

# Soumya in line for meaningful return?

SPORTS REPORTER



During the Asia Cup less than three months ago, the team could not piece together two whole batsmen to open an ODI innings. It got to the point that in the final of the tournament, off-spinner and lower-order batsman Mehedi Hasan Miraz opened the innings with Liton Das.

That picture was turned upside down when Soumya Sarkar hit a blistering ton for BCB XI in the one-day warm-up match against the West Indies. Now Bangladesh have their pick of four in-form openers -- Imrul Kayes, Soumya, Tamim Iqbal and Liton -- to choose from for the first ODI against the Caribbean outfit on Sunday in Mirpur. However, Soumya's unbeaten 83-ball 103, which featured six sixes and nine fours, may have tipped the scales in his favour.

Bangladesh's best opener and one of the best in the world, Tamim was seen as the lone ranger at the top of the order without a partner to rely on. The only time someone matched him at the top was in 2015, when Soumya burst onto the scene and laid waste to Pakistan and South Africa's bowlers during dominant home series wins. That element of matching Tamim in

quality was also evident during their 114-run partnership yesterday.

Soumya however fell away and for much of 2016, 2017 and the first half of 2018 seemed to be fading into oblivion, but a string of scores -- most encouragingly in the domestic longer format games -- has shot him back into contention.

He had also scored a century in the warm-up game against Zimbabwe in October, but could not find a place in the first two ODIs, before coming into the side and scoring a century in the third game, along with Imrul.

"I tried to bat long, that has helped me score runs," Soumya said after the knock yesterday.

He said that after the century against Zimbabwe in the third ODI as well.

Imrul hit two centuries in the Zimbabwe series but has hurt his chances with failure in the Test series against West Indies; Liton hit a century in the Asia Cup final and scored 83 in the second ODI against Zimbabwe, but has been inconsistent. With his string of scores in the National Cricket League and in one-dayers recently, Soumya may possibly make a meaningful comeback -- perhaps the first of its kind for someone trying to partner Tamim.



**SOUMYA**  
**103** not out

**Soumya Sarkar staked a claim to an opening slot in ODIs after scoring an unbeaten 103 for BCB XI during the warm-up game against the West Indians at the BKSP yesterday.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# 'I'm wondering if they're tricking us'

SPORTS REPORTER

Ahead of an ODI series against Bangladesh, West Indies were served up as flat a track as can be in the warm-up match against BCB XI at the BKSP in Savar yesterday. West Indies skipper Rovman Powell was not buying a bit of it.

It is no secret that West Indies' strength is their big-hitting prowess. It is even less of a secret that Bangladesh like to hound visitors with spin, and West Indies know that better than most after losing all of their 40 wickets to spin while being thrashed in the recently concluded two-Test series.

"I am wondering if Bangladesh are trying to trick us and put us on pretty good wickets just before the first game," said Powell after they lost the practice game by 51 runs in the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method. "That is something to think about."

West Indies have good reason to see conspiracy in a docile wicket. That is exactly what was given to the tourists in a two-day practice match at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram before a raging turner at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium saw the lose the first Test by 64 runs.

"Definitely not," he responded when asked whether he was expecting a similar pitch in Mirpur for Sunday's first ODI. "Just like the Test games, we believe that the pitches will spin here."

It is also something to think about that they were handily beaten on the type of wicket they would presumably prefer over a turner. Having scored 331 for eight, they allowed BCB XI to score 314 for six in just 41 overs before bad light stopped play. That may have displeased Powell more than the loss because after the spin domination in the Tests, they would have expected to be at least on level terms on a flat wicket.

While results in practice games do not count for much, the home side will be happy that they have already started winning a few mind games.



It's a good sign for the team that the backup cricketers are also in good shape. If there is competition in the team then the team looks in a good position. And the players will pick up according to the demands of the team. We are yet to decide who will open the innings with Tamim [Iqbal].

**MINHAJUL ABEDIN**  
CHIEF SELECTOR  
ON THE SWEET DILEMMA OVER THE OPENING POSITION

SPORTS REPORTER



A warm-up match ahead of an international series does not routinely garner a lot of attention, but West Indies' one-day tune-up against BCB XI yesterday was a special case as two of Bangladesh's most beloved cricketers -- opener Tamim Iqbal and ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza - made the trek down to BKSP in Savar to play the unofficial match.

