

Satisfied but not happy: Mario

SPORTS REPORTER



After observing the players' condition yesterday, the first day of the conditioning camp in Mirpur, with Bangladesh's one-off Test against Afghanistan and the following triangular T20I series featuring hosts Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Zimbabwe next month in mind, the Tigers' strength and conditioning coach Mario Villavarayen said that although he is satisfied with the players' current state, he is still not pleased as the players have a lot to improve on.

"We are doing the fitness test after eight months. Because we have been playing non-stop cricket since October. So again, for me and the players to find out where they are and how we need to push them in the next coming months. So in terms of where they are, satisfied, but not happy. And it's understandable because we have not done fitness camp for eight months. So it's natural, they are not at their best but not bad. So I am happy in that sense.

"That's the reason we did the fitness test, to find out the condition [of the players] in terms of running fitness, where they are in terms of their strength and others to work on areas where we need to work on. There are some guys who need to work on their

fitness and there are some who are doing well, but they need to improve too," said Mario after yesterday's session in Mirpur.

Apart from T20I and Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who is currently in the United States, all the other members were present in the conditioning camp yesterday. Meanwhile, ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, about whom it was learned that he wanted to practice on his own, was however seen training with others yesterday after being named in the 35-member list even though there are no ODIs in the upcoming series for the Tigers.

There have been instances of fielding lapses by Bangladesh players, even from the likes of Sabbir Rahman -- considered one of the best fielders in the Tigers' squad -- in recent matches. However, Mario thought that fitness cannot be the sole reason behind such mishaps.

"I cannot say that's the reason or this is the reason. It is not fair to say that someone dropped the catch because of fitness," he said.

Mario also informed that Mahmudullah Riyad, who recently recovered from a calf injury and also started bowling his off-spin -- although with a modified round-arm action -- in the recently concluded three-ODI series against Sri Lanka, and all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin, who has been plagued by a back injury, have successfully completed what was asked of them in yesterday's camp.



Even though the day was meant for fitness training and observation, certain cricketers such as Liton Das elected to jump-start their skill practice as the wicketkeeper-batsman was hard at work in the nets on the first of a four-day conditioning camp in Mirpur yesterday. (Inset) Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was also present, toiling away to keep his fitness levels up.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/BCB

'The dynamic he adds is fantastic'



JOFRA ARCHER

REUTERS, London



There have been few more explosive Test debuts than the one made by England's Jofra Archer in the second match of the Ashes series against Australia at Lord's.

Although England failed to win the match, Archer's hostile spell on the fourth day served notice that the 24-year-old Barbados-born fast bowler has the ability to enjoy a stellar career.

The bare statistics do not tell the whole story. Archer took two wickets in the first innings and three in the second as Australia limped to 154 for six to force a draw on Sunday and remain 1-0 up in the series.

But he left a trail of devastation in his wake, hitting Australia's leading batsman Steve Smith with a sickening blow to the neck which forced him to retire hurt.

Smith returned to the crease but awoke on Sunday morning suffering from concussion symptoms which ruled him out of the rest of the match.

Archer also struck Smith on the forearm and Marnus Labuschagne, Test cricket's first substitute in place of Smith, on the helmet with the second ball he faced.

His teammates were impressed. "Out on the field Jofra has clearly made a big impact," England captain Joe Root said.

"The dynamic he adds to the bowling attack is fantastic. What a couple of brilliant spells we have seen from him already! It is an exciting prospect, going into the rest of the series."

England all-rounder Ben Stokes described Archer's performance as "frightening".

"I am not sure there will be a better debut in terms of announcing yourself in the team," Stokes said. "The spell was incredible to watch. We are very lucky he is in our team. He gives you an extra dimension."

Many of the Australian team have played with Archer in the Indian premier League and had known what to expect.

"It didn't surprise us," captain Tim Paine said. "We've seen Jofra in Australia for a few years now. We know the package he brings. It's something every team wants to have."

Archer contributed hugely to England's World Cup victory this year, bowling the Super Over in the final against New Zealand, and has the potential to make an even bigger impact in the longest format of the game.

"With Archer, I am excited for the next few years of Test match cricket. We have got a superstar," former England captain Michael Vaughan, who led his team to victory in the 2005 Ashes, told the BBC.

BPL GC meets three franchises

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) Governing Council (GC) has started discussions with tournament franchises with the intention to resolve disagreements and set rules for the new four-year cycle of the tournament.

The BPL GC held meetings with representatives of Dhaka Dynamites, Khulna Titans and Rajshahi Kings and are also expected to hold meetings with Rangpur Riders, Comilla Victorians and Sylhet Sixers today.

Earlier this month, the governing council announced that they would set fresh regulations to start a new four-year cycle, which will also require a renewal of contracts with franchises. The governing body of the tournament had also not endorsed Shakib Al Hasan's move from Dhaka Dynamites to Rangpur Riders and also did not recognize direct overseas signings by franchises for the upcoming season.

"The BCB [Bangladesh Cricket Board] wants to set rules for the next four years as a new cycle is starting. But in this cycle, they can have one or two foreign signings. We have said it even before [to the media], it is always better to have two or three direct overseas signings and a must to have one local signing [as an Icon Player]," Khulna Titans managing director Kazi Inam Ahmed told reporters when asked about the franchises' suggestions to the GC during the meeting.

