

SPORT



Mohammad Mithun (L) and Mushfiqur Rahim strung together a 73-run third-wicket stand to help Bangladesh successfully chase 283 with five wickets to spare against Sri Lanka Board President's XI in a practice match in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Mithun fills the big shoes

SPORTS REPORTER



The concern regarding how to fill the gap when the team's best player misses out on a tour or series is a perennial one. Bangladesh have travelled to Sri Lanka to play a three-match ODI series against the hosts sans star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who was granted a break by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) following the World Cup.

Bangladesh registered a five-wicket victory against Sri Lanka Board President's XI in their warm-up match at the P Sara Oval in Colombo yesterday. While the team should be boosted by such a win ahead of the series opener on July 26, one other positive takeaway from the match was Mohammad Mithun's sensible 100-ball 91.

Mithun batted at the number three position -- where Shakib played throughout the World Cup. And the right-hander did not disappoint, scoring a team high 91 while stitching together two important partnerships -- a 73-run stand for the third-wicket with Mushfiqur Rahim followed by a 96-run fourth-wicket stand with Mahmudullah Riyad -- to guide the Tigers to a comfortable victory.

While speaking to reporters after the game, Mithun said that he never let his mind get carried away with the fact that he was batting in Shakib's place but rather just tried to do what came naturally.

"Actually I did not think anything like I am batting at number three position -- the place where Shakib [Al Hasan] bhai bats. As Shakib bhai is not in the squad, someone needs to bat in that position. Normally, it is the responsibility of the players who bat at the top to play long innings and I tried to do that," said Mithun.

Shakib has been phenomenal recently and was clearly Bangladesh's top performer in the recently concluded World Cup. The all-rounder finished third in the top run-getters' list in the mega event with 606 runs from eight matches. To undertake a series without the ace all-rounder must have hampered the team's balance. However, Mithun's positive display in yesterday's practice match must have given some hope to the team, who are surely looking to find their rhythm after a dismal World Cup.

Mithun, however, mentioned that they still need to play their best cricket on the day to start the series on a positive note.

"I played two matches for the A team before coming here. So I think it helped me adjust to the condition as I think the temperature here is a bit less than of Bangladesh. So it helped me but it's not the same for everyone though," Mithun said. "A win is always helpful for a team. Obviously we will be feeling a bit better in terms of confidence but still we need to play our best cricket again on the day -- on July 26 -- if we want to win."

Mahmudullah fit and ready to bowl

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



There was good news for Bangladesh fans during the Tigers' practice game against the Sri Lankan Board President XI yesterday as Mahmudullah Riyad bowled for the first time since sustaining a shoulder injury during the tour of New Zealand earlier this year.

The injury had kept him from bowling his effective part-time off-spin in the recently concluded World Cup. There was more good news as he is expected to play a full part in the upcoming three-ODI series against Sri Lanka after recovering fully from a Grade 1 tear on his right calf muscle. The injury was sustained during Bangladesh's World Cup game against Afghanistan and kept him out of the next match against India, although the senior batsman did take part in their last World Cup game against Pakistan.

According to Bangladesh team physio Bayjedul Islam Khan the cricketer is expected to start bowling his off-spin again from the upcoming series.

"The state of his shoulder is comparatively better from what it was during the World Cup. He is doing the work for his rehab and yes, he is still bowling with a round-arm action and will gradually start with a



straight-arm action. It will improve when it comes to bowling and there should be no problem. We are hoping that he will be able to bowl in this series," Bayjed told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, he also added that Mahmudullah will have to make some changes while throwing as he won't be able to throw with full intensity for the rest of his career.

"There is still some problem in throwing, intensity-wise and it will develop slowly. But it won't recover fully as there is a complete tear in that spot," he said.

Mahmudullah scored 33 runs with the bat after bowling three overs and also fielded for some time.

Some work to do after comfortable win

MAZHAR UDDIN from Colombo

Bangladesh registered a comfortable five-wicket win over the Sri Lanka Board President's XI in the practice game ahead of the three-match ODI series at the P Sara Oval in Colombo yesterday.

