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Injury puts Tigers in a corner

SPORTS REPORTER



After preparing inadequately for the ODI series,

Bangladesh's preparation for the upcoming Tests are also not going swimmingly due to injury worries. Although coach Steve Rhodes said that Bangladesh would want to field their best eleven, it appears that the Tigers can only line up with their best 'possible' eleven.

A number of key players, including captain Shakib Al Hasan, will be missing during the Test series. The all-rounder sustained a left little finger injury in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) final and missed out on the ODI series which the Tigers lost 3-0.

He was told to keep the finger immobilised for three weeks, meaning Shakib will not be able to take part in cricketing activities for another week. That obviously puts him out of the line-up for the first Test, due to start on February 28, and, taking recuperation time into account, he could miss out on the other two as well.

Another challenge is the tight schedule that will see the Tigers play three Tests in the span of 24 days. Although Rhodes said "it is not something to worry about", given that some of the squad are carrying niggling injuries, it could be a factor as the series progresses.

"I think that 15 days' cricket, which it could be out of 24 days, is difficult. Not many teams will play a three-Test series in 24 days," he commented.

Mushfigur Rahim sustained a wrist injury in the one-day practice game before a rib injury flared up in



Having suffered a clean sweep in the three-match ODI series, Bangladesh batting consultant Neil McKenzie (L) was seen putting batsmen through the drills in training yesterday. With the three-match Test series against the hosts in mind, the likes of Mominul Haque (R) will hope to capitalise on today's two-day practice match against New Zealand XI in Christchurch. PHOTO: MAZHAR UDDIN

the second ODI. Later, it was the situation. revealed that he had a broken rib.

Pacer Taskin Ahmed -- who was also ruled out of the ODI series, being replaced by newcomer Ebadot Hossain -- and Mohammad Mithun, expected to recover from his hamstring injury before the Tests, are also injury concerns.

Soumya Sarkar has already been drafted into the Test squad after the flurry of injuries and it appears that the Tigers will have to make a team on an ad-hoc basis. However, Rhodes remained hopeful that Bangladesh could make the best of

the biggest example.

injury in series has become a frequent reality in

the past year, it can no longer be used as an

excuse as Shakib-less Tigers have provided quite

a few impactful performances in recent past --

the positive results in last year's Asia Cup being

With the World Cup in sight, the sole take

away from the series could be how some

players -- Mohammad Saifuddin, Sabbir

Rahman, Mohammad Mithun and Mehedi

Hasan Miraz-- have stepped up while regular

and expected performers like Tamim,

runs at the death in the three ODIs respec-

tively while his performance with the ball in

the last ODI, where Bangladesh had con-

ceded over 300 runs, was praiseworthy. The

young all-rounder had ended the game with

comparatively economical figures of one

wicket for 43 runs in nine overs. Mithun

looked impressive during his back-to-back

fifties in the first two ODIs before missing

Mehedi added a valuable 26, 16 and 37

Mushfigur and Mahmudullah went missing.

"We are hopeful of putting 11 fit guys out there when we get around to the Test match. When you are not fit, it puts you at risk of injury," Rhodes said.

"We got a few little niggles here but hopefully we got a great medical team and they'll pull them through and we will put our best 11 out there. I am not sure, he's [Mushfigur has] got a problem with his wrist area, just above his thumb. The idea is to basically stop that moving so he has got a protection on that which will stop it from moving. We will keep it like that for three days and then we will

open it up and see what sort of movement there is and how the pain is and we will take it from there. But I wouldn't really say he is out or wouldn't really say in. So, the answer is sorry, I don't know."

In this scenario, given Mushfiqur and Mithun do not make it, the visitors are left with 13 players. Three of those are spinners in Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Nayeem Hasan and Taijul Islam while the conditions are expected to be pace-friendly. If Mushy does not play, Liton will have to keep wickets. It is a real conundrum heading into the Test series.

Ebadot's net fury

MAZHAR UDDIN from Christchurch



The challenge to overcome the

whitewash in the ODIs and stage a turnaround in the three-match Test series against New Zealand in difficult condi-

tions will not be an easy task for the Tigers. And to make it happen, it's not just the batsmen who will have to battle it out against the Kiwi pacers in seaming conditions but the Bangladeshi fast bowlers also need to step up and utilise the platform and, more importantly, take 20 wickets if

Bangladesh resumed their training ahead of the first Test starting from February 28 in Hamilton as the Tigers spent time at the nets at the Lincoln University ground in Christchurch, where they will take part in a two-day practice game today against a New Zealand XI.

the visitors want to win a Test.

The New Zealand Cricket website is expected to host a live stream of the match, scheduled to start from 11:00 am local

Apart from the injured Mushfigur Rahim, all members of the squad were present in the training session. Another injured batsman, Mohammad Mithun, batted at the nets yesterday without much discomfort while the other members of the side also had a good outing in strong, windy conditions. Talking about high-intensity training, it

was arguably the Tigers' stand-in captain for the Test series Mahmudullah Riyad who faced the toughest chin music from pacer Ebadot Hossain during the net ses-It was an action-packed 20 minutes at

the nets where Ebadot tested Mahmudullah to the limit, which the Tigers' coaching staff -- including bowling coach Courtney Walsh -- enjoyed a lot.

