

SPORT

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Junior players stepped up during ODI series against hosts New Zealand and they will be expected to do the same -- with more support from seniors -- when Bangladesh take on the Kiwis in the first of the three-match Test series today. Mustafizur Rahman (inset) will likely lead the inexperienced pace unit.

PHOTO: BCB



Riyad's Hamilton connection

MAZHAR UDDIN from Hamilton

Mahmudullah Riyad's connection with Hamilton has been a deep one as the city was the site of major turning points in Bangladesh's current stand-in skipper's career.

It was at Seddon Park in Hamilton in February 2010 when the elegant right-hander discovered himself as the next big thing when Mahmudullah smashed his maiden Test hundred in hostile conditions after coming in to bat at number eight.

The 33-year-old also smashed his second ODI hundred in the same venue against New Zealand, just after striking his maiden century in the previous game against England, during the ICC World Cup in 2015. That was also a new beginning for Mahmudullah in ODIs.

But when it comes to Test cricket, it took another nine years for Mahmudullah to register his second hundred -- against Zimbabwe last year in Dhaka, which was followed by another century against West Indies just a game later.

Mahmudullah is back to the scene of his personal triumphs and this time, in the absence of regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan due to injury, he is also the stand-in captain for the three-match Test series against the hosts starting from today.

But much like he will need to marshal his

relatively inexperienced troops Mahmudullah will also need to lead from the front with the bat in the middle order in the absence of another injured and experienced batsman in Mushfiqur Rahim. Known for his calm and ability to soak up pressure in difficult situations, the first Test against New Zealand in Hamilton will be a great platform for Mahmudullah the batsman to apply himself.

Apart from Tamim Iqbal at the top, the Tigers' batting lineup is missing the much needed experience in and it is Mahmudullah in his favourite city who can compensate in style.

"If I talk about this city, I would probably say Hamilton is one of my favourite cities in the world as I have a few good memories here. Having said that, I think it will be different conditions tomorrow [Thursday]; it will be a new day and I have to think about my game accordingly. Yes, when I am in my hotel room I do remember a few good memories of this city but I would say that past is past. It will be a new day, a different bowling attack, so I need to think what I can do tomorrow and I am positive about my approach," Mahmudullah told reporters in Hamilton yesterday.

Ever realistic and grounded, Mahmudullah may not want to think of his past deeds at the venue, but Bangladesh fans will hope that that is just his method of writing a new and perhaps most positive chapter to his Hamilton diaries.

Onus now on youngsters

MAZHAR UDDIN from Hamilton

If you ask the Bangladeshi cricketers about their favourite format, a majority would answer ODIs or T20s, mostly because of the glitz and glamour associated with the limited-overs formats.

There are a few exceptions though, and it is vital that the youngsters set a benchmark for themselves when it comes to adapting to and enjoying the longest and the most esteemed format of the game, which allows cricketers to grow in all aspects.

Among the exceptions is young Shadman Islam, who became Bangladesh's 94th Test cricketer in November last year when he scored 76 against West Indies on debut. The left-hander did show a glimpse of the temperament and composure that the longer version demands, but he must remember that his main challenge is about to begin here in New Zealand.

Among those 94 Test cricketers till date, a majority have been unable to sustain and establish themselves due to a lack of consistency or, to some extent, the disappointment of being left

out of the limited-overs side.

The likes of Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, and Mahmudullah Riyad recognised the importance of excelling in the prestigious format at different points in their career and have since displayed the urge and hunger to do well in Tests.

Whenever Bangladesh play Test cricket away, especially outside the sub-continent, it is a huge challenge that requires adaptability and character -- attributes that have at times been conspicuous in their absences.

With the first of three Tests against New Zealand starting from today at Seddon Park, the onus may yet fall on the seniors like Tamim and Mahmudullah in the absence of the other two stalwarts in Shakib and Mushfiqur, who will not be featuring due to their injuries.

Shakib, the regular Test captain, has often said that there are no seniors or juniors when you play a team game as everyone has their own roles to play if they are to win a match. The main reason for Shakib's words is to make his teammates realise their responsibilities.

