAKISTAN				R/B	4s/6s		
Imamul c Dhoni b Kumar				2/7	0/0		
Zaman c Chahal b Kumar				0/9	0/0		
Azam b Yadav				47/62	6/0		
Malik run out				43/67	1/1		
Sarfraz c sub (Pandey) b Jadhav				6/12	0/0		
Asif c Dhoni b Jadhav				9/10	0/1		
Shadab st Dhoni b Jadhav				8/19	0/0		
Ashraf c Dhawan b Bumrah				21/44	2/0		
Amir not out				18/26	1/0		
Hasan c Karthik b Kumar				1/3	0/0		
Usman b Bumrah				0/1	0/0		
Extras: (lb-6, nb-1)				7			
Total: (All out in 43.1 overs)				162			
Fall of wickets: 1-2, 2-3, 3-85, 4-96, 5-100, 6-110, 7-121, 8-158, 9-160, 10-162.							
INDIA				R/B	4s/6s		
Sharma b Shadab				52/39	6/3		
Dhawan c Azam b Ashraf				46/54	6/1		
Rayudu not out				31/46	3/0		
Karthik not out				31/37	2/1		
Extras: (nb-2, w-2)				4			
Total: (For two wickets in 29 overs)				164			
Fall of wickets: 1-86, 2-104							
Bowler				O	M	R	W
Amir	6	1	23	0			
Shimwari	4	0	27	0			
Hasan	4	0	33	0			
Ashraf	5	0	31	0			
Shadab	1.3	0	6	1			
Zaman	6.3	0	25	0			
Malik	2	0	19	0			

Result: India won by eight wickets
Player-of-the-match: Bhuvneshwar Kumar (India)

INFO-ZONE

BANGLADESH V AFGHANISTAN
HEAD TO HEAD IN ASIA CUP

M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0

IN ALL ODIS

M	W	L	NR	M	W	L	NR
5	3	2	0	5	2	3	0

Last meeting in ODIs: Dhaka, Oct 1, 2016 where Bangladesh won by 141 runs.

KEY PLAYERS

Mahmudullah Riyad		Rashid Khan	
34.38	Average	20.06	
137	Innings	35	
3438	Runs	602	
128*	HS	60*	
76.82	SR	98.20	
19	50s	2	
3	100s	0	
Bowling			
70	Wickets	110	
120	Innings	35	
48.95	Average	14.20	
5.16	Economy	3.92	
0	5-wicket haul	4	
3/4	Best Bowling	7/18	