The tall fast bowler welcomed Mahmudullah with a nasty in-swinging length delivery which cut in sharply to the



right-hander, who could only manage to get an inside edge on to his thighs.

Despite the pain, Mahmudullah quickly returned to his batting position and Ebadot, this time, bowled a fast bouncer that the elegant right-hander somehow managed to fend off at the last

Even Bangladesh batting consultant Neil McKenzie was overheard saying to Walsh: "I really like the way he [Ebadot] is showing the aggression." The 25-year-old, who managed to

impress the selectors with his sheer pace and movement during the Bangladesh Premier League despite playing just four games, was about to test Mahmudullah even further. The right-arm seamer fired in a fuller

length delivery with good pace as the ball this time shaped away from Mahmudullah who could only manage to get an outside edge as Ebadot celebrated by punching the air.

Just after finishing an eventful net session, the captain praised the pacer and urged him to continue bowling with the same aggression in the upcoming Test series.

It will be important for the likes of Ebadot, Abu Jayed, Khaled Ahmed and of course Mustafizur Rahman to remain aggressive with their body language and look to exploit the seaming conditions to great effect if the Tigers really want to test the Kiwi batsman.

Bowling a problem too

NABID YEASIN



Almost all the questions were raised regarding Bangladesh's batting, especially the

repeated top-order debacles during their 3-0 ODI series whitewash at the hands of hosts New Zealand, which was sealed with an emphatic 88run defeat in Dunedin on Wednesday.

Bangladesh's top order was unable to put up any sort of resistance against the Kiwi pacers throughout the series, which played a major part in the undesirable outcome so close to the 2019 World Cup. However, while trying to find answers to why the likes of Tamim Iqbal, Liton Das, Mushfiqur Rahim, Soumya Sarkar and Mahmudullah Riyad failed miserably, one thing that skipped many eyes was that the bowling was also nowhere near the acceptable standard.

It was only in the third ODI that Bangladesh's bowling unit was truly tested. For the first time in the series Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's side bowled the whole 50 overs after electing to field first, whereas the previous two ODIs saw the Kiwi batsmen chase down Bangladesh's below par scores of 232 and 226 in 44.3 overs and 36.1 overs respectively, with eight wickets to spare each time.

The most concerning part came to the fore in the third ODI is how two of the leading pacers in Bangladesh's current squad --Mustafizur Rahman and Rubel Hossain -were taken for plenty by New Zealand. The nation's ace left-arm quick, Mustafizur took two wickets in the third game but conceded 93 runs in 10 overs at an alarming economy rate of 9.3, while Rubel -- although just playing his first match on tour -- leaked 64 in nine overs, scalping a solitary wicket.

It was, however, the ease with which the Kiwis batted on their way to posting a mammoth total that spoke more about the struggle of Bangladesh's bowlers in such conditions. New Zealand batsmen Henry Nicholls, Ross Taylor and Tom Latham -- all of whom scored fifties -- did not try anything out of the box, but just stayed on their back for most of their innings and played each ball according to merit, exactly the way it should be done on such a flat surface as the

one at the University Oval. Over the three ODIs, Bangladesh have conceded 792 runs in 130.4 overs at an economy of 6.07 runs and were able to pick up just 10 Kiwi wickets altogether. This provides a glimpse into how easily New Zealand dealt with Bangladesh's bowlers throughout the series.

Maybe the absence of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who missed out the ODI series due to a finger injury, could be pointed out for such horrendous bowling figures but such can also be said for the much talked about batting mishaps. And as missing Shakib due to

FORMAT

100 balls per innings

A change of ends after 10 balls

Bowlers deliver either five or 10 consecutive balls

Each bowler can deliver a

maximum of 20 balls per

game Each bowling side gets a

strategic timeout of up to two and a half minutes

A 25-ball Powerplay start for each team

Two fielders are allowed outside of the initial 30yard circle during the Powerplay

The Hundred: exploding the over

STAR SPORT DESK



The over as cricket fans know it will be completely reimagined, or destroyed as those of a traditional bent might say, when an eightteam league called 'The Hundred' starts

business in England next summer.

The BBC reported yesterday that the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has won the votes of 17 of the 18 first-class counties -- Surrey being the exception -- for The Hundred, a format where teams play 100 balls each. The ECB has also finalised the rules of play and the format -- completely different from any played at a professional level.

"The Hundred will help cricket to reach more people," ECB chief executive Tom Harrison was quoted as saying by the BBC.

"This new competition will help us to meet the ambitions of our game-wide strategy for 2020-24," Harrison said, while assuring that the ECB remains "totally committed to the existing, popular forms of cricket".

