

SPORT



Two of Bangladesh's most formidable pacers, Rubel Hossain (L) and Mustafizur Rahman (C), seemed less than threatening as they fooled around on the ground during the Tigers' training session in Dunedin ahead of the final ODI against New Zealand yesterday. With the Test series set to begin soon, Mominul Haque was seen gearing up for what should be the perfect format for him to perform in.



PHOTO: MAZHAR UDDIN

The Shafiul predicament

MAZHAR UDDIN from Dunedin

When was the last time Bangladesh pacer Shafiul Islam played an ODI away from home? It would be quite hard to recall, so patchy has been the nature of his appearances since making his ODI debut back in 2010.

The same question was asked of the seamer, who is currently with the Tigers' ODI side in New Zealand. Lest one think that this is a satire piece, his actual reply with a smile that could have easily been read as resigned was a resigned one: "Ah... I can't remember... I have played a one-day game in Bangladesh before 2015 against England. I am preparing myself to give my best as I get to learn a lot with the team. The national team has good facilities."

Shafiul played his last ODI away from home back in May 2013 against Zimbabwe in Bulawayo while the last time he played an ODI was back in 2016 against England, which the lean pacer could not remember as well.

But interestingly, his luck with the team is in stark contrast to his squad selection as the 29-year-old has almost been a regular part of the touring Bangladesh squad was with the team in nearly 80 per cent of tours since the ICC Champions Trophy in 2017, but had to return home without zero matches added to his career.

"I have done quite a few tours in the recent past as I was part of the West Indies [2018] tour but was unable to play. It was the same in Zimbabwe. I played a T20 in South Africa but couldn't play any ODIs. Actually I don't want to remember the negatives. I will try to start afresh whenever I get the opportunity," he said.

It may sound like a cruel joke, but his main function has become that of a high-quality net bowler for the Tigers and even the selectors cannot explain the reason for his inclusion. His career is proof that there was not much faith in him at any point.

"Obviously, I do get upset but it is also challenging. If I remain upset it will hurt my game. Obviously, the hunger is there,"

Shafiul added.

QUANDARIES ABOUND

The Bangladesh team is currently struggling to find an extra batsman as replacements for the two injured cricketers Mushfiqur Rahim and Mohammad Mithun for the third ODI. A lack of foresight on the part of the selectors could be blamed for this dilemma. They eventually had to include Mominul Haque from the Test squad as a back-up for the third ODI.

"I think we could have included someone extra in the squad to prepare for the World Cup, which I think may be a good idea. But it's not like whatever I want or think will happen as there are others to take the decision," Bangladesh ODI skipper Mahsrafe Bin Mortaza said on the matter.



Bangladesh's Shafiul Islam may be included in just about every tour the Tigers go on but interestingly, the pacer hardly ever gets any game time.

PHOTO: STAR

Can Tigers resist ahead of Tests?

SPORTS REPORTER from Dunedin

With Bangladesh already having lost the three-match ODI series against the Kiwis with a game in hand, the focus for the Tigers will now be to recover some confidence for their first ever three-match Test series in the tough conditions of New Zealand.

Bangladesh have never won a Test match over the 13 matches that the two sides have contested with each other. The Tigers lost 10 of those while managing to draw three. Bangladesh, who are still searching for their first ever international win in New Zealand, have lost all seven matches played away from home.

Adapting to conditions hostile for any subcontinent team has remained the biggest challenge for the visitors, which was evident during their

losses in the first two ODIs. Bangladesh's batsmen struggled to deal with the Kiwi seamers' sheer pace and movement.

It was the Tigers' top order that has remained below par as Bangladesh lost their first five wickets for less than 100 runs in both games and the third and final ODI will be a great platform for the visitors to stage a comeback and avoid the humiliation of being whitewashed.

Bangladesh has managed to post modest totals of 232 and 226 in the first two ODIs respectively and it's the batting department which needs to fire now.

Talking about adapting to tough Kiwi conditions, the players also need to make some adjustments if they are to deal with the Kiwi seamers and once again it will be the likes of Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad who need to lead the resistance in the absence of

Shakib Al Hasan, who is sitting out the tour so far with a eleventh-hour finger injury.

There are other injury concerns too for the Tigers as Mushfiqur is suffering from multiple injuries along with his pre-existing rib injury and unfortunately for the tourists, the scan report revealed that the wicketkeeper-batsman has suffered a broken rib yet again.

Mohammad Mithun, who scored consecutive fifties, in the first two ODIs also suffered a Grade 1 hamstring tear while taking a quick single in the second ODI in Christchurch. He is expected to recover ahead of the first Test in Hamilton on February 28.

At the same time, the Tigers' fast bowling department also needs to step up if they are to win their first ever Test against the Kiwis, that too in their own den and the visitors need to take 20 opposition wickets, which will be a humongous task.

The Lady with the Steadicam

SPORTS REPORTER from Dunedin

A 56-year-old lady carrying a 26kg Steadicam and moving all over the ground to capture the closest moments on the field is a regular sight whenever there is an international cricket match in New Zealand.

Rebecca Wilson Jennings is the name of that famed Kiwi and she has been working as a camera operator for over thirty years, half of those with the Steadicam in hand. Working for Sky Sports, Rebecca captures the toss before the game and moves around the ground whenever a batsman gets dismissed while also capturing footage of the spectators.

However, it's not just her; being behind the cameras is very much a family affair. Her husband, Mike Wilson, is a stump-cam expert while her son and daughter have also worked as her assistant.

Rebecca studied physics but had a passion for videography and after chasing her dreams for over three decades, she is now famously known as 'The Lady with the Steadicam'.

