

## A cracker in the making?

goodness

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram



There was a lot of speculation about the nature of the wicket at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium (ZACS) leading up to the first Test between Bangladesh and West Indies.

Generally speaking there are two broad types of wickets at the ZACS. For most of its first decade, when a draw was all Bangladesh could hope for, the port city's premier venue sported slow and low wickets with lots of runs for batsmen and toil for bowlers. Then the second type of wicket made an appearance in the 2016 Test against England, when Bangladesh had enough faith in their spinners to ask for a truly spinning wicket.

After a reversion to the old style against Sri Lanka earlier this year, there was plenty of evidence yesterday -- not least Bangladesh picking four specialist spinners and West Indies just two pacers -- that the excitement of 2016 was back.

"This one spins, and the ball keeps low, and it also suddenly spins a lot," said Bangladesh centurion Mominul Haque after the first day's play. Bangladesh tailenders Taijul Islam and debutant Nayeem Hasan took the team to 315 for eight with an unbroken 56-run ninth-wicket stand.

"I think the tailenders batting well was very vital. Maybe if we win, that will be the reason.

West Indies left-arm spinner Jomel Warrican also thought that the momentum resided with Bangladesh.

"It is very good for batting but assists the spinners. The ball is coming on well for the batsmen, but the bounce is inconsistent. It is going to be a challenge as the wicket is turning from day one. It will become more difficult," he said.

Like in 2016, there was grass cover on the wicket in the leadup, which means that instead of a crumbling wicket, the pitch may hold together for five days. If that is the case and West Indies can challenge Bangladesh's total, a cracker may be in store.

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**BD-WI SCOREBOARD** 0/2 Mithun c Dowrich b Bishoo 20/50 34/68 2/0 4/3 1/0 Mushfigur Ibw b Gabriel 3/7 0/0 Mahmudullah b Gabriel 22/31 3/0 Mehedi b Warrican 24/60 2/0 Nayeem not out 32/57 3/1 Taijul not out

Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-105, 3-153, 4-222, 5-226, 6-230, 7-235, 8-259.

Chase

# A special ton even for Ctg

SAKEB SUBHAN from Chattogram

A Chattogram Test and a Mominul Haque century is not really new -- the quiet, slightly built Bangladesh left-hander had hit five tons at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium before yesterday's sixth. While it may seem par for the Chattogram course, his 120 on the first day of the first Test against West Indies was a slight departure.

CRYSTAL

REFLECTIVE

There is an unfortunate tendency in Bangladesh to view overachievers with suspicion. And Mominul -- quiet, unassuming, inexpressive and not fitting the mould of the new, brash and ambitious young Bangladesh superstar -- becoming Bangladesh's joint-highest Test centurion as well as having the country's highest Test average is the definition of

overachievement in many eyes.

Common criticisms have been that he scores runs on flat wickets and that he scores centuries during run sprees. That of course ignores the fact that four of those centuries came in the second innings -- three of them in service of draws and one in a winning cause.

However, there could be none of those criticisms against yesterday's innings, which was the only one of note on a difficult, turning wicket when he had to start at one for one in the first over against the new ball with Caribbean tails up.

"Compared to other wickets this one is a bit slower and takes more turn. The ones I played on before [at the venue] were flat and did not spin much. The ball also stays low," said Mominul after the day's play.

After Soumya Sarkar's dismissal in the first over,

Mominul put on 104 with Imrul Kayes in the first session and after Mohammad Mithun's dismissal midway through the second session, Mominul put on a 79-run fourthwicket stand with skipper Shakib Al Hasan. None of his partners, however, looked nearly as much in command as Mominul was over his 167-ball stay.

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শুধুই দেয়াল নয় স্মৃতির আঙ্গিনা

In the ill-fated Test series in the West Indies in July this year, he was guilty of losing his wicket by going hard at the ball outside off stump, especially when the pacers were operating around the wicket.

There was evidence yesterday that he had worked on that problem in technique and approach. Most impressive was his judgement of length. Length balls in the corridor of uncertainty were left alone, but whenever Kemar Roach and Shannon Gabriel overpitched, he extended his slight frame, meeting the ball low and adjacent to his eyes and driving forcefully. His backfoot play was on point as well, hooking and cutting wayward deliveries with a flourish.

He did have a bit of luck, being dropped on 67 by the wicketkeeper off leg-spinner Devendra Bishoo after lunch. His next mistake cost him his wicket as he succumbed to the temptation he had avoided all day -- chasing a wide Gabriel delivery and setting off a collapse of four wickets for 13 runs. It says much about his sense of responsibility that despite playing the definitive innings for his side, he took all the blame for Bangladesh nearly losing the ascendancy.

"I think the whole blame falls on me. He [Gabriel] probably would have bowled two more overs in that spell and [if I didn't get out] maybe we could have been in a stronger position at the end of the day, maybe for the loss of one more wicket. If I didn't get out, maybe the other wickets wouldn't have fallen

Mushfiqur [Rahim] bhai wouldn't have gotten out, neither [Mahmudullah] Riyad bhai nor Shakib bhai." Former coach Chandika

Hathurusingha -- who is rumoured to be one of those detractors and during whose tenure Mominul failed to strike a single ton -- was mentioned, but Mominul left that ball alone. "Maybe that [his cen-

tury-less streak] was good for me -- people encounter small struggles in life and it is up to what you can learn from that struggle. I never thought of it as having a point to prove to Hathurusingha. I am the one who has to perform on the field." As he walked away from

the press conference, he was probably not thinking that the corridor of uncertainty for his detractors had just grown narrower; instead just thinking about his next innings.

ten occasions, and have players who

are experienced on the biggest stage

Babu and Bashundara Kings assis-

tant coach Abu Faisal Ahmed have

both tipped their respective sides as

favourites in today's final, the match

"We are ready for the final. We are

Although Abahani coach Jakaria

and have winning pedigree.