The concept elicited mixed reactions when it was originally mooted, perhaps because cricket already has a format where teams play 120 balls, or 20 overs, each called T20 cricket. It is the most popular and most lucrative format, with cash-rich franchisebased leagues mushrooming virtually everywhere in the cricketing world and beyond. Cricketing stars including India skipper Virat Kohli, former Indian captain Sourav Ganguly, former South African skipper AB de Villiers and Jamaican six-machine Chris Gayle have expressed opinions on the format -- some thinking it an unnecessary addition while others viewed it as an interesting innovation.

There is also a T10 League played in the United Arab Emirates, but it is yet to be taken seriously by the International Cricket Council.

WHAT THEY SAID

"Obviously for the people involved in the whole process and the set-up it will be really exciting but I cannot think of one more format, to be honest."

-Virat Kohli

"You got to be very careful that it should not be such that before a spectator comes and blinks, the thing (match) is over. The shorter the format gets, the difference between the very good and the ordinary becomes much lesser."

-Sourav Ganguly

"I can't see anything wrong with trying something different."

-AB de Villiers

"Well, if I don't start it (the Hundred), it won't be a tournament."

-Chris Gayle



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMA

RUBEL HOSSAIN

the last one due to a hamstring injury. Saifuddin put in an all-round performance throughout the series and announced himself as a genuine pace-bowling allrounder -- the type of player that could lend balance to any team. The all-rounder had twice scored forties in the series and was also instrumental with the ball too.

It was Sabbir who perhaps stood tallest among the lot as he scored his maiden ODI ton in the last game and marked his return to the national fold in style after having shown glimpses in the first two games. The right-hander celebrated his 110-ball 102 in animated fashion, indicating that he lets his bat do the talking now. And yes, a Bangladesh fan would love to see more of the same words from Sabbir's bat in the future.

There is a silver lining. Some of the failures in the top order -- Tamim, Mushfigur, Riyad are giants of Bangladesh cricket. Their woes were anomalies, and one could bet that they will fire back soon enough. The positives are that the performers in the tour used to represent a headache for the team management and their advent is surely a boon. However, as this tour proved, it counts for little if the whole team is not firing, and that is what they will have to work on.

Astle back for BD Tests

AFP, Wellington

Spinner Nathan Astle will resume his stop-start Test career against Bangladesh after beating Ajaz Patel for a spot in New Zealand's 13-man squad to face Bangladesh next week, selectors said Friday.

Astle was the only change in the squad that defeated Sri Lanka 1-0 in December to claim an unprecedented fourth Test series in a row for New Zealand.

Selector Gavin Larsen admitted it was "a tough call" to drop Patel, who was outstanding against Pakistan in the UAE.

"It's great though to have Todd fit again and we're keen to see what his wrist-spin can offer in New Zealand conditions, and he'll also bolster the batting," he said.

Astle, 32, made his Test debut against Sri Lanka in 2012 but since then has played only two more, most recently against England in March last year.

The first of three Tests begins in Hamilton on February 28.

SL sense historic series win

AFP, Port Elizabeth





South Africa and Sri Lanka were locked in a tense,

low-scoring battle at the end of the second day of the second Test at St George's Park yesterday. Needing 197 runs to achieve an historic series win, Sri Lanka were 60 for two at the close.

It was an extraordinary day's play during which 18 wickets fell and 282 runs were scored, leaving both teams with a chance of victory.

Sri Lanka, who won the first Test in Durban by one wicket, will become the first team from Asia to win a Test series in South Africa if they can score 137 more runs, while South Africa will earn a face-saving share of the series by taking the remaining eight wickets.

South Africa seemed set to take control when Sri Lanka collapsed in a flurry of strokes to be bowled out for 154 before lunch, giving South Africa a first innings lead of 68 runs. But Sri Lanka's bowlers hit back, bowling out the hosts for a paltry 128 - by 40 runs their lowest total in a home Test against the islanders.

Suranga Lakmal, Sri Lanka's most experienced bowler, took four for 39, while part-time off-spinner Dhananjaya de Silva took a Test-best three for 36. He was forced into a front-line role when left-arm spinner Lasith Embuldeniya



Sri Lanka pacer Suranga Lakmal was instrumental on the second day of the second Test against South Africa, helping the side bundle out South Africa for 128 in the second innings with figures of four for 39 yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

suffered a badly dislocated left thumb, which required surgery and prevented him from batting or taking the field yesterday.

Eleven runs after Faf du Plessis successfully reviewed a leg-before decision off the off-spinner, Lakmal trapped last batsman Duanne Olivier leg before wicket.

Sri Lankan captain Dimuth Karunaratne and Lahiru Thirimanne put on 32 for the first wicket at the start but both were dismissed in the space of six balls by Duanne Olivier and Kagiso Rabada respectively.

Silva 3-36)

Earlier, in a frenetic start to the day, Sri Lanka scored 94 runs but lost six wickets in 17.4 overs. SCORES IN BRIEF

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 222 & second innings 154 all out (Du Plessis 50 not out, Amla 32; Lakmal 4-49, De

SRI LANKA: First innings 154 all out (Dickwella 42, Thirimanne 29, Perera 20; Rabada 4-38, Olivier 3-61) and second innings 60 for 2 (Karunaratne 19, Fernando 17 not out)