"I love to move around the ground during the games and I enjoy my work a lot. Obviously at times it's tough. You need to be strong as the whole camera set up is over 26 kgs and you have to operate it while driving on two wheels. But it is not that complicated to operate the Steadicam. All you need is to remain focused as you never know when you may need to move during a game," Rebecca told The Daily Star yesterday.



PHOTO: MAZHAR UDDIN

Wrist-spin promise to the fore?

SPORTS REPORTER

Perhaps a leg-spinner is the last piece of the puzzle that could provide more balance to the Bangladesh squad. In that regard, Bangladesh could be hopeful about

completing that jigsaw sometime in the near future as it was a leg-spinner -- North Zone's Saiful Islam Pramanik -- who shone the brightest in the one-day version Youth Cricket League (YCL) final, helping his side become champions with an 11-run win over East Zone at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi yesterday.

After being sent in to bat, opener Anik Sarker's 51 and batsman Meherab Hossain's 68-ball 61 in the middle led North to a respectable 219 for eight. However the day belonged to Saiful, who proved that a leg-spinner can be vital in times of need, registering match winning figures of five for 28 in 10 overs.

While speaking to The Daily Star, tournament coordinator Shafaq Al Zabir held the young bowler in high regard, insisting that this edition of YCL saw some talented leg-spinners.

"Today the player [Saiful] who won the player-of-the-match award was also a leg-spinner. Like him, there were one or two leg-spinners in almost every team. Maybe, not all of them took many wickets in the tournament but they bowled really well."

Another boon of the tournament could be how competitive the competition was, with

the final itself being the biggest indicator. It was a 59-run 10th wicket partnership between East batsmen Abu Bokkor Jr and Mehedi Hasan that almost saved the day for their side before the latter was dismissed after scoring a heroic 36-ball 32 at the death. However, despite efforts from tail-enders, East fell short, managing just 208 in 49.2 overs.

Zabir was also in awe of the young players' dedication and hailed their fighting spirit.

"It was a very good, competitive tournament. For instance, if you look at today's game, you can see that after North Zone set a 220-run target, the last-wicket partnership [East's] was more than fifty runs and that

took the game very close. Like this, there was heavy competition in almost every match. The tournament even saw 260 runs chased down by the youngsters," he said.

While the previous editions of the YCL in 2016-2017 saw a T20 tournament held alongside the mainstream longer-version event, this, the third edition, was the first time the one-day version was introduced. Zabir explained that there was a special reason behind the change.

"We want the players to play all versions but as there is the Under-19 World Cup on the horizon, we arranged for a one-day version alongside the longer-version this

year."

Although it seems a bit early to tell yet, the exciting prospects found at this level could enrich the current Under-19 squad and make for an exciting Under-19 World Cup, which will hold in January-February 2020 in South Africa.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NORTH ZONE: 219 for 8 in 50 overs (Anik 51, Meherab 61, Leon 38; Avishek 2-37, Bokkor Jr 2-25)

EAST ZONE: 208 all out in 49.2 overs (Alvi 59, Bokkor Jr 28, Mehedi 32; Saiful 5-28, Tareq 2-34)

Result: North Zone won by 11 runs.



A jubilant North Zone take a victory lap after winning the YCL one-day final by 11 runs against East Zone, courtesy of Saiful Islam's (R) five-for, in Rajshahi yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Taylor 51 shy of NZ ODI record

ICC

Ross Taylor, the New Zealand batsman, is just 51 runs away from becoming the all-time leading run-scorer in one-day internationals for his country.

Taylor, on 7957 runs from 217 games at an average of 48.22, is just behind Stephen Fleming, the former captain, who scored 8007 runs from 279 matches. He has a chance to take over the record in the third ODI against Bangladesh in Dunedin on Wednesday.

However, the middle-order batsman, who will turn 35 next month, played down his feat. "If you play enough games, some of these mile-

stones come along," he told reporters on the eve of the game.

"I guess it'd be nice, but hopefully there's a few runs left in me. Flem was someone that I looked up to as a player growing up, and when I first made the Black Caps as well."

Taylor already holds the national records for most centuries (20), most fifties (66) and highest average. Of late, he's been in a purple patch of sorts, making six consecutive fifty-plus scores before the series against India. But he sees all of this only as records to be broken.

"My mentor, Martin Crowe, used to always say to try and get to these



records, but you're just setting up for the next guy to come along and beat them," he said. "Hopefully, in years to come, Guppy [Martin Guptill] and Kane [Williamson] can come and beat it as well."

If he does get the record, it will be another chapter in his love affair with the University Oval, Dunedin. The town was where he began that run of consecutive 50-plus scores last year. Taylor, battling a quadriceps injury, heroically steered his side from 2/2, smashing his career-best 181* to chase down England's challenging 335/9. A few years earlier, in 2013, he had made a double-century at the

venue against the Windies.

The night before the 181*, he had eaten at a restaurant called 'Madam Woo'. "I think it's closed, so lucky I'm not superstitious before the game!" he joked.

Thinking back to that game against England, Taylor said, "I don't think it was until we got to maybe around the 40th over that I thought we had a good chance of winning it. The quad gave way. In hindsight it was probably a good thing to stand and deliver. I wasn't able to do much running."

But Taylor knows the past counts for little in a match. He's looking at the future, and knows that any experience his side take away from this series will be handy during the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2019.

IPL kicks off on March 23

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Defending champions Chennai Super Kings will take on Royal Challengers Bangalore in the opening match of IPL 2019 in Chennai on March 23.

The schedule is only for the first two weeks of the tournament and "subject to the announcement of the Lok Sabha 2019 election dates."

As per the current schedule, as many as 17 matches will be played from March 23 to April 5.



IPL RELEASES FIXTURES FOR FIRST TWO WEEKS