



Tinker-time for BCB think-tank

Take on Ireland in dead rubber today

SPORTS REPORTER

Having secured their place in the ODI tri-series final with two commanding wins over West Indies, Bangladesh may look to tinker with the playing eleven and assess the strength of their bench when they take on hosts Ireland, who have already been ruled out of the series, at the Clontarf Cricket Club in Dublin today.

The match is scheduled to get underway at 3:45pm Bangladesh



LITON DAS

Standard Time.

Mashrafe bin Mortaza and his troops were clinical in both the fixtures against West Indies while the other match against Ireland was washed out without a ball being bowled.

Bangladesh, who are firmly on top of the points table with ten, are expected to make a few changes and experiment with different tactics in the dead rubber against Ireland, keeping the upcoming ICC Cricket World Cup in the United Kingdom in mind.



MOSADDEK HOSSAIN



MOHAMMAD SAIFUDDIN

The young Mohammad Saifuddin was rested in the previous encounter with West Indies seeing as the pace bowling all-rounder was suffering from back pain. For that match, Saifuddin was replaced by Abu Jayed, who trained yesterday and is expected to feature against Ireland today.

It has also been learnt that Bangladesh's team management might re-examine opener Liton Das and Mosaddek Hossain, who are also a part of the Tigers' 15-member World Cup squad.

The likes of Yasir Ali and Forhad Reza could also be in consideration as the team management have plenty of options to tinker with in the playing eleven for today's match.

Rubel Hossain and Taskin Ahmed may also get a chance as the Tigers' think tank deems it necessary to provide rest to any of the other fast bowlers -- Mustafizur Rahman, skipper Mashrafe and Jayed, who endured a poor ODI debut in the previous game against West Indies.

Final is the ultimate goal: Nurse

AGENCIES

West Indies off-spinner Ashley Nurse said Monday's defeat to Bangladesh had not dented the team's confidence, and they were now fully focused on winning Friday's final of the ODI Tri-series.

They had already qualified for the final with two comprehensive wins over Ireland. Nurse has been the leading bowler in the tournament with seven wickets.

"Next game is the final so it's the most important game of the series. All the work we did over the last couple games is all well and good but to get the win in the final is the most important thing right now," Nurse told.

"It's a tournament where the final is the ultimate goal. They've gotten the better of us in the last two games but that doesn't mean anything. We have to turn up on Friday and try to do the work."

Nurse said it was important not only for the Windies to bat well but to place pressure on the Bangladesh middle order which was yet to be really tested.

"I think if we can get some more runs on the board, first and foremost, then the bowlers would have an easier job. The two games so far we haven't really gotten into their middle order so if we can get into the middle of their batting order I think we'll be in with a good shout."

A chance to rest for Mashrafe

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has enjoyed a good ODI tri-series in Ireland so far, making his mark in both the side's victories with six wickets. His leadership has seen Bangladesh notch two comfortable wins over West Indies and secure their place in the series final. However, the Tigers' captain was not in the best of shapes heading into the series, therefore, today's match against Ireland is a good opportunity to rest the player.

Mashrafe was the one who started the rot for the Windies when they were going strong in the first match -- after Shakib Al Hasan and Mehedi Hasan provided crucial breakthroughs -- by picking up the wickets of Roston Chase, Shai Hope and Jason Holder after bringing himself on in the 41st over.

In the second match, he reserved his overs for the death and took the responsibility of keeping West Indies on a leash. Having provided an early breakthrough, he picked up two more

wickets with his contributions proving to be significant.

His leadership skills often overshadow his bowling triumphs but during the second game he picked up a nice record, becoming the fourth-highest ODI wicket-taking captain alongside Pakistan's Waqar Younis. Mashrafe has claimed 97 wickets from 75 matches as captain and there could have been many more if his career was not plagued by injuries.

With the ICC Cricket World Cup coming up, the Tigers will need Mashrafe for his leadership and for his mentality. However, his contributions with the ball should not be overlooked by the team management. The Ireland game -- being a dead rubber -- presents a good opportunity for Mashrafe to be rested. The Tigers have backup pace options and since Bangladesh have never won a tri-series in their history, the final should be prioritised.

With the World Cup coming up too, it's time for everyone to take note and reserve the best of their prized fighter's hard grind for the coveted tournament.

Ton-up Imam lifts Pakistan to 358

AFP, Bristol

Pakistan opener Imamul Haq came into form ahead of the World Cup with a century against England in the third one-day international at Bristol on Tuesday.

The left-hander watched wickets fall at the other end as Pakistan declined to 95 for three after losing the toss but kept his composure to complete a 97-ball hundred including 11 fours.

It was the 23-year-old's sixth hundred in 27 matches at this level and first against England, the top-ranked side in ODI cricket.

Imam, the nephew of Pakistan batting great and selection chief Inzamamul Haq, continued to take the attack to England after reaching three figures, driving David Willey for a straight six and next ball glancing the left-arm quick for four.

His innings was a boost for Pakistan just weeks away from the start of the World Cup in England.

Victory in Bristol would see Pakistan level this five-match series at 1-1 following England's 12-run win in the second ODI at Southampton on Saturday -- the opening fixture was a no-result washout.