The practice game was a perfect platform for the Tigers to adapt to conditions after recently returning from a two-month World Cup campaign in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

The Bangladesh think tank will surely keep the practice game in mind to form the best eleven for the first match of the three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka scheduled for July 26.

The Daily Star tried to analyse the Tigers practice match in all three departments.

BATTING

All eyes were on the Tigers' opening position after the disappointing performance from both Soumya Sarkar and Tamim Iqbal during the World Cup. The two could not put on the best of starts yesterday as both missed out. Tamim was dismissed despite getting a start after scoring 37 when he was caught at mid on off a mistimed pull shot. Soumya too was dismissed in the same fashion for 13 and the team management would hope for a better show from the two openers in the first ODI.

In the absence of Shakib Al Hasan, their best performer in the World Cup, Mohammad Mithun was given the responsibility to bat at number three yesterday and the right-hander managed to utilise the opportunity in style. Mithun remained composed after coming in to chase the 283-run target and went on to score a brilliant 100-ball 91 with the help of 11 fours and a six. More importantly, he focused on



Bangladesh stand-in captain Tamim Iqbal (R) discusses tactics with pacer Mustafizur Rahman in yesterday's practice match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka Board President's XI in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

staying at the crease while also latching on to scoring opportunities when they were on offer.

Mithun added a crucial 73-run third-wicket stand with Mushfiqur Rahim, which laid the foundation for the victory. After Mushfiqur was dismissed for 50, Mahmudullah Riyad also

looked comfortable since recovering from a calf injury and scored 33 runs. Sabbir Rahman too looked compact while scoring an unbeaten 33 to help register a comfortable win. It will be important for Bangladesh's middle order as well as the openers to remain consistent especially in the absence of Shakib.

BOWLING

Much like the batting department, Bangladesh is surely going to miss Shakib's left-arm spin, especially in subcontinental conditions. Rubel Hossain however did a decent job with the new ball, providing two early breakthroughs. Mustafizur Rahman also bowled well and picked up a wicket but there are still some concerns for the Tigers in the fast bowling department as Taskin Ahmed was wayward in line and length. The tall fast bowler, making a comeback to the side, conceded 57 runs from eight overs.

Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam and Mosaddek Hossain are expected to take the responsibility in the spin-bowling department and apart from Mosaddek, none of them could impress yesterday.

But the death-overs bowling will be the biggest area of concern for Bangladesh as the selectors included pacer Shafuil Islam in the squad keeping that aspect in mind. Shafuil is expected to join the team today.

FIELDING

Bangladesh will have to work a bit more in the fielding department, especially in ground fielding and high catching, which has often led the Tigers down in crunch situations. Apart from a dropped catch by Taskin on the boundary, the Tigers fielding looked solid yesterday.

Shafuil called for SL tour

SPORTS REPORTER

Through a media release the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday informed that pacer Shafuil Islam has been added to the squad for the Sri Lanka tour and that the right-arm is expected to join the Tigers in Colombo today.

The initial 14-member squad which travelled to Sri Lanka for the three-match ODI series lacked firepower in the bowling department as skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was ruled out in the last moment due to a hamstring injury.

In addition, the way Taskin Ahmed bowled -- returning expensive figures of one for 57 in eight overs -- in yesterday's warm-up against Sri Lanka Board President's XI might have also played a part in high-ups' decision to include Shafuil in an effort to boost their pace attack.

BCB XI strong on second day

SPORTS REPORTER

BCB XI saw themselves reach a strong position by the end of the second day of their four-day match against KSCA Secretaries XI in the ongoing Dr (Capt) K. Thimmappiah Memorial tournament at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in India yesterday.

