







Whenever taking a break from the serious business of practising his bowling, Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is always up to some shenanigan or other. He seemed to be hunting for a target while sipping coconut water yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur and soon found one -- the unsuspecting bowling coach Courtney Walsh.

Rhodes eager to test depth



The silver lining in the dark cloud of Bangladesh missing out on the services of Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal for the Zimbabwe series starting on Sunday is that it

will provide a glimpse into Bangladesh's future. While their absence through injury midway through last month's Asia Cup had blindsided the Tigers, this time the team management have had the opportunity to plan for how to succeed in their absence.

The team gave a good account of themselves in the UAE by reaching the Asia Cup final with the likes of Liton Das and Mohammad Mithun stepping up, so it is not all doom and gloom ahead of an assignment at home that is likely to

be easier than the Asia Cup. Yesterday during training at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, head coach Steve Rhodes was looking at the positive side and seemed excited by the chance to see the strength of the Tigers' bench.

"We know we are two good players light [but] it will be an opportunity for two others," Rhodes told reporters. "Zimbabwe have just come from South Africa and they were beaten. No team likes that and I expect a wounded animal. Our approach will be about making sure that we perform

our duties well on the cricket field. If we do that well, we don't have to worry about our opposition.

"There are opportunities for some people. If those guys grasp their chance, that means [there is] depth in our squad and there will be competition for places. And if there is competition, people are always trying to play at their best, which is a very healthy thing. You look back at some of the great teams around the world and if they've got a second team that plays



SAIFUDDIN



MITHUN

just as well, that means their first team is conquering the world. This is an opportunity to see if we can get that depth."

Ace all-rounder Shakib's absence opens up two slots -one in the spin department and one in batting. Mehedi Hasan Miraz will have to step up as the lead spinner, and there are options in the supporting role as well.

"[Nazmul Islam] Apu is a quality spin bowler; he has shown that in the shortest format. We know that he can do that in the fifty-over format, so if Apu plays that's two quality spin bowlers," Rhodes said. "And [Mahmudullah] Riyad, he is a far better bowler than many think. In a team without Mehedi, he may well be the number one spinner. Fazle [Rabbi], if he plays, can bowl left-arm spin as well. I am confident we've got enough quality in our spin."

The options are a little more limited in the batting ranks but it may be the time for pace bowling all-rounders Ariful Haque -who has been on the sidelines for long -- or Mohammad Saifuddin, for whom Rhodes seemed to have long-term plans.

"We've got him [Saifuddin] in the squad and think that he's a very good all-rounder. He has the ability to perform at ; the highest level," Rhodes said. "He's gone away and come back into the fold, so is a little more mature. [Captain] Mashrafe Bin Mortaza does a fantastic job for this country in . the way he leads, the way he bowls, the way he throws himself ' around on the field. We all know he's had his injury issues. If ; Mash did pick up an injury, the type of player to replace him is somebody like Saifuddin. If he can get some cricket, then if ! something goes wrong -- hopefully not -- with Mash then at least somebody will have played some cricket in that position. And I am talking maybe even close to the World Cup.

"This is why these games and the West Indies games are so important. We will learn so much more about our team."

'Mental muscles need more development'

SPORTS REPORTER



While it is beyond doubt that Bangladesh have improved substantially in international cricket over the last four years, there have been questions about the players' mental strength. It only grew louder when they lost

their sixth final in last month's Asia Cup from a dominant position against India. Perhaps that is what persuaded the Bangladesh Cricket Board to fly in Bangladesh-born sports psychologist Ali Azhar Khan from Canada to have a two-day session with the team that ended yesterday.

After conducting his second session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday Azhar, who had also worked with the Tigers in 2014, said there has been marked improvement in the players' self-belief but the mental muscles needed to develop more in crunch situations.

"They have changed a lot from how they were before," Azhar told reporters yesterday. "They have much more selfbelief and have become mentally stronger. But they aren't able to hold on to that when the weight of the boat gets heavier with the shore in sight. We have to bring out our latent talent more, which of course is a skill that needs to be practised. These mental muscles will develop when we practise this skill on a daily basis.

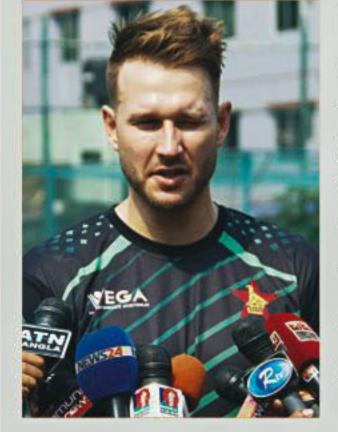
"It is possible because we have the experience of beating everyone. When this belief becomes stronger the consistency will improve. When we come close [to winning] in these tournaments, the pressure of expectations increase and if the mental muscle is not strong we cannot sustain it."