SCORES IN BRIEF

Pakistan: 358 for 9 in 50 overs (Imamul 151, Haris 41, Sarfaraz 27, Asif 52, Imad 22; Woakes 4-67, Curran 2-74)



Pakistan opener Imam-ul-Haq struck a blistering 131-ball 151 in the third ODI against England in Bristol yesterday. The left-hander's astonishing century laid the platform for a solid 358 for nine by the end of their innings.

PHOTO: AFP



Lakshmi ICC's first female referee

AFP, New Delhi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) on Tuesday named GS Lakshmi as the first woman on the international panel of match referees, making her eligible to take control of men's games.

The 51-year-old Lakshmi, who first officiated as a match referee in domestic women's cricket in 2008-09, has overseen three women's one-day internationals and three Twenty20s.

Her appointment came just after Australia's Claire Polosak became the first woman umpire in a men's ODI last month.

"To be selected in the international panel by the ICC is a huge honour for me as it opens up new avenues," Lakshmi said.

ICC WORLD CUP 2019 BITES



15 DAYS TO GO

We're a flexible team: Shastri

AGENCIES, New Delhi

Ahead of the ICC Cricket World Cup, team India head coach Ravi Shastri is confident about his side and believes that they have enough ammunition in the ranks to go all the way and clinch the trophy.

He also said that the side will be extremely flexible and combinations will purely be based on the conditions. Speaking about the number 4 position, which has been a topic of debates and deliberations, Shastri said that according to him, there is no one player for that particular spot and it will be a horses for courses selection.

"We are a flexible team. It's horses for courses, we have got enough ammunition. We have got enough players who can bat at 4. So, I am not really worried about that," Shastri told Cricketnext in an interview. "I think we have got all bases covered. Last thing you want is passengers on the tour. You want to have in those 15 players... who can play anytime, at any given time. If there is a major injury to a fast bowler, there will be a replacement almost straight away," he further added.



Kedar Jadhav, who has become an important member of Virat Kohli's side, picked up an injury during the just-concluded IPL, but the coach is not too worried and wants to wait before making any call.

"In fact I am totally blanked out from that. When the flight takes off on May 22, we will see who are the 15 on that and just take it from there. Luckily in Kedar's case, there is no fracture so we will wait and watch. There is still time so it should be ok," he said.

Shastri said a team can't pre-plan for a big event like the World Cup and the four years leading up to the tournament is the time to prepare.

Shadab fit for World Cup

REUTERS, Karachi

All-rounder Shadab Khan has been declared fit for Pakistan's World Cup campaign after blood tests showed zero viral load, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said on Tuesday.

Shadab, 20, was originally named in the squads for the current England limited-overs series and World Cup only to be ruled out after contracting a virus.

The PCB has confirmed Shadab will now leave for London, where he will consult a doctor before joining the Pakistan squad in Bristol next week.

"I am delighted to know that the blood tests are negative and I can now return to competitive cricket," Khan said in a statement.

"I was always very confident that I would fully recover from the viral infection and will be available for the World Cup."

Lehmann backs Smith, Warner

REUTERS, Melbourne

Former Australia coach Darren Lehmann expects Steve Smith and David Warner to play a big role in their title defence on their return to international cricket at the World Cup.

Smith and Warner have returned from year-long bans following a ball-tampering scandal in South Africa.

The top order duo made impressive return from elbow surgeries for their respective franchises at the Indian Premier League Twenty20 tournament and Lehmann was convinced they will shine at the World Cup in England and Wales.

"Smith at number three or four, he'd be exceptional at the World Cup," Lehmann told Macquarie Sports Radio.

"People are worried about the break they've had with 12 months out, but you see them in the IPL performing and making runs."

"David Warner is an excitement machine, at the top of the order, he can set it alight."

"If he has a really good tournament, he set us on the road to winning a lot of games in the last World Cup. If he does it again at the top of the order with Aaron Finch, they'll be hard to stop."

In his absence, Finch and Usman Khawaja have formed a steady opening partnership for Australia but Lehmann expected Warner to slot back at the top of the order.

"Opening with Finch and Warner, I think that's a certainty," the former Australia all-rounder said.

"And then there's Khawaja or Shaun Marsh at three I'd think and Smith at four - this is your top four."

Women's hockey team start camp

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's hockey team have started their preparation for Women's Junior (U-21) AHF Cup Qualifiers, scheduled to be held in Singapore from September 9 to 15, at Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Under the supervision of Sports Directorate, some 50 women yesterday turned up for the 16-day second-phase training which will continue till May 29 before a short break for Eid-ul-Fitr. The first phase of 15 days' training was held in March.

"We began this training camp for the upcoming AHF Cup U-21 tournament and it is an initiative of Sports Directorate. The third phase training will be held under the supervision of Bangladesh Hockey Federation," coach Hedayetul Islam Razib said yesterday.

"Over two years, we have been working with the girls, who are aged between 14 and 19 years. We have chosen these girls from talent hunt, Bangladesh Youth Games and women's hockey tournament," Razib said, adding the team would play two warm-up matches in Kolkata before the AHF Cup.