Tamim would be playing competitive cricket for the first time in nearly three months after fracturing his left knuckle during the Asia Cup opener on September 15. Mashrafe, meanwhile, would be playing for the first time since buying nomination papers for the upcoming general election. All eyes were therefore on the BKSP to see what impact these different kinds of distractions had on the two.

There was good news all around for Bangladesh supporters when bad light ended play yesterday with nine overs of BCB XI's chase of West Indies' 331 for eight.

A blistering 73-ball 107 from Tamim and an unbeaten 83-ball 103 from Soumya Sarkar took BCB XI to 314 for six by that point and made them winners by 51 runs through the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method.

Mashrafe was his wily self with the ball, recording the most economical figures of the run-drenched day with eight overs for 31 runs and the wicket of Marlon Samuels. He also scored an aggressive 22 to help Soumya navigate a tricky situation and take the team to a

winning position.

The biggest boon for Bangladesh heading into the ODI series from Sunday against the same opposition was that Tamim appeared not to have missed a single beat over the last 10-11 weeks. On the contrary, the left-hander seemed to take it up a notch in how he went after the West Indies bowlers.

He got going in his customary style in the third over, clipping Kemar Roach off his pads through midwicket for four and then launched into a cover drive to collect his second boundary. Most encouragingly, there was no sign of the side strain that delayed his comeback to the side when he got up on his toes and creamed a square cut to the point boundary.

The tone of his innings was set when, in the seventh over from Kemar Roach, he rolled back the years by dancing down the track and lofting the fast bowler over long on for six.

Imrul Kayes scored 27 in an 81-run opening stand before he was caught at point off Roston Chase in the ninth over. Soumya then came in and gave able support to Tamim, who was in murderous mood.

The Chattogram native reached his fifty off just 34 balls and took just 36 more deliveries to notch his century.

## SCORES IN BRIEF

**WEST INDIANS:** 331 for 8 in 50 overs (Powell 43, Hope 81, Hetmyer 33, Chase 65 not out, Allen 48; Rubel 2-55, Mehedi 2-65, Nazmul 2-61)  
**BCB XI:** 314 for 6 in 41 overs (Tamim 107, Imrul 27, Soumya 103 not out, Mashrafe 22 not out; Chase 2-57, Bishoo 2-81)  
**Result:** BCB XI won by 51 runs (D/L method)



**Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (R) shakes hands with West Indies opener Shai Hope, who scored 81 against the BCB XI during a warm-up game at the BKSP yesterday.**

PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh's highest scorer in ODIs and Tests added a fourth six to 13 boundaries after reaching his hundred before being stumped off Chase trying for a fifth, ending a 114-run stand over just 13.5 overs for the second wicket.

A mini-collapse followed as Mohammad Mithun, Ariful Haque, Towhid Hridoy and Shamim Patwary all

came and departed in quick succession. Soumya, however, was assured throughout -- apart from when he skied a ball before reaching fifty and it eluded a confused Marlon Samuels. Patwary's dismissal, bowled by Fabian Allen, brought the score down to 265 for six in the 36th over, which is when Mashrafe walked out to uproarious cheers.

Earlier, it was Rubel Hossain -- another returnee to the scene who impressed with the ball -- who went out for the toss, which the West Indies won before choosing to bat. Their 331 for eight was built on 81 from opener Shai Hope and an unbeaten 51-ball 65 from Roston Chase. It however proved insufficient on a belter of a wicket at the BKSP.

# Pujara keeps India in fight

AFP, Adelaide



Cheteshwar Pujara scored a gritty 123 in punishing conditions to claw India back into the opening Test in Adelaide Thursday after Australia seized early control with some blistering bowling.

Nathan Lyon, Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc all grabbed two wickets as temperatures topped 36 Celsius (96.8 Fahrenheit) and the tourists wilted to 250-9 at stumps on day one.

The experienced Pujara faced 246 balls in his gutsy knock -- passing 5,000 Test runs for his 16th Test century -- as the wickets tumbled around him, including superstar captain Virat Kohli for three.