#### BCL youth tourney gets nod

SPORTS REPORTER

There is no alternative to having youth teams at the club level if budding footballers are to be groomed at the grassroots level and the good news is that clubs are finally showing interest in forming youth teams. The teams in the

Bangladesh Championship League (BCL), the second-tier professional football league, gave their nod to participate in a youth tournament after the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday decided to introduce a youth football tournament among BCL participants.

The decision to hold such a tournament for the first time since the forming of the league six years ago was taken at a professional football league committee meeting yesterday.

All 11 clubs from the BCL must play the tournament, which will feature under-17 teams, after the completion of the upcoming 7th edition of the BCL, which will get underway from January 30.

#### Boon to leave after mother's passing

SPORTS REPORTER

David Boon, the ICC match referee in the Bangladesh-West Indies Test will not continue in the match in order to be with his family after the death of his mother Lesley Boon, aged 86, in Hobart yesterday.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) informed that ICC will declare a replacement for the remaining four days of the match in Chattogram.

A minute's silence will be observed in memory of the former Australian batsman's mother before start of play at 9:23am today.

### **NUMBERS GAME**

comparing me with him [Tamim Iqbal]. He is on another level in world cricket and Virat Kohli is even higher. I don't think about these things. The year is not over yet, there is the second innings and the second Test. I am thinking about how to

There is no question of

improve and contribute to the team.

> Bangladesh batsman **MOMINUL HAQUE**

Number of Bangladeshis with eight Test centuries. By striking 120 against West Indies yesterday, Mominul Haque joined Tamim Iqbal as one of the leading Test centurions in Bangladesh cricket.

Test centuries this year for Mominul. Only Virat Kohli, the Indian runmachine, has managed as many in 2018. Kohli took 17 innings to register his fourth ton while Mominul reached the mark in his 13th Test innings of the year.

#### PLAYERS TO WATCH



#### **SUNDAY CHIZOBA**

Although Nigerian marksman Sunday Chizoba had been the most reliable campaigner for Abahani in their recent successes, the 29-year-old seemed a shadow of his former self in the group stages. However, the longserving hitman shrugged off his poor performances by scoring one of three goals against Arambagh in the quarterfinal. He followed that up with a sublime hattrick against Sheikh Jamal in the semifinals and 10-time champions Abahani will be hopeful of another dominant performance from Sunday in

the final.



#### DANIEL COLINDRES

**World Cupper Daniel Colindres** has been the centre of most discussions regarding foreign recruits after Bashundhara Kings roped in the 33-year-old forward. The Costa Rican stole the show on his debut, scoring one and assisting three others, before firing a hattrick past Team BJMC to shoot the newcomers into the semifinals. Colindres has become the nucleus of the Kings, who will need the forward to provide another masterclass if they are to topple the final hurdle against Abahani today.

# Jinx, Abahani in way of Kings' coronation

ANISUR RAHMAN



Newcomers Bashundhara Kings will be dreaming of

on their debut appearance in topflight football in today's Federation Cup final but standing in the bigspenders' way is the imposing figure of giants Abahani.

The match will get underway at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today from 4:30pm with Channel 9 telecasting live from the venue.

Since the introduction of the and sundry to reach the final of the season's curtain-raising tournament on their debut appearances in 2010 and 2011 respectively. However, Sheikh Jamal's run was upended by Abahani in the final while Team BJMC were denied by Sheikh Jamal.

to reach the Federation Cup final in their debut season, now find 10-time champions Abahani in their way.

professional football league in 2008, Sheikh Jamal and Team BJMC were the only teams who stunned all

Bashundhara Kings, the third team

The Dhanmondi-based outfit

ond hattrick of Federation Cup titles since their triumphs from 1997-2000. However, an even bigger motivation is that a win would see the Sky Blues surpass archrivals Mohammedan's haul of 10 titles and give them sole supremacy.

On the pitch, the sides are evenly matched in terms of performances as well as on paper. Both finalists showed character in the group stage and knockout matches and have similar

strengths up front and similar problems in defence. Bashundhara Kings have hit 13 goals and conceded five in five matches while Abahani have scored eight goals and conceded five in four matches. Even their top-scorers, Daniel Colindres and Sunday Chizoba, are tied on four goals apiece.

However, the popular Abahani are ahead of Bashundhara in one aspect -- they have been in the tournament's final 18 times, winning on

hopeful of becoming champions by maintaining our consistent performance in the final," said Abahani coach Jakaria Babu. "We are simply taking Bashundhara Kings as just another opponent and will play our own game rather than thinking of their any player like Colindres." "Our target is to be champions. We have been trying to display good football from the group-stage matches. We want to be champions in our maiden appearance by beating giants Abahani," said Faisal, whose side will be bolstered

can go either way.

by the return of Kyrgyzstan midfielder Bakhtiyar Duyshobekov. Another thing that has added extra colour to the Federation Cup final is that the champions will represent Bangladesh in the upcoming AFC Cup and both sides are seemingly desperate to win the final to realise two objectives.



Bashundhara Kings captain Towhidul Alam Sobuz (R) and Abahani skipper Shahidul Alam Sohel pose with the Federation Cup Trophy on the eve of today's final. will be looking to clinch their sec-PHOTO: BFF