



Striker Nabib Newaz Jibon and other players practice headers during the Bangladesh football team's training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Focus on defence ahead of Qatar, India ties

SPORTS REPORTER

After a day's break following two FIFA friendly wins against Bhutan, the Bangladesh national football team began training for the upcoming World Cup qualifying matches against Qatar and India.

The Red and Greens will host Asian champions Qatar on October 10 before playing away against India in Kolkata five days later.

Having suffered a 1-0 defeat against Afghanistan in their first match of Group E, Bangladesh are at the bottom of the table with zero points, and things are expected to get even tougher for Jamie Day's men against the two much higher-ranked opponents.

Qatar are 62nd in FIFA rankings while India are 104th. Bangladesh are the lowest-ranked side in the group at 187.

Even though Qatar were held to a goalless draw at home by India, the stats from that match is evidence of how much

the home team dominated. The Asian champions had 27 shots in total against two by India while also dominating possession (68 per cent).

It was down to some resolute defending and a string of superb saves from goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh that the hosts failed to score.

The Bangladesh coach knows what is awaiting his side and he will unsurprisingly revert to a defensive system despite 4-1 and 2-0 wins against Bhutan.

The coach wants his charges to be defensively at their best and do better with the ball if they get it.

"We have to be better than we have done on the ball, when you play a better team," the coach told media after yesterday's training session at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Veteran midfielder Mamunul Islam explained what the coach worked on in the first day's practice.

"The coach is working on small things such as what should our first pass be after we get the ball, what should be the movement of our players after winning

possession, etc."

While stressing on man-to-man marking and counter-attacking strategies during training, Day said they need to defend well and do something when they win possession.

"If you look at all the games against Qatar, both teams (Afghanistan and India) have had to defend very well for long periods of the game. It's going to be probably the same for us. We're going to have to defend well and be hard to beat and when we get the ball we've got to take care of it and try to do as well as we can with the football," the 39-year-old coach said.

However, ahead of these two matches defence has become the biggest worry for the coach, with full-back Bishwanath Ghosh suspended while centre-back Tutul Hossain Badsha and another full-back Shushanto Tripura are nursing injuries.

The coach will be having his fingers crossed to get the two injured defenders fit within the next two days before he announces his 23-man squad on Tuesday.

Vettori joining on October 25

SPORTS REPORTER



Newly-appointed spin consultant and former New Zealand captain Daniel Vettori is expected to join the Tigers during the preparation camp ahead of the upcoming India tour in November, informed Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) cricket operations committee chairman Akram Khan yesterday.

The BCB, on July 27, appointed Vettori as national team's spin bowling consultant until the ICC World T20 next year in Australia, and the Kiwi spin legend is expected to join the Tigers' camp on October 25. Bangladesh is scheduled to play two Tests and three T20s against India from November.

"We will start our preparation camp for the upcoming India series from October 25 and he (Vettori) will be available from the start of the camp as he is coming before that," Akram told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The 40-year-old will be available for around 100 days in his role with Bangladesh which includes preparation phase, series' and tournaments including the tour of India, Asia Cup and the tour

of New Zealand in 2020.

The BCB is eyeing former South Africa batsman Neil McKenzie as the team's full-time batting coach instead of his present role as white-ball batting consultant. Akram informed that McKenzie will join the team for the first Test in India.

"McKenzie will come and he will stay during the first Test. We are trying to have him for both red ball and white ball game. It will be good for our team. He will stay for the first Test and we are discussing for the second Test too. We have contracted him just for T20s and one-dayers. We don't have contract for Tests, but we are discussing it," he said.

Meanwhile, Akram added that the BCB will take a decision regarding tour of Pakistan by the next two weeks, saying that security of the team is the first priority for the board. The Sri Lanka national team is currently in Pakistan for the first time since the militant attack in 2009.

"This is not just a decision of the board. We haven't decided whether we will play in Dubai or Pakistan. We are discussing, but we will decide in the next 10-15 days. This decision will be finalised in board meeting and the green signal has to come from both sides (the cricket board and the government)," Akram added.



Mehedi, Mominul put BD A on top

SPORTS REPORTER



After an impressive display on the opening day, it was once again all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who shone with the ball before skipper Mominul Haque's century put Bangladesh A on top on the second day of their final four-day match against Sri Lanka A at the Mahinda Rajapaksa International Cricket Stadium in Hambantota yesterday.

Starting the day on 223 for five, Sri Lanka could only manage to add 45 more runs as they were bundled out for 268 in 90.2 overs. Mehedi, who had scalped three wickets on the previous day, took four of the five wickets that fell yesterday, finishing with the figures of seven for 84 in 37 overs, featuring 14 maidens.

After Mehedi removed overnight batsman Lahiru Udara, ending a 43-run sixth-wicket stand between Lahiru and Charith Asalanka in the 88th over, Sri Lanka soon faltered and lost the rest of their wickets within a span of just 19 deliveries. Bangladesh however lost two wickets in Jahurul Islam and Nazmul Hossain inside six overs with just 22 runs on the board before Shadman Islam and Mominul Haque added a 154-run third-wicket stand. Shadman was dismissed after scoring a 104-ball 77 run knock but Mominul's impressive 190-ball 117 helped Bangladesh manage a score of 283 for six in 67 overs at stumps.



MEHEDI... 7 for 84

Oman U-21s coming for 5-match series

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh under-21 hockey team will play a five-match series against their Omani counterparts at home from October 8 to 18 as a part of their preparations for the Junior Asia Cup 2020, which will be held in Dhaka in June next year.

