

Sabbir growing in confidence

SPORTS REPORTER from Napier

It was almost a fresh start for Sabbir Rahman after the hard-hitting batsman was included in the Bangladesh ODI side a month before his six-month ban from international cricket concluded.

The cricketer has started growing in confidence, something that he was worried he would lack ahead of the three-match ODI series starting against New Zealand at McLean Park tomorrow.

The 27-year-old scored 40 off 41 balls in the practice game against a New Zealand XI on Sunday to help Bangladesh post 247 before the visitors went down by two wickets.

"I played some good knocks in the BPL and also scored 40 runs in the practice game here. So I am getting confidence and I was scared before playing the first few games about whether or not I would be able to gain confidence. But now I am feeling better and confident. As I played in an international environment in the BPL, it helped me a lot," Sabbir said at the team hotel in Napier yesterday.

Bangladesh have never won any international game in New Zealand and according to Sabbir, the Tigers will be eyeing a winning start to the series and even look to win the ODI series.

"Obviously the first match of a series is always important. If we are able to win the first game we will be mentally ahead and then we will look to win the series. If we can play the way we have been playing both at home and away over the



Bangladesh batsman Sabbir Rahman (L) and manager Khaled Mashud enjoy a leisurely stroll about the team hotel after arriving in Napier ahead of the three-match ODI series against hosts New Zealand, which gets underway tomorrow morning. PHOTO: MAZHAR UDDIN

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SABBIR RAHMAN
BANGLADESH BATSMAN

past three years, it will be a good tour for us," he said.

Conditions in New Zealand have always been a challenge for any visiting side but Sabbir believes they are quite similar to Bangladesh and he expected that the Tigers would be able to adapt and give their best.

However, he admitted that losing Shakib Al Hasan to a finger injury at the last moment would certainly hurt them during the crucial tour.

"Obviously it's a huge challenge as he is an all-rounder and also the most experienced and most crucial member of the side. At the same time, he is also our best spinner so it has a great effect on our team and no one will be able to take his place, but we will try to cover that [loss] as a team," Sabbir added.

Bangladesh will begin their first training session at the Anderson Park in Napier today.

| FIXTURES | | | |
|----------|------------|--------------|--------|
| Date | Match | Venue | Time |
| Feb 13 | First ODI | Napier | 7:00am |
| Feb 16 | Second ODI | Christchurch | 4:00am |
| Feb 20 | Third ODI | Dunedin | 4:00am |

Channel 9 will telecast the matches live while reruns will air from 6:00pm. All times are Bangladesh standard.

TIGERS set for NZ challenge

STAR SPORT DESK

With slightly unpleasant memories of their last tour and without talismanic all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, Bangladesh will kick off their sojourn through New Zealand with the first ODI against the hosts in Napier tomorrow.

Shakib's absence due to a fractured left little finger notwithstanding, the Tigers were boosted by the arrival of skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Tamim Iqbal, who reached Napier yesterday along with three other squad members who had stayed behind to fulfil their Bangladesh Premier League commitments. The second and third ODIs will be held in Christchurch and Dunedin on February 16 and 20 respectively, before the Tigers take on New Zealand in a three-Test series from February 28. In Bangladesh's

previous visit to New Zealand in 2016-17, the Tigers lost all three ODIs, two T20Is and two Tests and have never beaten the hosts in their backyard across three tours of the country.

They did come close to winning an ODI on the last tour, but wasted the opportunity and quite a few others that they created. They were also well on the way to achieving a drawn first Test in Wellington, where Shakib hit a double-century and Mushfiqur Rahim scored

159, but they crumbled to a defeat in their second innings on the fifth day.

Even though Shakib will not be there for much of the tour as the Test skipper will need at least three weeks to recover from the fracture, Mashrafe and Co can draw from the last tour and know that they can push their hosts if they can keep their act together.