He stressed the importance of body language, citing Soumya Sarkar's last ball to India's Dinesh Karthik -- who hit a six when five were needed in the last ball -- in the Nidahas Trophy final in March as an example.

"If you saw the batsman's body language at that time, you would have realised how much self-belef he possessed. When I was watching Soumya, I felt like the match would slip out of his hand, because I could see the absence of that psychology. If I could have reminded him of that body language and to keep up the self-talk... because thinking about what would happen if you lose brings stress. We have been talking about the formulas for the last two days. There are many ingredients to mental fitness; it is about bringing them all together.

"The players always seem inspired during these sessions and they want them more often but with time it goes away. Just like physical fitness lasts because of routine fitness work, we should also incorporate psychological fitness into our routines. If not as a regular fixture, these sessions should happen more often."

TALK ON ZIM SERIES



I think we have a good chance. It helps that there will be no Shakib, no Tamim, who are big players for Bangladesh, so we're very positive going forward.

Zimbabwe seamer **Kyle Jarvis**

Tushar reaches 11k on day of draws

SPORTS REPORTER



Former Bangladesh players WALTON Shahriar Nafees and Tushar NCL Imran hit hundreds on the final day of the third round of

the National Cricket League yesterday as all four games ended in draws. Tushar became the first Bangladeshi to reach 11,000 first-class runs in the

Tushar, Khulna Division's domestic batting colossus, struck 103 off 176 balls -- extending his domestic record of most first-class hundreds by a Bangladeshi to 31. Khulna started the day on 181 for five in their second innings, 170 runs in front of Rangpur Division in the Tier-1 game at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna. The right-hander was unbeaten on 63 at the end of the third day and built a 75-run sixth-wicket stand with all-rounder Ziaur Rahman (63) before the centurion was stumped off Tanbir Hayder.

There did not seem to be much thought of forcing a result as they batted till the stroke of tea to be all out for 334. Rangpur batted out 23 overs to reach 91 for one, with opener Jahid Jabed

SCORES IN BRIEF

KHULNA V RANGPUR KHULNA: First innings 304 and second innings 334 (Soumya 71, Tushar 103, Ziaur 63, Mahedi 31; Mahmudul 4-29, Tanbir 2-25)

RANGPUR: First innings 315 and second innings 91 for 1 (Jabed 64 not out; Al-Amin 1-18) Result: Match drawn.

DHAKA METRO V CHATTOGRAM **DHAKA METRO:** First innings 287 and second innings 254 for 7 decl (Shadman 62, Shykat 40, Shamsur 52, Sharifullah 31 not out;

Nayeem 6-119) **CHATTOGRAM:** First innings 236 and second innings 159 for 3 (Sadikur 27, Pinak 59 not out, Mominul 32: Arafat 2-77)

The other Tier-1 game at the Barishal

Result: Match drawn.

SYLHET V DHAKA

4-78)

SYLHET: First innings 355 for 9 decl (Imtiaz 41, Zakir 88, Rajin 96, Kapali 36; Shuvagata 3-72, Taibur

DHAKA: First innings 55 for 3 Saif 22, Mazid 10; Enamul 2-7) Result: Match drawn.

BARISHAL V RAJSHAHI BARISHAL: First innings 133 and second innings 229 for 7 (Nafees 102, Shamsul 62; Taijul 3-55,

Sabbir 3-19) RAJSHAHI: First innings 155 (Muktar 59 not out, Sabbir 31; Sohag 3-41, Monir 2-15, Tanvir 3-

Result: Match drawn.

Dhaka Metro resumed the final day on 191 for which they reached 55 for three.

HIGHLIGHTS

Tushar Imran crossed the 11,000run mark yesterday with yet another ton. Continuing on from his unbeaten 63, he went on to hit his 31st firstclass hundred against Rangpur Division. The 34-year old is the highest run-getter in Bangladesh's first-class cricket.

 Youngster Zakir Hasan and veteran Rajin Saleh contributed 151 runs for the third wicket for Sylhet yesterday. Both however missed out on hundreds as 20-year old Zakir fell for 88 while 34-year-old Saleh for 96.