Having starting the day on 135 for three -- 56 run in the lead -- BCB XI posted 334 for 10 in 102.3 overs. Overnight batsman Najmul Hossain, who started the day on 27, scored a team high 72 runs off 125 balls before being run-out in the 70th over. Although BCB XI lost a few quick wickets in the middle, a 77-run eighth-wicket stand between Kazi Nurul Hossain (68 off 87) and Sunjamul Islam (3 off 82) helped the side post a commendable total.

Following the exchange, Secretaries XI ended the day on 100 for three -- trailing by 155 runs -- in 26 overs. A few quick wickets by BCB XI today could see Secretaries XI in deep trouble.

Ireland's dream come true

One-off Test against England starts today

AFP, London



Ireland's march to becoming a fully-fledged member of cricket's elite will reach another important staging post when they play their first Test against England at Lord's on Wednesday.

The Irish men's side only made their Test debut last year, suffering a final day defeat by Pakistan in Dublin in a creditable display before being well beaten by fellow newcomers Afghanistan.

Since the turn of the century, Ireland have become known for their one-day exploits, beating the likes of Pakistan (2007) and England (2011) at World Cups. But Test status was always the dream.

Now this match at Lord's is set to be

the highlight of Ireland's year given they did not qualify for the reduced 10-team World Cup won just over a week ago by tournament hosts England in a thrilling final against New Zealand, which also took place at 'the home of cricket'.

The sport has a long history in Ireland and cricket was hugely popular there in the 19th Century. But a rising tide of Irish nationalism and the growth of the Gaelic Athletic Association led to cricket being declared a "garrison" or "foreign" game.

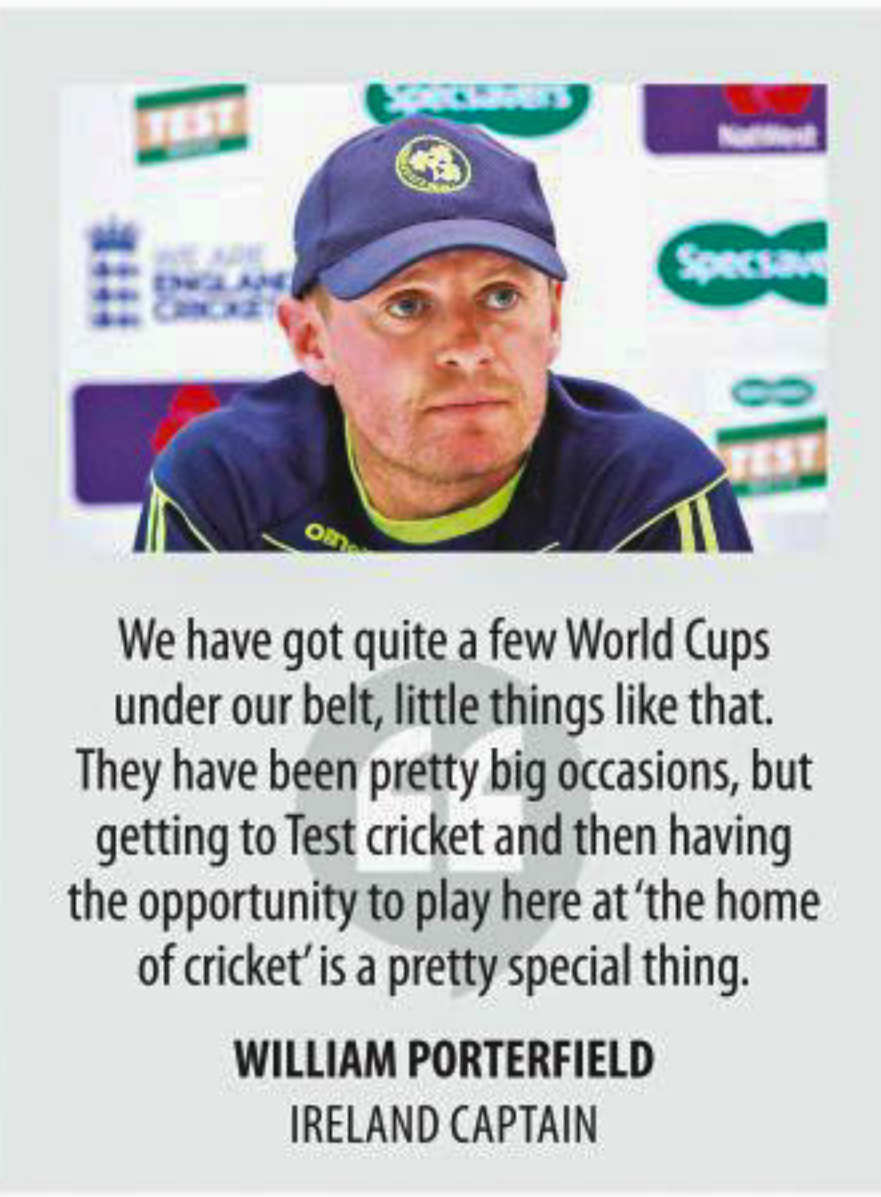
Irish cricket went into something of a retreat although memorable occasions such as a televised win over the touring West Indies in 1969 helped to change attitudes.