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA



KANE WILLIAMSON

| TIGERS' ODI RECORD IN NEW ZEALAND | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|--------|-----|
| Mts | Wins | Losses | N/R |
| 11 | 1 | 10 | 0 |

| ODIS AGAINST NEW ZEALAND | | | |
|--------------------------|------|--------|-----|
| Mts | Wins | Losses | N/R |
| 31 | 10 | 21 | 0 |

Mash, Tamim take Scenic route

MAZHAR UDDIN from Napier

Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Tamim Iqbal were the last two members of the squad to reach the Scenic Hotel in Napier to join the team after a car journey of over six hours from Auckland yesterday.

It was the fear of flying in a small aircraft that compelled Tamim and Mashrafe to take the scenic route southeast from Auckland, where they reached Sunday and made the drive the following day.

The size of the aircraft did not much bother two other members of the side, Rubel Hossain and Mohammad Saifuddin, who reached Christchurch yesterday and changed flights in Wellington before finally arriving in Napier.

The city on New Zealand's eastern coast is currently preparing for the famous annual Art Deco Festival, to be held from February 13 to 17, which has its roots in a massive 7.9 Richter scale earthquake that destroyed most of the commercial heart of Napier on February 3, 1931.

The city was rebuilt in 1930s fashion and by the end of the decade Napier was the newest city carrying, and the Art Deco is held to celebrate the courage the city displayed during those hard times.

It is undoubtedly the best time for the city to host the first match of the three-match ODI series between New Zealand and Bangladesh, but for journalists travelling from Bangladesh it was a hassle to find



Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) and batsman Tamim Iqbal (R) enjoy some much needed refreshments following their six-hour drive from Christchurch to Napier. The journey would have been six times shorter had the two Tigers not feared flying in small aircrafts. PHOTO: STAR

accommodation, which at the moment is quite expensive.

Back at the Scenic Hotel, where the cricketers spent a rest day yesterday ahead of the first game tomorrow at McLean Park, Mahmudullah Riyad was roaming around the hotel lobby and was the first to welcome Mashrafe and Tamim when they reached yesterday afternoon.

In just a couple of hours, Mashrafe was outside the hotel again to meet his 2003 World Cup teammate, former Bangladesh opener Al Shahrar Rokon, who has been living in Napier for the past few years.

Famous for his love of 'adda' (chatting), Mashrafe immediately engaged Rokon and a few other expatriates in a lively conversation, answering queries from fans who eager

to know about his entry into politics, Tigers' chances of winning their first ever international game against New Zealand in their own backyard, and many other topics.

When this journalist asked Mahmudullah about the unorthodox bowling action that he employed during warm-up match against New Zealand XI on Sunday, he said with a big smile: "Actually, I try that bowling action jokingly in the nets but that day a few of my teammates asked me to bowl with that action just once in the practice game, and I did it."

Tamim soon joined in the adda and shared his fear of flying in small aircrafts and to make him more uncomfortable, this journalist reminded him that the team would have to change flights in Wellington, which is notoriously windy, for the second ODI in Christchurch.

"I am not going to change flights, that too in Wellington. I would much rather make the journey by road or take a direct flight," Tamim said.

By then Sabbir Rahman, Liton Das, Mominul Haque, Soumya Sarkar and Shadman Islam returned to the hotel after dinner at a nearby Turkish restaurant in a relaxed mood.

Missing out, of course, was Shakib Al Hasan who was injured just before the crucial tour of New Zealand. It was a big blow for Bangladesh but with the full squad now in New Zealand, and heart of the team in Mashrafe present, the Tigers seems relaxed and confident of taking on the hosts as the preparation for the upcoming ICC World Cup in England truly gets underway.

Rescheduled DPL to begin in March

SPORTS REPORTER



The Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) has rescheduled the Dhaka Premier League (DPL), the country's lone top-flight 50-over domestic competition.

On January 13, the CCDM had informed following a meeting that they were planning to start the league from February 20 and the players-by-choice draft, which was scheduled to take place today, will once again be in place.

