

Saifuddin misses the bus

SPORTS REPORTER from Birmingham

The Bangladesh team bus departed the Hyatt Regency and headed towards Edgbaston at around 12:10pm yesterday, where the team would have its first full practice session since their last World Cup game against Afghanistan. The departure was delayed by 10 minutes because bowling coach Courtney Walsh was talking to the media. Five minutes after the bus left, however, all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin was seen standing in front of the main entrance, looking forlornly at his departed ride.

He disappeared inside, evidently to call a taxi, which he boarded presently and was off for practice. Apart from paying the taxi fare, Saifuddin's tardiness will also cost him because he will have to pay a fine in accordance with team disciplinary rules.

"He was late," Bangladesh media manager Rabeed Imam told The Daily Star. "We did not wait for him. The departure was late anyway because Walsh was talking to the media. He will have to pay a fine."

The media manager was not sure how much the fine would be, but it is expected to be around the 100-pound mark. A costly few extra minutes of sleep indeed.



The Tigers were relieved to have Mahmudullah Riyad back in training in Edgbaston yesterday, the first time since he sustained a calf injury against Afghanistan on June 24.

Mahmudullah back to batting

SPORTS REPORTER from Birmingham

The injury cloud looming over Mahmudullah Riyad got a bit lighter yesterday during Bangladesh's first practice session since their 62-run win over Afghanistan as the senior middle-order batsman batted in the nets in full gear at the practice ground in Edgbaston.

However, Mahmudullah -- who has sustained a Grade 1 tear on his right calf muscle during the World Cup match against Afghanistan on June 24 -- did not take any part in fielding practice. Bangladesh's next World Cup assignment is a crucial match against India tomorrow and they would desperately want their full team firing if they are to stay alive in the tournament by winning their next two matches.

Mahmudullah was diagnosed with the tear on the day of the match against

Afghanistan and it was expected that he would need seven to 10 days to recover for the match that was set to take place exactly a week later. The 33-year-old however had insisted that he would play the match against India in any way possible.

Mahmudullah has played two crucial innings in this edition of cricket's mega event, hitting an unbeaten 46 off 33 balls in the opening win over South Africa at The Oval and then cracking a 50-ball 69 in the loss to Australia on June 20 in Trent Bridge. He also played a vital hand against Afghanistan, scoring a 38-ball 27 during a 56-run fifth-wicket stand with Mushfiqur Rahim on a slow wicket in Southampton.

Known as one of the cleanest hitters in the lineup, Mahmudullah's presence at number six is a valuable one as he will be expected to take the attack to the vaunted Indian attack in the final stages of the innings.

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Tigers' new-ball blues

SAKEB SUBHAN from Birmingham

For the Bangladesh team in Birmingham, there is only one game to focus on -- tomorrow's World Cup match against India. Winning the game would not only keep them well and truly alive in the race to the semifinals, it will also mark the removal of a big mental hurdle against a team they have not beaten since 2015.

To do that, however, Bangladesh will have to perform beyond expectations in their bowling department, especially the pacers. All three -- skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mustafizur Rahman and Mohammad Saifuddin -- have been expensive throughout the World Cup. More relevantly ahead of the challenge against India's in-form top order, Bangladesh have taken a wicket in the first 10 overs of the innings in only three of their six matches so far -- against South Africa, New Zealand and the West Indies. Even more alarmingly, a pacer took the early wicket only once, when Saifuddin dismissed Chris Gayle in the fourth over in Taunton.

Mustafizur and Saifuddin have taken 10 wickets each, but most of those have come later in the innings and against a strong batting line-up like India's, like against England and Australia, the damage may already be done by then. The problem for Bangladesh is that except skipper Mashrafe, none of the other pacers seem to fancy bowling with the new ball. Also, one of the two spinners

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in Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Shakib Al Hasan have often opened the bowling -- another ploy that could backfire against India, arguably the best players of spin in the world.

"We have to assess what's going to happen here in Birmingham," Bangladesh bowling coach Courtney Walsh told reporters yesterday. "If the wicket's going to turn, it's best for us to have a spinner bowling early, trying to take early wickets. So we'll have a look at the [then ongoing] game [between India and England] to see what the wicket is playing like today."

"We've got three seamers playing now, Rubel played a game before, so any of those guys can bowl with the new ball because we have been trying to get them ready for

that. Obviously if things are swinging and there's a bit in the air, then Saifuddin gets a little bit more swing than probably Fizz. But Fizz still gets a bit of shape and as you know, Mash is always swinging it around. So it's always a good option to have, and as I said, it's just the surface and on the day."

Walsh also backed Mashrafe, who has just one wicket in six World Cup games so far.

Shakib Al Hasan (R) would look to continue his brilliant form while Mustafizur Rahman would look for an inspired performance against India tomorrow.



Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza chats with bowling coach Courtney Walsh during a training session in Edgbaston yesterday.

"Wicket is not the key thing in this, I mean there's run rate as well. His economy rate has been good, he's bowling well. I am sure the wickets will come. I'm not really concerned about him not getting the wickets; I am more concerned about him keeping it tight and doing the job that he's been doing. Whenever he strikes up front for us, it's a big bonus, still two games left and hopefully he can do that."