Several of the present side have played county cricket, including Tim Murtagh, a stalwart for Lord's based-Middlesex, who recently took his 800th first-class wicket.



England batsman Jason Roy is all set to make his Test debut for the reigning ODI world champions when they take on Ireland in a one-off match in London starting today.

PHOTO: REUTERS



We have got quite a few World Cups under our belt, little things like that. They have been pretty big occasions, but getting to Test cricket and then having the opportunity to play here at 'the home of cricket' is a pretty special thing.

WILLIAM PORTERFIELD
IRELAND CAPTAIN

Meanwhile fast bowler Boyd Rankin was briefly an England player when that was the only way Irishmen could play Test cricket before switching back.

"It is a dream come true, and it is something I never thought would happen in my playing career," said Rankin.

"You can't get much better than a Test match at Lord's."

England pacer James Anderson has been ruled out of four-day Test against Ireland but World Cup star Jason Roy will make his debut. England will be resting several of their World Cup stars, including fast bowler Jofra Archer, all-rounder Ben Stokes and batsman Jos Buttler.

Eoin Morgan, their victorious Dublin-born captain, no longer plays Test cricket with Joe Root, a fellow World Cup winner, in charge.

'I hope to take SL to the next T20 World Cup'

AFP, Colombo



Veteran Sri Lankan pace bowler Lasith Malinga Tuesday confirmed he will retire from one-day international cricket after the first match against Bangladesh but hopes to play T20 cricket.

Malinga invited fans to his farewell ODI at the R. Premadasa Stadium in Colombo on Friday and said the cricket board agreed to his request to retire from the 50-over format of the game.

Posting a video message to his fans on his wife's Facebook page, Malinga said he felt no ill will towards officials and players who may have tried to push him out of the team. The 35-year-old said he was sidelined by selectors two years ago but was able to prove his value to the national team at the recent World Cup.

"Friday will be the last day you will see me playing a ODI match," Malinga said. "If you can, please come for the match."

During practice Tuesday ahead of the first ODI against Bangladesh, Malinga said he hoped to play T20 cricket and had his sights on the 2020 World Cup in Australia.

"I hope to be able to take Sri Lanka to the next T20 World Cup," he said. "I hope I will have an opportunity to play in that tournament, but if there are better players than me, I don't mind being left out."

Malinga's retirement was first announced by skipper Dimuth Karunaratne, who on Monday told reporters the right-arm fast bowler indicated Friday's match would be his last ODI appearance.

Malinga was named to the 22-man Sri Lanka squad for the series with matches scheduled for July 26, 28 and 31 at the R. Premadasa Stadium. He will leave as Sri Lanka's third-highest wicket-taker in ODI cricket with 335 wickets in 219 innings so far.

Only Muttiah Muralitharan (523) and Chaminda Vaas (399) have taken more wickets than Malinga in ODIs for Sri Lanka.