17-year old right-arm off-spinner Nayeem Hasan attained career-best figures as he scalped all but one of the Dhaka Metropolis wickets that fell and finished with figures of 6 for

six at the Sheikh Kamruzzaman Stadium in

Bogura, 242 runs ahead of Chattogram Division

after taking a 51-run first-innings lead. Skipper

Arafat Sunny declared on 254 for seven before

lunch and set Metro a target of 306. Opener Pinak

Ghosh then hit an unbeaten 59 to take Metro to

washed out at the Sheikh Kamal International

Stadium in Cox's Bazar, and Sylhet Division had

reached 229 for two on the third day. Rajin Saleh

looked set for a hundred but was out four runs

shy of the mark while Zakir Hasan fell 12 runs

short as Sylhet were bowled out for 355. That left

only 27 overs for Dhaka Division to bat, during

The first two days of the other Tier-2 game was

the close safely on 159 for three.



AFP, Abu Dhabi

Pakistan grabbed an early wicket after Babar Azam struck a fluent 99 to edge closer to claiming a series victory over Australia in the second Test at Abu Dhabi on Thursday.

Azam narrowly missed out on a hundred after an aggressive innings, while skipper Sarfraz Ahmed followed up his first-innings 94 with 81 as Pakistan declared their second innings at 400 for 9, setting a

Pak close to victory

daunting 538-run target for the tourists. By the close on the third day, Pakistan had Shaun Marsh dismissed for four -- bowled by left-arm paceman Mir Hamza for his first Test wicket -- to boost their chances of victory after Australia clung on for a thrilling

draw in the first Test in Dubai last week. Aaron Finch (24) and Travis Head (17) were at the crease with Australia, who are 47 for 1. SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: First innings 282

AUSTRALIA: First innings 145

PAKISTAN: Second innings 400 for 9 decl (Fakhar 66, Azhar 64, Shafiq 44, Babar 99, Sarfraz 81; Lyon 4-135, Labuschagne 2-74)

AUSTRALIA: Second innings 47 for 1 (Finch 24 not out,



Even by Pakistan's standards, Azhar Ali's run out on the third day of the second Test in Abu Dhabi was a farcical one. Asad Shafiq (C) and Azhar thought the ball had crossed the ropes and were having a midpitch conference when Australia skipper Tim Paine gleefully whipped off the bails. PHOTO: COLLECTED

U-19s take lead against Sri Lanka

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh U-19 team bowled out their Sri Lankan counterparts for 288 to take a 39-run lead at the close of play on third day of the fourday match at the NCC Ground in Colombo yester-

Left-arm spinner Rakibul Hasan and Towhid Hridoy were the destroyers-in-chief for the young Tigers, bagging three wickets each.

Tawhid did the early damage, picking up the wickets of Nipun Dhananjaya and Navod Dinusriparanavithana early in the day before a 90-run fourth-wicket partnership between Mohammad Shamz and Sonal Dinusha

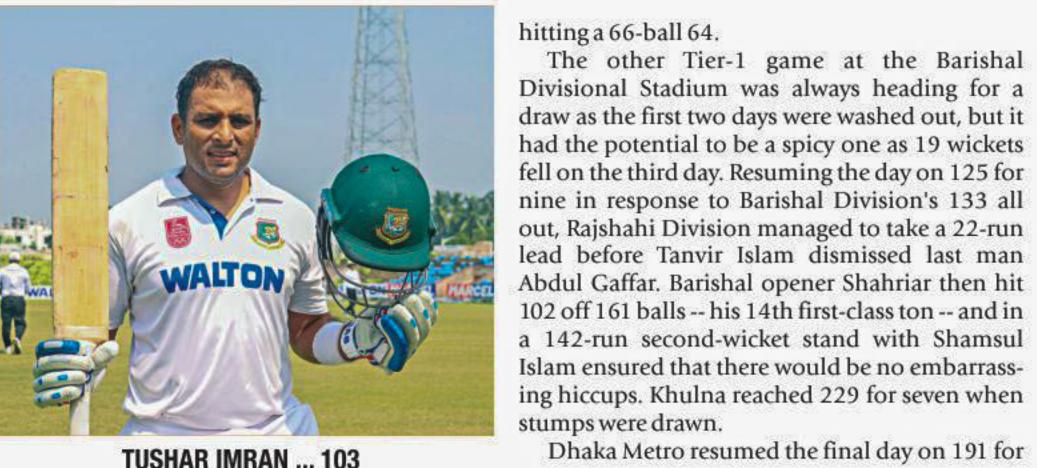
stabilised the hosts' innings. Rakibul went on to bag the prized wicket of Sonal, who held the Lankan innings together with his

201-ball 100. Left-arm medium pacer Shoriful Islam and Shahin

Alam also bagged two wickets. Bangladesh lost opener Tanjid Hasan and reached stumps at 18 for one in their

second innings. The young Tigers had earlier failed to capitalize on a good start on the first day

and slumped to 309 all-out in their first innings.



TUSHAR IMRAN ... 103