"The one local signing can be the captain of the team, a marquee and it can also be a player from the same region as the franchise. We [Khulna Titans] have taken a lot criticism from the fans because we do not have players from Khulna. So, having a local player [ahead of the draft], in any manner, makes the system look good," Inam added.

According to Dynamites' chief executive officer Obaid Nizam, the franchise did not have any crucial agenda to discuss with the governing council.

When asked for his thoughts on signing a local icon cricketer and the Shakib issue, Nizam said:

We have discussed with three franchises -- Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi -- and the discussions were fruitful. They have agreed to be included for the new cycle. They informed that they will accept what the board decides. They [franchise] are informed about the new rules and those rules will be included in the contract so that there won't be any problems in future.

MAHBUBUL ANAM
BCB DIRECTOR

"There is no discussion over the issue as the rules will be changed from this season. They [BPL GC] wanted some advice from us which we have shared. We did not have any discussion over Shakib."

Later yesterday, Rajshahi Kings informed of their suggestions to the GC through a press release. They urged that a percentage of revenue -- 'broadcast rights, sponsorship rights, ticket procedure and all other revenue streams' -- that the tournament generates be shared among the franchises. They also wanted consistency in rules and bylaws in the next cycle -- regardless of whether there are changes from the first cycle -- so that franchises could plan for the 4-year tenure.

According to BCB vice-president and BPL commissioner Mahbub Anam, the governing council will take a decision after consulting with franchises.

"We have discussed with three franchises -- Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi -- and the discussions were fruitful. They have agreed to be included for the new cycle. They informed that they will accept what the board decides. They are informed of the new rules and those rules will be included in the contract so that there won't be any problems in the future," Mahbub told the reporters.



Budding youth cricketers underwent a practice session under the guidance of coach Mahmudul Haider Tamim (L) as a part of a talent hunt programme outside the Abdur Rab Serniabat Stadium in Barishal yesterday. Since they have no ground to call their own, the age-level cricketers were forced to make do.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Smith shoots to number two in Test rankings

Karunaratne breaks into top 10

ICC



Steve Smith, who followed up his twin tons at Edgbaston with a 92 at Lord's in the second Ashes Test, has reclaimed the No.2 spot in MRF Tyres ICC Test Rankings for Batsmen. Jofra Archer, meanwhile, has debuted at No.83 on the bowlers' ranking.

Smith's 92 in the second Ashes Test took his runs tally to 378 in three innings at an impressive average of 126. Despite being banned for a year, he is only nine points behind table-topper Virat Kohli, with Smith making up 19 points on the Indian captain after his performance at Lord's.

Pat Cummins, meanwhile, has strengthened his hold on the MRF Tyres ICC Test Rankings for Bowlers, reaching career-high ranking points.

Several Australians have made noteworthy strides in the batting rankings owing to their performances in the ongoing Ashes series. Travis Head climbed two spots to No.18, while Marnus Labuschagne has jumped 16 spots on the table to be No.82. Their English rivals, notably Ben Stokes (six spots up to No.26), Jonny Bairstow (seven spots up to No.30) and Rory Burns (17 spots up to No.64) have made advances too.

However, Australia's top-order players David Warner (down four), Usman Khawaja and Cameron Bancroft (both down five) have lost out.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne, whose brilliant 122 in the first Test helped his team claim a six-wicket win over New Zealand, has broken into the top 10, climbing four spots to No.8, the highest he has been in his seven-year Test career.

Among bowlers, Archer, who returned match figures of 5/91 in his debut Test at Lord's, has broken through in the rankings to 83rd. Jack Leach, who was playing only his sixth Test, climbed eight spots to be No.40. The left-arm spinner, who made his Test debut against New Zealand last year, has already picked up 24 wickets at an average of 24.16.

Sri Lankan spinner Akila Dananjaya was also impressive in the first Test against New Zealand at Galle and has jumped nine spots ahead to No.36. He claimed six wickets in the Test, which included a five-for in the first innings, where he rattled the Kiwi top order giving his team the early advantage.

Cummins, who is the top wicket-taker in Ashes this year with 13 scalps at 16.30, has also churned out handy performances with the bat and is now No.5 in the MRF Tyres ICC Test Rankings for All-rounders.

England unchanged for Headingley

AFF, London



England named an unchanged squad on Monday for this week's third Test against Australia at Headingley.

The injured James Anderson, England's all-time leading Test wicket-taker, will continue his bid to return later in the series by playing in a county 2nd XI match starting Tuesday.

England's selectors kept faith with the XI that drew the rain-affected second Ashes Test at Lord's on Sunday, with the hosts having the better of an exciting last day before Australia held out to preserve their 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

Surrey left-arm seamer Sam Curran, who did not play at Lord's, retained his place in a 12-man squad for the third Test, which starts at England captain Joe Root's Headingley home ground on Thursday.

With just a four-day turnaround between Tests in London and Leeds, major changes were always unlikely.

Now England will hope that is sufficient time for World Cup-winning fast bowler Jofra Archer, who took five wickets while repeatedly topping speeds of 90 mph on his Test debut, to recover from the 44 overs he sent down at Lord's. SQUAD: Rory Burns, Jason Roy, Joe Root (capt), Joe Denly, Ben Stokes, Jos Buttler, Jonny Bairstow (wkt), Chris Woakes, Jofra Archer, Stuart Broad, Jack Leach, Sam Curran.