At the end of a day characterised by poor shot selection, Pujara went for a quick single on the second last ball and was removed in a brilliant run-out by a diving Cummins.

"It was one of my top innings in Test cricket, I could say top five," said Pujara, adding that he was disappointed other batsmen didn't do as well.

"To be honest we should have batted better but they also bowled well in the first two sessions and I knew that I had to stay patient and wait for the loose balls."

Bating after Kohli won the toss, the visitors crumbled in a disastrous morning session under a pace barrage before digging in later in the day, with Pujara and Ravi Ashwin (25 off 76 balls) staging a fightback as the bowlers tired.

## SCORES IN BRIEF

**INDIA:** First innings 250 for 9 (Pujara 123, Sharma 37, Pant 25, Ashwin 25; Starc 2-63, Hazlewood 2-52, Cummins 2-49, Lyon 2-83)



**India's Cheteshwar Pujara raises his bat after scoring a century against Australia on the first day of the first Test at the Adelaide Oval yesterday.**

PHOTO: AFP

# MSC staring at early exit

## Chittagong Abahani advance to last 8

SPORTS REPORTER



Chittagong Abahani booked a quarterfinal berth in the Independence Cup with a single-goal win over Rahmatganj while Mohammedan found themselves on the verge of elimination following a 2-0 defeat to newcomers NoFel SC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Chittagong Abahani, runners-up in the previous edition, are now on top of Group B with a maximum six points from two outings followed by NoFel in second, who have three points from two games.

Rahmatganj and Mohammedan are facing early exits with one point each from two matches but both the Old Dhaka outfit and the Black and Whites have a slim chance of progression. However, they will need outright wins and other results to go their way if they are to advance to the last eight. Mohammedan take on Chittagong Abahani while Rahmatganj meet NoFel in their final group games.

Going down at the hands of the lightweight was a source of frustration for Mohammedan fans and a couple hundred of the dejected audience could not restrain themselves from hurling abuse towards players and officials at

the final whistle.

There was also visible frustration among the players in the dugout after the final whistle perhaps owing to the mistakes that led to both goals. Two players were involved in a heated exchange that almost turned into a scuffle before an official intervened and calmed things down.

Once the country's powerhouse, Mohammedan find themselves faced with the prospect of elimination from the group stage for the second successive tournament this season.

However, there have surprisingly been no discussions about their poor performances on the field, where they had yesterday hardly created any scoring opportunities barring an innocent shot from Pashban Mollah which rattled the crossbar after the flight of the ball.

Packed with out-of-form veterans, Mohammedan went down in the 28th minute after Ashraful Islam struck before Mohammad Roman wrapped up the victory for NoFel by tapping into an open net in stoppage time of the second half.

In the day's earlier match, Chittagong Abahani's Gambian forward Momodou Bah struck the decisive goal through a 39th-minute header.

**RAHMATGANJ 0 - 1 CTG ABAHANI**  
(BAH 38')  
**NOFEL SC 2 - 0 MOHAMMEDAN**  
(ASHRAFUL 28', ROMAN 90'+5)

# An embarrassing emergence

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Under-23 team put up a sordid batting display as they suffered a 97-run defeat to the UAE in their opening match of the Emerging Teams Asia Cup at the Southend Club ground in Karachi yesterday.

170 all-out was Bangladesh's reply to the UAE's 267 as batsmen like Nazmul Hossain (8), Mosaddek Hossain (0) and captain Nurul Hasan (0) failed to even reach double digits.

It could have been even more embarrassing had Shafiful Islam and Shoriful Islam not added 54 runs for the ninth wicket.

Left-arm spinner Ahmed Raza dismissed Shafiful for 32 runs to break the partnership and then ended Bangladesh's chase by removing last man Khaled Ahmed to finish with match figures of four for 50.

Shoriful, who hit three sixes and a four, was unbeaten on 31.

Raza, along with leg spinner Imran Haider, scripted the memorable win for UAE. Imran also picked up four wickets, giving away 35 runs.

Before the exchange, opener Ashfaq Ahmed's 93-ball 98 and Ghulam Shabbir's 57-ball 52 gave UAE a competitive total of 267.

Bangladesh will face Hong Kong in their second match today.