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'STARC DESERVES PLACE IN ALL-TIME AUSTRALIA ODI SIDE'



THE EXPERT OPINION
|| FROM ALLAN BORDER ||

After a gentle start, Australia now look the real deal and the win against New Zealand has brought back that old familiar feeling that often leads to a World Cup trophy.

This was a very impressive win because they did it the hard way. In this tournament, they have relied on Aaron Finch, David Warner and Steve Smith at the top of the order to get runs but all of a sudden, they had to dig deep -- and to come through that is a very good sign.

I did not think Usman Khawaja was very fluent but he did well to hang in there for his 88 and New Zealand will feel frustrated that they had a couple of missed opportunities. Their fielding was not perfect, even though Martin Guptill took a stonemason to get rid of Smith.

We have seen some amazing catches in this tournament but that is out of the top drawer. At that stage it looked grim but step forward Alex Carey. He looked like he was batting on a different surface to everyone else out there.

He struck the ball beautifully on both sides of the wicket and hit some nice cover drives, which we did not see much of from anyone else. He is without doubt my man of the match because, without him, Australia would not have got 150.

He has turned a few heads in this tournament with his reliable performances. There were a lot of doubts before, critics asking if he was truly our best option. Should we have gone for Matty Wade or Tim Paine? But he has grown in confidence and it has been nice to watch. Today, it looked like he was batting on a better surface than the likes of Finch, Warner and Smith all struggled.

New Zealand must be amazed. It cannot be often that you get a hat-trick, see Smith, Finch and Warner in the shed cheaply and take a catch like Guptill did and still be on the wrong end of the result. That says a lot about Australia right now.

Australia's score was below par but with the pitch drying out, I thought we were in for a thriller. But Mitchell Starc then did his usual thing and finished with a five-for.

He had a break from the game with back injuries and different ailments before

It's a great result beating New Zealand, but one win is not going to win you the World Cup. Records don't mean much if we don't win the World Cup. I'm just stoked to be playing a part in this group and continue to contribute.

MITCHELL STARC

the tournament but he has got a fantastic rhythm going here and is clocking some serious pace, comfortably over 90mph, which is why he is miles ahead of the rest in the leading wicket taker column.

You would have to pick him in your all-time Australia ODI side because of what he does in the big games. There are lots of other options out there but in the big games, he stands up. He has come to the boil at the perfect time and Australia now look a strong contender to win it, which is unbelievable when you look at how they were struggling six months ago.

And that is before the likes of Glenn Maxwell and Marcus Stoinis have really caught fire in the middle order. They are the sort who could go bananas and win a final on their own.

I am really confident with where this team is at. India and England demand massive respect too and you can never count your chickens -- but that old familiar feeling is definitely back.

Source: ICC

RAHIM STEEL

RAHIM STEEL

All-rounder Ben Stokes yet again played a crucial role for England in their all-important World Cup match against India yesterday. Stokes scored his third consecutive fifty-plus score as he added a quickfire 79 off 54 balls. He also played a vital role with his medium pace in the do or die encounter.

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ICC chief happy with wickets
AFP, Birmingham

International Cricket Council chief executive David Richardson said yesterday that he is happy with the World Cup's "sporting pitches", insisting they have provided good balance between bat and ball.

Richardson said the ICC's only direction to the pitch curators was to prepare sporting tracks.

"During our playing days a score of between 220 and 260 was a good score but not now. So our only direction to the curators was to prepare sporting tracks," the former South African wicketkeeper-batsman told reporters in Edgbaston. "And what's heartening to see in this tournament is how the bowlers have had a say and we have seen some exciting cricket."

INDIA-ENGLAND SCOREBOARD

ENGLAND	R/B	4s/6s		
Roy c sub (Jadeja) b Kuldeep	66/57	7/2		
Bairstow c Pant b Shami	111/109	10/6		
Root c Pandya b Shami	44/54	2/0		
Morgan c Jadhav b Shami	1/9	0/0		
Stokes c sub (Jadeja) b Bumrah	79/54	6/3		
Buttler c & b Shami	20/8	1/2		
Woakes c Sharma b Shami	7/5	1/0		
Plunkett not out	1/4	0/0		
Archer not out	0/0	0/0		
Extras: (b-2, lb-2, w-4)	8			
Total: (For 7 wks in 50 overs)	337			
Fall of wickets: 1-160, 2-205, 3-207, 4-277, 5-310, 6-319, 7-336.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Shami	10	1	69	5
Bumrah	10	1	44	1
Chahal	10	0	88	0
Pandya	10	0	60	0
Kuldeep	10	0	72	1
INDIA	R/B	4s/6s		
Rahul c & b Woakes	0/9	0/0		
Sharma c Buttler b Woakes	102/109	15/0		
Kohli c sub (JM Vince) b Plunkett	66/76	7/0		
Pant c Woakes b Plunkett	32/29	4/0		
Pandya c sub (JM Vince) b Plunkett	45/33	4/0		
Dhoni not out	42/31	4/1		
Jadhav not out	12/13	1/0		
Extras: (lb-1, w-6)	7			
Total: (For 5 wks in 50 overs)	306			
Fall of wickets: 1-8, 2-146, 3-198, 4-226, 5-267.				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Woakes	10	3	58	2
Archer	10	0	45	0
Plunkett	10	0	55	3
Wood	10	0	73	0
Rashid	6	0	40	0
Stokes	4	0	34	0

Result: England won by 31 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Jonny Bairstow.