

Fine tuning or overall policy change?

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The recent history of the Bangladesh cricket team's fast bowling unit is a topsy-turvy one. In an era where the general quality of fast bowling is rising, the national team is not only lagging behind international standards but appear to be relatively 'out of ideas' when it comes to improving the state of the bowling unit.

Bangladesh signed pace legend Courtney Walsh in 2016 to guide a relatively young pace arsenal with veteran Mashrafe Bin Mortaza leading the charge. There was an also apparent resurgence in faith shown to fast bowlers as five pacers were included in the squad for the World T20 and the Asia Cup tournaments in 2016.

The likes of Taskin Ahmed and Mustafizur Rahman showed promise, looking capable of carrying the pace lineup alongside Mashrafe and the likes of Rubel Hossain. Four years on, Walsh has left his post after the 2019 World Cup and even as new pacers have come in, the Tigers have shown little signs of levelling up.

The ODI side regularly features four seamers, even at home, but the New Zealand series last year and the recently concluded World Cup showed that pace is a discipline where the Tigers suffer greatly. Even ace paceman Mustafizur Rahman got his wickets after the 30-over period at the World Cup and the new-ball woes greatly compounded the team's ability to challenge in a major tournament.

Despite Walsh's best wishes, the pacers failed to execute ideas which were based on Walsh's theme of 'consistency'. In fact, bowlers showed more improvement during Heath Streak and Champaka Ramanayaka's tenures.

Plenty of faces have been tried in all three formats in recent times but the

team management almost always seem to fumble through the darkness before stumbling onto familiar faces like Taskin Ahmed.

However, while talent remains on an individual level, the quality never improved. Fizz was still mostly relying on his cutters that he had to perfect due to conditions at home. Taskin was looking to hit the wicket hard, but his inconsistent form shows that ideas did not materialise.

Abu Jayed perhaps suffered from a lack of opportunities while others such as Khaled Ahmed, Ebadat Hossain and Abu Hider have remained on the periphery of the management's plans, never showing signs of cementing their place. Subashis Roy, once thought to have great potential, played his last Test in 2017 before he too was 'lost' in the shuffle.

India, once thought to be primarily a batting side, improved in Tests by finding bowlers who attack. The question facing newly appointed pace-bowling coach Charl Langeveldt is whether small tweaks to individuals will do the trick or whether it is a matter of implementing an overall change in policy for the fast men.

He admitted that his coaching philosophy was different to Walsh's and he would focus on the individual. He understood the problem of playing pacers in the subcontinent while pushing the bowlers to get better in foreign conditions. However, the improvement shown by pacers is directly related to the nature of the pitches here as well, which has left a chasm between current and required standards.

Langeveldt talked about 'changing the mindset' of the bowlers, but the aggression that has to be shown on the field can only materialise through skills developed. 'It's [fast bowling] hard work but you need to be clever,' Langeveldt said during a press conference. It appears that for the pace battery to improve, a lot more than just fine tuning is needed.



Having replaced West Indies great Courtney Walsh, Bangladesh's new bowling coach Charl Langeveldt of South Africa (R) imparts some wisdom to Tigers' paceman Mustafizur Rahman during the ongoing preparatory camp in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

BD lose by six again

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh U-21 women's hockey team suffered a 6-0 defeat at the hands of Sports Authority of Indian (SAI) academy's hockey team in the second match of the Junior Women's AHF Cup's preparation series at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The home side fell one goal behind in the first quarter before going on to concede three more in the second quarter. After resumption, the visiting SAI Academy's women's team added two more goals, raising the tally to 6-0, however they could not add any more in the fourth and final quarter in the face of tough resistance from the home side, who lost the first match by an identical 0-6 margin on Wednesday.



I think the introduction of the [World] Test Championship is a good initiative for our country. Personally I am very happy because Test cricket doesn't get enough attention in our country. Now it will get the attention, so it is good for us. The Test match [against Afghanistan at home] before the Test Championship will be good in terms of preparation. It is a good opportunity for us and I am hopeful that it will be a good Test match.

MOMINUL HAQUE

BANGLADESH BATSMAN, SPEAKING IN MIRPUR YESTERDAY

Tigresses edge past Thailand

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh women's cricket team beat their Thai counterparts by four wickets in a T20I at the Kampong Cricket Club in Utrecht on Wednesday.

Thailand scored 68 runs for the loss of five wickets in their allotted overs before Bangladesh overcame the target with three balls to spare.

Bangladesh will play a T20 practice match against the Netherlands before taking on Thailand in the second T20I on Monday.

After the completion of their 10-day camp in the Netherlands, the Tigresses will travel to Scotland to participate in the upcoming Women's World T20 qualifiers, set to begin on August 31.

Eight teams, divided into two groups, will take part in the qualifiers. The winners of the two semifinals will ensure their places at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2020, to be held in the Australian cities of Canberra, Melbourne, Perth, and Sydney from February 21.

In the qualifiers, defending champions Bangladesh have been drafted alongside Scotland, Papua New Guinea and the USA in Group A while Group B consists of Ireland, Thailand, Namibia, and the Netherlands.

Lankans to tour Pakistan for ODIs or T20Is

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will return to Pakistan after a nearly two-year absence for three short-form cricket games later this year, the sports minister said Thursday.

"We are not in a position to send the team to Pakistan to play the two Tests, but we will be in Pakistan for about eight days to play the ODIs or the T20 matches," Harin Fernando told reporters in Colombo.

No dates were announced, but the minister said the games would be scheduled for later this year.

Citing safety fears, Fernando said two Tests could instead be played in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where Pakistan has held many of its home series.

International teams have stayed away from Pakistan over security concerns.

In October 2017, Sri Lanka played a T20 match in Lahore for the first time since a terror attack near the same venue in March 2009.

Archer strikes early

AFP, Leeds



England fast bowler Jofra Archer dismissed recalled Australia opener Marcus Harris on the first day of the third Test at Headingley on Thursday before rain intervened again in the Ashes.

Only four overs were possible before lunch but that was enough time for Australia to be reduced to 12-1 after England captain Joe Root had won the toss under gloomy skies in conditions that promised to assist his pace bowlers.

No sooner had Root called correctly on his Yorkshire home ground, however, then rain delayed the scheduled start by over an hour.

When play eventually got underway, conditions remained difficult for the batsmen.

Australia had dropped opener Cameron Bancroft, who had made just 44 runs in four innings, and brought in Harris to partner David Warner at the top of the order after England had enjoyed the better of a rain-affected draw in the second Test at Lord's.

Both left-handed batsmen struggled against England's new-ball attack of Stuart Broad and Archer.

The experienced Warner was repeatedly beaten by Broad juggling the ball off a length, while the

express Archer, in his second Test, went past Harris's outside edge.

Harris did leg-glance a stray Archer delivery for four and edged him short of Ben Stokes at third slip for another, far less convincing boundary.

But Archer, bowling from around the wicket, squared him up with an 87.3 mph delivery that saw Harris get a thin edge through to wicketkeeper Jonny Bairstow -- like Root appearing on his home ground.

Moments after Harris had fallen for eight, with Australia 12-1 off four overs, the umpires took the players off the field after deciding that a fresh shower was now too strong for play to continue.

Warner had yet to score after facing 12 balls.

Australia, still 1-0 up in the five-match series after their 251-run win in the first Test at Edgbaston, made three changes to their side in total.

With Steve Smith ruled out with a concussion suffered when hit on the neck by a 92 mph Archer bouncer at Lord's, Marnus Labuschagne -- cricket's inaugural concussion substitute when replacing Smith in the second Test -- took over from the star batsman.

Smith, however, was a huge loss to Australia having made scores of 144, 142 and 92 this series. Meanwhile fast bowler James Pattinson came in for paceman Peter Siddell.



PHOTO: REUTERS

England pacer Jofra Archer (C) continued his hot streak in the Ashes series by taking the wicket of Australia opener Marcus Harris for just eight on the first day of the third Test at Leeds yesterday.