A 26-member Oman team is scheduled to arrive here tomorrow for the five matches, to be played at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium, informed an official of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation.

The BHF is conducting a three-month training camp with 44 players under coach Mamunur Rashid, with the squad to be trimmed to 26 before the series.



Pacer Abu Hider, all-rounder Afif Hossain and batsman Saif Hassan alongside young off-spinner Nayeem Hasan and all-rounder Ariful Haque will be leaving Dhaka today to join Bangladesh A for their unofficial three-match ODI series against their Sri Lankan A, set to begin from October 9 at Hambantota. PHOTO: STAR

SHORT CORNER

Pandya undergoes surgery

India all-rounder Hardik Pandya underwent successful surgery on his lower back in London on Friday and said he hopes to return to action in "no time".

Pandya first sustained the injury during the Asia Cup last September and missed India's limited overs home series against Australia in February with lower back stiffness.

The 25-year-old recovered in time to play the 50-over World Cup in England and Wales earlier this year before complaining about the issue again after the recent Twenty20 matches against South Africa. -- Reuters

KKR rope in Mills, Hussey

Kolkata Knight Riders on Saturday named former New Zealand pacer Kyle Mills as the Indian Premier League side's new bowling coach.

Mills, 40, ended his playing career in 2015 as New Zealand's second highest wicket-taker in one-day internationals with 240 wickets from 170 matches.

David Hussey, a former Knight Riders player and Australian international, has been named as a top advisor to New Zealand head coach Brendon McCullum. "They bring a wealth of experience as professionals and are terrific individuals," Knight Riders chief executive Venky Mysore said in a statement. -- Afp

Sri Lanka stun Pakistan

AFP, Lahore

Inexperienced Sri Lanka stunned Pakistan by 64 runs in the first Twenty20 international in Lahore on Saturday, taking a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Sri Lanka scored 165-5 in their 20 overs with Danushka Gunathilaka scoring 57 off 38 balls including a six and eight boundaries.

Debutant Bhanuka Rajapaksa scored 32 off 22 with two sixes and as many boundaries while skipper Dasun Shanaka chipped in with 17 including two sixes.

Teenage Pakistan paceman Mohammad Hasnain took a hat-trick, finishing with 3-37.

Pakistan were bowled out for 101 in 17.4 overs with Nuwan Pradeep and Isuru Udana taking three wickets apiece. The second match will be played on Monday and the third on Wednesday -- all in Lahore.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SRI LANKA: 165 for 5 in 20 overs (Gunathilaka 57, Fernando 33, Rajapaksa 32; Hasnain 3-37)
PAKISTAN: 111 all out in 17.4 overs (Sarfraz 24, Iftikhar 25; Pradeep 3-2, Udana 3-11, De Silva 2-20)
Result: Sri Lanka won by 64 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Danushka Gunathilaka.

Rohit, Pujara extend lead

AFP, Visakhapatnam



Rohit Sharma on Saturday struck a second successive hundred in his debut as Test opener to help India set South Africa a daunting 395 to win the opening match of their series.

The hosts declared their second innings on 323 for four in the final session of day four in Visakhapatnam.

South Africa were 11 for one at stumps with Aiden Markram, on three, and Theunis de Bruyn, on five, at the crease.

The visitors need another 384 runs and India nine wickets on the final day to get ahead in the three-match series.

Ravindra Jadeja struck early after trapping first-innings centurion Dean Elgar for two in the fourth over of the innings.

The left-handed Elgar, who made 160 in the first innings, was given not out by the on-field umpire only for India to get the decision overturned with a TV review.

Markram and de Bruyn then played out the remaining overs from spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Jadeja until bad light forced the extended play -- to make up for lost time due to thunderstorm on day one -- to be called off.

Sharma, who made 176 in India's first innings of 502 for seven declared, is the first batsman to hit two tons in his first match as a Test opener.

He also hit 13 sixes, the most in a Test match, breaking Wasim Akram's record of 12.

Sharma put on 169 with Cheteshwar Pujara, who made 81, to frustrate South Africa after the loss of opener Mayank Agarwal for seven. Pujara was trapped lbw by Vernon

Philander after he completed his 21st Test half-century.

Sharma survived a reprieve on 50 when he was caught at the boundary off Dane Piedt. Replays indicated that felder Senuran Muthusamy's foot had touched the rope.

He was finally stumped off Keshav Maharaj as he attempted a big hit.

Jadeja hit a 32-ball 40 before being bowled by paceman Kagiso Rabada.

Maharaj struck before lunch, grabbing the key wicket of Agarwal, who hit 215 in the first innings, but the bowlers then struggled.

Earlier, Ashwin completed a haul of seven wickets as South Africa were bowled out for 431 in the morning session.

Ashwin got overnight batsman Maharaj out for nine and then trapped

Rabada, leaving the Proteas 71 runs behind.

Elgar was the hero of the South African innings with his 12th century that revived the tourists' batting after they had slipped to 63 for four.

His century partnerships with skipper Faf du Plessis, who made 55, and Quinton de Kock, who hit 111, were key to the Proteas fightback.

SCORES IN BRIEF
INDIA: First innings 502-7 decl and second innings 323 for 4 decl (Sharma 127, Pujara 81, Jadeja 40, Kohli 31 not out, Rahane 27 not out; Maharaj 2-129)
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 431 all out (Elgar 160, Du Plessis 55, De Kock 111, Muthusamy 33 not out; Ashwin 7-145, Jadeja 2-124) and second innings 11 for 1.



India opener Rohit Sharma (R) celebrates his back to back century on the fourth day of the first Test against South Africa in Visakhapatnam yesterday. PHOTO: AFP