Having hit two consecutive fifties in the first two ODIs during the recently concluded three-

match series against the hosts, Mohammad Mithun stands out as one of the more consistent performers on tour.

But the biggest test for Mithun will now be to replicate his confidence and eagerness to do well in the longest format, especially in tough New Zealand conditions, and if he can ace the challenge it will show that he has reached the next level in terms of mindset, which is still a concern.

The same goes for Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar, who are highly rated for their talent and potential but like Mithun, there are question marks as they are yet to combine talent and game sense into a winning formula.

Liton averages 25.36 in 13 Tests while Soumya also has a pretty similar record with an average of 26.72 from 12 Test matches -- numbers that do not do justice to their talent.

If Bangladesh really want to do well in Tests, especially away from home, it's not just the seniors who need to perform but the responsibility also rests on these aspiring cricketers to realise what they are capable of and take a big step forward at a time when the team truly needs it.



Shakib Al Hasan's absence will see Mahmudullah Riyad (L) stand in as captain in the first Test in Hamilton. Riyad will also be relied upon heavily to give some stability to Bangladesh's middle order as Mushfiqur Rahim will be missing due to injury. PHOTO: BCB

Rubel fires Prime Bank to semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Opener Rubel Mia's brilliant half-century helped Prime Bank Cricket Club defeat Abahani by 49 runs and secure a place in the semifinal of the inaugural edition of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) T20 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Although they had started tournament with a 47-run victory over Brothers Union, Abahani -- the strongest side on paper, although yet to get their best eleven -- could not make it to the knockout stage of the tournament.

Electing to bat, Prime Bank openers Anamul Haque and Rubel provided a solid start, stringing together a 67-run partnership before the former was dismissed Zakaria Islam having scored 37 off 22 balls.

Rubel struck a 56-ball 76, eventually falling prey to Abahani all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin in the 19th over of the game but not before taking his side to a challenging total of 176 for six. Saifuddin was the pick of Abahani bowlers as he returned economical figures of 20 for one in four overs.

In reply, Abahani suffered a batting collapse at the top, with a team-high 36 runs coming from pacer Rubel Hossain at the death as they inevitably fell short to be ousted from the tournament.

The other game at the venue, between Gazi Group and Prime Dolshwar SC, was abandoned due to rain. However, the match has been rescheduled to be played today in Mirpur, as quoted in a media release.

In the first of the two matches played at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, Sheikh Jamal registered a four-run victory by DLS method



Opener Rubel Mia struck a brilliant 56-ball 76 to help Prime Bank defeat Abahani and secure a semifinal spot in the DPL T20. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

against Uttara SC in a game that was interrupted by rain.

Uttara managed 59 for five in reply to Sheikh Jamal's 72 for five -- which was reduced to a 64-run target -- and the victory saw Sheikh Jamal through to the semifinals.

The other game at Fatullah was between two eliminated sides, with Mohemmadan registering a 30-run victory over Legends of Rupganj courtesy of an all-round performance from Alauddin Babu. The all-rounder's valuable 30 runs at the death and Nadif Chowdhury's unbeaten 41 took Mohemmadan to 143 for nine. Alauddin later shone with the ball too, returning figures of one for 16 runs in three overs to help his side restrict Rupganj to 113 for eight.

A bright light passes, but not dimmed

Widely respected and loved cricket coach Syed Altaf Hossain, credited as being the first cricket coach of independent Bangladesh, breathed his last on Tuesday evening at the age of 81 at his residence in Dhaka. Born in 1938 in Hooghly, Altaf was a National Sports Award recipient in 1999 and also served as the Bangladesh national team's coach. He was also certified as a first-class umpire by the Board of Control for Cricket in Pakistan in 1970, and before that he was the first cricketer from then East Pakistan to get a call-up to a 14-man squad for the Pakistan national team in 1965 against New Zealand. After Bangladesh won independence from Pakistan in 1971, cricketing activities were stalled in the new nation till 1973, and it was Altaf who spearheaded its revival by joining the Bangladesh Krira Parishad as the first cricket coach of Bangladesh. Well-known cricket writer and coach Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury shared his memories of the great man yesterday over their 50-year friendship. The following are excerpts of Jalal's reminiscences:

For someone like myself, who had a long 50-year association with the man, it is very difficult to organise my thoughts on this day as my memories of Syed Altaf Hossain come pouring down like rain.

The country's cricket fraternity is mourning a death of a true giant who has blessed this nation and indeed the people in sporting sphere with his majestic personality, great skills and his signature gentleman attitude -- a true star that we have had the privilege of calling our very own.

He defined an era with passion, sincerity and commitment.

I can still remember a delivery from a bowler of his height looked like it was coming from a two-storied building, his first entry into the field as our first international umpire, his towering sixes at the outdoor stadium and his transformation into a batsman from a pace bowler and much more. Above all, I remember the wholesomeness of his presence.

WHY HE WAS SPECIAL?

He was the first cricketer from erstwhile East Pakistan to get selected for a Test squad when he was named in the Pakistan side for the first Test against New Zealand in 1965, he was also a top-rated umpire with the experience of officiating in first-class matches. He had played a pioneering role in the re-emergence of the game in Bangladesh in the period



SYED ALTAF HOSSAIN (1938-2019)

following the Liberation War and one cannot imagine these days the struggle he had to go through to shape the game in this country after independence.

In an illustrious career Syed Altaf Hossain was most famed for his role as a coach as he became the first licensed cricket coach. Apart from his role as the head coach of the Bangladesh male national cricket team, his role in creating a base for women's cricket in the country is unmatched because there were not too many people around who believed that women's cricket could take off in this conservative society. He received the National Sports Award in 1999 and the Prothom-Alo Lifetime Award in 2011.

If we want to describe him in one

word, it would be 'versatile'. All this information is good enough to understand why he was special but it will not come close to describing him as an entity if we only focus on mere facts.

For me there is more to say.

He was a superstar when I was a beginner in cricket but I never saw a star-like vanity. He never used any harsh words towards anybody but still, the ever-smiling great man encouraged many like me to come to cricket, come to coaching and come to umpiring. He had a high profile but as a human being he maintained a low profile.

He was a legend on all levels and to top it off, an absolute gentleman. For me it was an honour and a privilege to get the opportunity to spend time with such a legend.

Why do we remember him and why does the new generation need to remember him? The answer is very simple -- the lessons we need to learn from the life of this great legend is for us to rally our young people behind art, education and the spirit of the game. His values should cut across all generations.

I cannot remember if anyone ever had any bad word to say about him or whether he uttered anything like that; you may think that's a fairytale these days.

Whatever he has achieved and contributed, no undertaker will be able to bury those under the earth.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MOHAMMEDAN V RUPGANJ

Mohammedan: 143 for 9 in 20 overs (Avishek 22, Nadif 41 not out, Shohag 21, Alauddin 30; Shahid 3-40, Minhazur 2-20)

Rupganj: 113 for 8 in 20 overs (Azmir 18, Naeem 28, Asif 14; Saqlain 2-15, Nihaduzzaman 2-19, Shahadat 2-18)

Result: Mohammedan won by 30 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Alauddin Babu.

SHEIKH JAMAL V UTTARA SC

Sheikh Jamal: 72 for 5 in 8 overs (Imtiaz 12, Fardeen 25, Nasir 11 not out; Sajjad 3-8)

Uttara SC: 59 for 5 in 7 overs (Tanjid 11, Anisul 13, Mohimenu 12 not out, Shakhir 12; Sunny 2-11)

Result: Sheikh Jamal won by 4 runs (D/L method)

Player-of-the-match: Elias Sunny.

PRIME BANK V ABAHANI

Prime Bank: 176 for 6 in 20 overs (Anamul 37, Rubel 76, Zakir 17, Al-Amin 20, Ariful 21; Saifuddin 1-20, Zakaria 1-24)

Abahani: 127 for 9 in 20 overs (Mosaddek 17, Rubel 36, Ariful 15 not out; Mohor 3-26, Al-Amin 2-21, Kapali 3-22)

Result: Prime Bank won by 49 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Rubel Mia.