League coordinator Amin Khan however informed yesterday that they were preparing to start the league from March 1 after the completion of the players' draft on February 18. In the players-by-choice system, the 12 clubs choose from a player pool in a sequence decided by lottery.

"Our players, officials and coaches were busy with the recently-concluded Bangladesh Premier League, so they need time to think about the league and that's why it's not possible to hold the players' draft on February 12. Instead it may be held on February 18. Accordingly, we are also taking preparations to start the league from March 1," Amin said.

"There is no option for icon players. Like the previous year there will be six to seven categories including A+, A etc. The highest amount will be Tk 35 lakh," he added.

Each team can retain a maximum of three players and after the players' draft, clubs can release three players on the basis of mutual understanding.

The new schedule however gives national players, who will return home after playing the third and final Test against New Zealand between March 16 and 20, the opportunity to play matches in the Super League stage.

However, Amin said that they were not sure how many national players would play the league as many have already expressed their desire to rest and they will also be busy with World Cup preparations.

Cummins claims top honour

AFP, Melbourne

Australian fast bowler Pat Cummins won the Allan Border Medal on Monday, the country's highest cricketing honour, after a tumultuous year for the sport that was rocked by the ball-tampering scandal.

The award, presented in Melbourne, has been won by Steve Smith and David Warner two times each over the previous four years.

The two batsmen received a one year ban for their roles in the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa and will be eligible for international selection again at the end of March.

Cummins, 25, narrowly won the medal with 156 votes, beating Nathan Lyon with 150 and Aaron Finch with 146.

Denly, Root consolidate lead

AFP, Gros-Islet



England built on an already dominant position in reaching 207 for three in their second innings, an overall lead of 330 runs, at tea on the third day of the third and final Test against West Indies in St Lucia yesterday.

With the home side short-handed in the bowling department on the day and without regular captain Jason Holder for the match, the tourists took full advantage of the situation in adding another 99 runs in the afternoon session for the loss of Joe Denly's wicket.

Denly rode his luck in getting to 69 before falling to Shannon Gabriel on a 74-run second-wicket partnership with Joe Root. The fast bowler continued to charge in at pace and was eventually rewarded with the wicket via a catch to wicketkeeper Shane Dowrich.

Captain Root was then joined by Jos Buttler and the pair have progressed without too many difficulties, their

It's a day I'll never forget. Any time it's not going quite right I can look back on this game and have fond memories. I've had some horrible dark days with injuries and things like confidence and self-belief. I thought in my own mind I was an England player but I hadn't shown it. I felt like today I've shown I am an England player.

MARK WOOD, ENGLAND PACER

fourth-wicket stand already worth 60 with Root on 45 and Buttler on 37 going into the final session of the day as they pursue a consolation victory after already surrendering the series and the Wisden Trophy following defeats in the first two Tests in Barbados and Antigua.

Resuming at the overnight posi-

tion of 19 without loss, the tourists suffered an immediate setback when Rory Burns clipped the first delivery of the morning to Alzarri Joseph at square-leg to give Keemo Paul immediate success.

West Indies did not help their increasingly difficult situation when Shimron Hetmyer put down a simple chance offered by Denly off Shannon Gabriel. It proved a costly miss.

He lost the other opening batsman, Keaton Jennings, midway through the morning when the left-hander attempted to turn a delivery from Joseph top the leg-side and the ball ricocheted off his body onto the stumps to send him back to the pavilion for 23.

SCORES IN BRIEF
ENGLAND: First innings 277 & second innings 207 for 3 (Denly 69, Root 45 not out, Buttler 37 not out; Paul 1-11, Joseph 1-37)
WEST INDIES: First Innings 154 all out (Campbell 41, Dowrich 38, Roach 16 not out; Moeen 4-36, Wood 5-41)



England batsman Joe Denly struck a fluent 99-ball 69, laced with 11 fours, to help the visitors to a 330-run lead with seven wickets remaining in their second innings at tea on the third day of the third Test against West Indies at the Darren Sammy Stadium in St Lucia yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS