



After missing out on the first two Tests against New Zealand, Mushfiqur Rahim (L), who practised in the outer nets of the Hagley Oval yesterday has a strong chance of featuring in the third and final Test from tomorrow. (R) Pacer Mustafizur Rahman and Soumya Sarkar practise catching, an area where Bangladesh need to improve markedly.



## Intense Tigers seek correction

MAZHAR UDDIN from Christchurch

The tour of New Zealand has been a tough experience for the visiting Bangladeshi team and following the comprehensive defeats in the first two Tests that saw them succumb to the three-match series, the third and final Test in Christchurch will be the one last chance to gain something from this disastrous tour.

There were quite a few areas where the Tigers lacked, especially with the bat as they have consistently been undone by the short-ball strategy from Neil Wagner.

Just before the start of the training session at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch, Bangladesh head coach gathered all the

members of the squad and said: "Look boys, if you prepare harder in training things will become easy when you go out to the middle during the games. I want you all to make the intensity higher here and be prepared for the challenge on the field."

So the outer nets of the Hagley Oval yesterday, the Tigers were keenly working on their weaknesses that were brutally exposed during the two Tests.

Meanwhile, another experienced batsman Tamim Iqbal suffered some pain on his groin during the fielding session yesterday and did not continue practice. But it was learned later that it was nothing serious and the in-form opener is expected to train today. Weather remains one of the biggest concerns as there is rain forecast during the start of the Test match but after the bitter experience in Wellington, the visitors will definitely be aware of the situation and will surely be eyeing a positive finish to an otherwise dismal tour.

Young Shadman Islam has scored to half-century despite good starts in all four innings of the Test series. The 23-year-old was seen consulting with Rhodes before heading into the nets, where he stressed more on his defence and pull shot. Shadman was dismissed by short-pitched deliveries twice, while on two other occasions the left-hander was caught at the crease and paid the price. He asked for specific deliveries from the bowlers and made sure his foot movement was perfect.

In the net beside Shadman's, Tigers' fielding coach Ryan Cook was ready with a sidearm for a throwdown session with Liton Das and the South African added: "Liton, who do you want to face today, [Kagiso] Rabada or Glenn McGrath?"

Wagner, who was dismissed twice in four innings by

Wagner, knew exactly who he wanted to face against.

"Man I want Wagner, I want to face him."

Look boys, if you prepare harder in training things will become easy when you go out to the middle during the games. I want you all to make the intensity higher here and be prepared for the challenge on the field.

STEVE RHODES

## Signs point to Mushy return

MAZHAR UDDIN from Christchurch

Generally, Mushfiqur Rahim's mood depends on his on-field performances and, known for his sheer determination and eagerness to play every game for Bangladesh, it was a welcome sight for the team management to see the wicketkeeper-batsman back in action again.

After sustaining multiple injuries during the third ODI against New Zealand on February 20,

when he added a finger wound to a wrist problem and a pre-existing rib injury, the 31-year-old went on to miss the first two Test matches.

Although Mushfiqur batted against a soft ball batted ahead of the second Test and experienced some pain in Wellington, yesterday was the first time that the right-hander batted properly against the cricket ball in the outer nets of the Hagley Oval in Christchurch.

All eyes were on Mushfiqur as he started the net session against the fast bowlers and looked comfortable middling the ball. There

were a few instances when he did look uncomfortable with his batting grip, presumably due to wrist pain, but Mushfiqur managed to continue batting for nearly 10 minutes.

Later he faced throwdowns from trainer Mario Villavarayam, when he asked for short-pitched deliveries which he tried to duck under and also played some pull shots, keeping Kiwi pacer Neil Wagner in mind.

"From what I saw in the nets, he looks good, though I haven't spoken with him after that. I was looking forward to how he bats if he does return.

against the pacers and I think he coped quite well so we will just find out a little bit more," Tigers head coach Steve Rhodes told The Daily Star yesterday.

Following the thrashing innings defeat in the first two Tests the team management will definitely want Mushfiqur out in the middle order for much-needed stability. As things were shaping, it seemed that

Mushfiqur was well on track to make a comeback in the third Test starting from March 16, and it will be a big boost for the visitors if he does return.

## Need to play more Tests: Jayed

SPORTS REPORTER from Christchurch

Pacer Abu Jayed can consider himself unlucky as, despite bowling well in the second Test when he removed both inform Kiwi openers Tom Latham and Jeet Raval, the 25-year-old was denied the big wicket of Ross Taylor on the fourth day as the right-hander was dropped twice in the same over.

Taylor went on to smash his third double-hundred and Jayed was unable to pick further wickets and when offered sympathy for his misfortune, laid: "I need a five-wicket haul and if I had got Taylor that day, I am sure I would have bagged a fifer. Obviously, luck plays a big role in picking up wickets but I will keep pushing myself to the limit."

Jayed did mention Bangladeshi seamers' lack of experience when compared to their Kiwi counterparts as the likes of Trent Boult, Neil Wagner and Tim Southee have played a combined 168 Tests.

On the other hand, the four Bangladesh pacers Jayed (5), Ebadot Hossain (2), Khaled



Ahmed (2) and Mustafizur Rahman (13) have played just 22 games combined.

"If you look at the bowlers of other countries they have all played a lot of Tests, so I think we also need to play more. Test cricket is all about experience and the more you play, the more you learn and realise the nature of this game," Jayed told reporters at The Hagley Oval yesterday.

The cricketer from Sylhet played just five Tests and has been the most aggressive and impressive Bangladesh seamer in New Zealand so far as he

managed to trouble the Kiwi batsmen with his ability to swing it both ways.

According to Jayed, the tour of New Zealand has helped him to gain self-belief as he now has a better idea of his ability to cause trouble for international batsmen. He is now trying to learn the 'bouncer' ball from Kiwi pacer Tim Southee.

"I have spoken to [bowling coach Courtney] Walsh and I think we are developing as the ball swings a bit more here in New Zealand. I am also working on the 'bouncer' ball that Southee bowls, with the intention with it being like an outswinger grip but it actually swings in after pitching. I will also talk with Southee after the game to know more about it," he said.

Jayed, who has been a fan of English fast bowler James Anderson since childhood, informed that he has always tried to focus on aggression, which helps him to get the best out of himself.

Jayed's improvement is a sign for the team management to give inexperienced fast bowlers more opportunities consistently rather than dropping them after a few failures if Bangladesh want to prepare a new set of fast bowlers to thrive in Tests.

## A Messi masterclass

AFP, Barcelona

Lionel Messi pledged at the start of the season to bring "that beautiful cup" back to the Camp Nou and on the evidence of Wednesday night, few would against him.

Barcelona's 5-1 thrashing of Lyon in their Champions League last 16 second leg, a score that overlooked a nervy spell in the second half when the visitors were a goal from going through, in the end, was all about him.

Messi scored twice, including once from a penalty spot, although it was no ordinary spot-kick, instead a delightful chip that hung in the air and plumped perfectly down the middle.

There was a pair of assists too, for Gerard Pique and Ousmane Dembele, during a three-goal flurry in the final 12 minutes with Messi leaving Lyon defenders sprawled to add a second of their own.

"Almost everything went through Messi," said Lyon coach Bruno Genesio, whose team had held Barcelona to a 0-0 draw in the first leg. "When he is at that kind of level he is almost unstoppable. We did what we could."

They restricted him to two goals, one short of Cristiano Ronaldo's hat-trick that had sent Juventus through and Atletico Madrid crashing out in Turin on Sunday.

Messi paid tribute. "Cristiano had a magical night," he said.



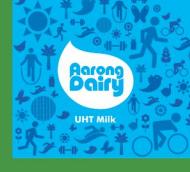
Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi scored twice and gave two assists during their 5-1 win in the Champions League Round of 16 second leg match against Lyon at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

The talk has been of a changing of the guard, after Real Madrid's European hegemony was ended by Ajax and a new era, with Spain having only one side in the Champions League quarterfinals for the first time.

Messi and Ronaldo remain constant, the former now on 108 goals in the competition, behind the latter's imperious 22.

Each still has the power to settle a tie on their own and those most ardent in the debate about who is the same sense of power and momentum.



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