

Will BCB's spin reliance change?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium [ZACS] in Chattogram, where Bangladesh are set to take on Afghanistan in a one-off Test from September 5, has been known as a happy hunting ground for Bangladesh.

However, many may be surprised to know that Bangladesh have won just two Tests and drew six out of 18 Tests played at the ZACS so far.

The reason behind the ZACS being termed as the Tigers' lucky ground is because of their success in the ODIs as Bangladesh won 12 out of 21 games played at the venue.

For the upcoming Test, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is thinking of giving seamers more opportunity to better prepare them for conditions abroad, where the faster men have often been found wanting.

"You are all aware of the type of wicket we normally have. There won't be much change in the pitch but we are trying to provide true wickets with some grass on it so that the fast bowlers get some advantage. We have to start [offering pace friendly pitches at home].

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AKRAM KHAN
CHAIRMAN, BCB CRICKET OPERATIONS

against the West Indies by 64 runs in November last year, drew the game against Sri Lanka earlier the same year and lost to Australia by seven wickets in 2017.

Mustafizur Rahman played as the lone seamer in those games in Chattogram alongside four genuine spinners in skipper Shakib Al Hasan, Taijul Islam, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nayeem Hasan.

Although the selectors did call up 12 fast bowlers in the 35-member Bangladesh preliminary squad, there is little chance of including more than two seamers in the playing eleven considering the type of pitch in Chattogram, which has mostly been batting friendly while assisting spin to varying degrees.

Pacer Shahadat Hossain, who played his last Test four years ago and not in contention currently, is the highest wicket-taker among pacers in Tests at the ZACS with 22 scalps from 10 games and is behind Shakib Al Hasan who leads with 55 wickets in 15 Tests at the venue. Mustafizur, with 10 wickets in four Tests is in

second place among the Bangladesh seamers.

The number of pacers fielded in recent home Tests – the 2018 Mirpur Test against West Indies was played with an all-spin attack – reveals a lack of confidence in the seamers. Skipper Shakib and Domingo will also be wary of the threat posed by Afghanistan's spinners like Rashid Khan, Mohammad Nabi and Qais Ahmed and perhaps that may see an extra coat of grass on the wicket.

The selectors are set to announce the squad within the next two days and it will reveal much about the weight of the BCB's words about maintaining standards abroad. Pacers have been abysmal at home, taking 15 wickets to the spinners' 161 in the last 10 home Tests, but they will benefit from more of the selectors' faith and an increase in assistance from the pitch.



(From R to L) Liton Das, Abu Jayed, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Jahurul Islam all seemed to be toiling hard during the practice session in Mirpur yesterday. The squad for the upcoming one-off Test against Afghanistan is to be announced within a couple of days.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Nayeem puts hosts on top

SPORTS REPORTER



After a decent start on the opening day of the first four-day, the Bangladesh High Performance (HP) team continued their

good showing as they ended the second day in a strong position against their Sri Lankan counterparts at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday.

While it was Nazmul Hossain Shanto who hogged the spotlight

with a magnificent unbeaten century on Day One, it was off-spinner Nayeem Hasan who shone yesterday. Nayeem returned figures of four for 31, scalping all four wickets that fell on the day after scoring a vital 72-ball 36 with the bat earlier.

Starting the day on 233 for four, Bangladesh HP lost centurion Nazmul (133 off 269) and Mahidul Islam early, leaving the score at 262 for six. However, Nayeem then strung an important 58-run seventh-wicket stand with



NAYEEM... 4 for 31

Zakir Hasan to restore stability and help Bangladesh HP post a commendable 360-run total.

Nayeem then carried on his

impressive display with ball in hand. He dismantled the Sri Lanka HP top order, starting with the wicket of Padhun Nissanka in the sixth over. Nayeem's exploits almost had Sri Lanka HP cornered as they were left reeling on 59 for four in 17.4 overs. However, the visitors started to repair the damage through an unbeaten 42-run fifth-wicket stand between Promod Maduwantha and Ashen Bandara, who took the visitors to 101 for four in 38 overs at the close.



Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel dives in vain to stop a shot from April 25 forward Kim Yu-Song during their AFC Cup inter-zone semifinal playoffs second leg at the Kim Il Sung Stadium in Pyongyang yesterday.

No history for Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani's fairytale run in the AFC Cup came to an end with an 5-4 aggregate defeat against April 25 SC following a 2-0 defeat in the second leg of inter-zone semifinal playoff at the Kim Il Sung Stadium in Pyongyang yesterday.

The defeat means Abahani had to be satisfied with a home win against the strong North Korean outfit, but the Sky Blues fell short of writing a piece of history of becoming the first Bangladeshi club to enter into the inter-zone final of the second-tier

club tournament in Asia.

Six-time professional league champions Abahani needed a draw in their away match to confirm inter-zone final berth and they fought shoulder-to-shoulder and held their superior hosts to a goalless draw in the first half on the artificial turf.

However, the resistance broke down four minutes into the second half when substitute Kim Yu-Song found the back of the net, earning the home side an aggregate draw with a crucial away goal advantage.

Abahani, who came into the match on the back of four successive wins in the AFC Cup, tried to find their way back and there was plenty

of time for them to bounce back, but the visitors suffered a big blow in the 67th minute when defender Mamun Miah was sent off.

With April 25 SC never having lost an AFC Cup match on home soil, it was always going to be tough for Abahani and the 10-man team found it hard to find a way to a goal. And they were silenced by Kim with a second goal in the 83rd minute, confirming the home side's place in their second successive inter-zone final.

April 25 will now face Vietnam's Hanoi FC in the inter-zone final playoffs on September 5 and October 2.

after the immediate impact of the blow from Archer's delivery.

"I had a few things running through my mind, particularly where I got hit," Smith told reporters.

"Like a bit of the past sort of came up, if you know what I mean, from a few years ago. That was probably the first thing I thought about.

"Then I thought, 'I'm actually OK here'. I was a bit sad, but I was alright mentally for the rest of that afternoon."

Smith did not relish being a spectator at Headingley but said he expected to be back in the thick of it in Manchester.

He dismissed the idea that Archer might have an edge against him should they face off again.

"No, I'm not really going to change anything. There's been a bit of talk that he's got the wood over me but he hasn't got me out," said Smith of England's tearaway paceman.

"He hit me on the head on a wicket that was a bit up and down at Lord's.

"All the other bowlers have had more success against me, I dare say. I've faced them a bit more but they've all got me out a lot more, so, yeah, pretty comfortable about that."

"If you bowl it up there it means they can't nick me off or hit me on the pad or hit the stumps," he shrugged.

"With the Dukes ball, I don't know -- it's an interesting ploy, so we'll see what happens."

Smith said he had tried them out and his heart-rate had gone up about "30 or 40" beats per minute.

"I just feel claustrophobic. I compare it to being stuck in an MRI scan machine so it was different," he said.

"At some point they're probably going to become mandatory so I am going to have to get used to them."

'Hard to believe Stokes will be surpassed'

APP, London



Ben Stokes's astonishing match-winning performance in the third Ashes Test at Headingley upstages that of Ian Botham in 1981 at the same ground, according to former England captain Mike Brearley.

"It is hard to believe Stokes's could ever have been, or even ever will be, surpassed," wrote Botham's 1981 captain in The Times. Both performances included stamina and skill with the ball as well as a monumental performance with the bat, each of them securing narrow wins for England in cricket's oldest rivalry.

Stokes's 135 not out on Sunday secured a highly unlikely one-wicket win over Australia -- England required 73 when the last batsman Jack Leach came to the wicket -- and followed a monumental 24-over bowling stint in the tourists' second innings during which he took three wickets.

Botham's performance in 1981 was equally heroic. In spite of taking six wickets in Australia's first innings and then scoring 50 in England's first dig, Botham came to crease a second time with the English following on.

His unbeaten 149 transformed the outcome of the Test, setting the stage for Bob Willis to write his name into folklore with eight wickets in the Australians' second innings as England sealed a remarkable 18-run win.

Brearley likens Stokes, Botham and another celebrated all-rounder Freddie Flintoff, who was the star of the England's

2005 Ashes victory, to "the finest specimen of the thoroughbred old English yeoman."

"Vivid though the images from the distant past are, mental pictures of rampaging bowling and batting by all three iconic all-rounders, it is difficult now to remove from the front of my mind the shock, the exhilaration, of the recent: the sheer improbability of Stokes's performance at Headingley last week," wrote Brearley.

Brearley, regarded as one of England's finest captains, said the trio rode their luck at times.

"I like the story of the man who kept complaining to God about his bad luck in life; why would God not at least let him win the lottery?"

"Fed up at last with these endless complaints, God barked down from the sky: 'Do me a favour, at least buy a ticket.'"

"Stokes, Botham and Flintoff all did rather more than buy tickets. By their courage, skill, conviction and genius, they earned their luck."

'OUTRAGEOUS RUSTICITY AND DEFIANCE'

Brearley, who is now a respected psychoanalyst, said there were similarities between Botham's Headingley innings and that of Stokes.

"In a way, Botham's 149 not out against Australia at Headingley in 1981 started where Stokes's 135 not out left off, with outrageous rusticity and defiance, in the quest for an apparently unreachable target.

"Echoes of the village green on the respectable arena of Headingley."

Fit-again Paul in for Cummins

ICC

A fit-again Keemo Paul has been included in the 13-member West Indies squad for the second Test against India starting on Friday.

The fast bowler had missed the series opener with an ankle injury. Miguel Cummins, who had come in as his replacement for the Antigua Test, makes way for his return.

The promising 21-year-old has six wickets in three Tests so far, to go with first-class returns of 80 wickets in 20 matches. Cummins didn't have a great time of it in the first Test, going wicketless in 20 overs.

SQUAD: Jason Holder (c), Kraigg Brathwaite, Darren Bravo, Shamarr Brooks, John Campbell, Roston Chase, Rahkeem Cornwall, Shannon Gabriel, Jahmar Hamilton (wk), Shimron Hetmyer, Shai Hope (wk), Keemo Paul, Kemar Roach.

Anderson steps up recovery

REUTERS, London

James Anderson bowled 20 overs for Lancashire second XI on Tuesday as he took another step towards proving his fitness for the fourth Ashes test against Australia.

England's leading wicket-taker, who is recuperating from a right calf injury, claimed 1-38 against Durham second XI at Chester on Tuesday.

The 37-year-old aggravated his calf injury in the Ashes opener at Edgbaston and missed the following two tests.

As part of his rehabilitation programme, Anderson featured for Lancashire's second XI against Leicestershire's second string last week, picking up two wickets.



STEVE SMITH