

SPORT



(Anti-clockwise from top) Ahead of the first Test against India on Thursday, Bangladesh's new Test captain Mominul Haque and coach Russell Domingo (L) inspected the pitch in Indore perhaps in effort to ascertain whether spinners or pacers would be the call for the day. Meanwhile, spin bowling coach Daniel Vettori held a special training session while batting consultant Neil McKenzie drilled his charges as well. PHOTO: BCB

Intense Tigers brace for tough Test

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Indore

The Bangladesh team practised under sunny skies at the Holkar Stadium in Indore yesterday and the focus had shifted to red-ball cricket with the likes of Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad getting into Test gear. There was an intensity about the Tigers yesterday, which perhaps had to do with the realisation of how difficult their task would be to contend with India when the two-Test series starts with the Indore Test from November 14.

The mood was best exemplified by an exchange between Shadman Islam and head coach Russel Domingo, who was delivering throwdowns to the left-handed opener. Suddenly, one turned into a beamer and Shadman did well to get out of the way. Domingo raised his hand to apologise and Shadman nodded. Domingo shook his head, disappointed. A scene like that would bring laughter and smiles but no smiles this time. It was all business.

At the start of the day, batting coach Neil McKenzie got into gear as well, doing some stretches before heading to the nets for his first ever consultancy session with the Test side had a very active session with inputs for the batsmen. McKenzie is officially Bangladesh's limited-overs batting consultant, but he will also be performing red-ball duties for the Tigers on the tour of India. Initially appointed till the 2019 World Cup in July last year, McKenzie was one of the few coaches that survived Bangladesh's eighth place finish in the global showpiece in July this year.

The Holkar wicket has a hard surface but it is thought that batting will become easier as the Test progresses, with spinners getting to playing a more important role. The only Test played here saw India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin bag 13 wickets as

India thrashed New Zealand in 2016.

Even South Africa were heavily thrashed in the recently-concluded Test series and there should be no illusions about the strength of India's bowling unit. McKenzie had plenty of advice on how to go about things.

Standing right behind the wicket, in the umpire's position so to speak, he would come around and talk to the batsman after every few deliveries during the net session. He was seen discussing how to set up the back foot and the stance to Mahmudullah while the right-hander was facing Tajul Islam and Nayeem Hasan at the nets.

Mushfiqur Rahim had faced Mustafizur Rahman, Abu Jayed and a net bowler in the morning session. He too was seen coming back to the nets again to consult with McKenzie.

Asked about how things were progressing, Mohammad Mithun informed that technique was the focus for McKenzie.

"We all know how strong their [India] bowling lineup is. We are especially thinking about how to face up to their spinners," the batsman said during a press conference yesterday.

"We feel that it would be harder to contend with the spinners rather than the pacers," he said.

"The spinners will start getting more purchase from Day Three, so we were working on the technical aspects to deal with that scenario," Mithun added.

Test cricket is serious business and India's cricket at home is not unknown. A challenge bigger than the T20I series -- which the Tigers lost 2-1 -- awaits and a transformation was in order.

"No team has been comfortable in India. We are not focusing on their weaknesses, but on our strengths. We're disappointed by the T20 series but we are now focused about doing well in the Tests," Mithun said.

Pink on the horizon

SPORTS REPORTER from Indore

While both Bangladesh and India had insisted that the focus lay with the first Test in Indore starting from tomorrow, the pink ball which will be used in the second Test in Kolkata dominated all discussion yesterday during Ajinkya Rahane's press conference.

Both teams are set to play their first ever pink-ball Tests under lights and there had been curiosity about how India were preparing for the Test after they had rejected the idea of day-night Tests in the past. There had been no time for preparation but Rahane informed that they were not sitting idle as a few from the Test side went and worked with Rahul Dravid at the National Cricket Academy in Bangalore while the T20I series against Bangladesh was going on.

"It was the first time I played with a pink ball and definitely it's a different ball game compared to red ball. Our



focus during the practice session was to look into the swing and seam and also play close to our body. What we found from the practice session was that the pink ball does a lot more than the red ball. We have to play slightly late and close to the body," he said.

Asked if the pink ball to be used was taking precedence over the first Test, Rahane said: "We decided to go and spend time at the NCA and if we got pink-ball sessions, it'd be great.

For bowlers it's a different thing. Shami was there, Jadeja was there. We decided that we'll have at least two sessions with the pink ball. But as I said, it's not difficult to stay in the present.

"The lateral movement is big, actually a lot more than the red ball. I'm sure we'll get two good practice sessions in Kolkata," he added.

India skipper Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma practised against throwdowns with the pink ball before moving on to red-ball practice. Naturally, the Indian team were not against gaining knowledge of the novel prospect.

Most of the Bangladesh Test team members have not yet used the pink ball. Asked about the challenge Bangladesh will pose, Rahane replied: "Bangladesh are a good team. They play as a unit. I thought we played really well against South Africa and that's in the past now. We always stay in the present. I am sure Bangladesh will come really hard at us, and they will give their best to win this Test match and the Test series."



The India team run drills ahead of the first of a two-Test series against Bangladesh in Indore on Thursday. (Left) Meanwhile, India captain Virat Kohli inspects the pink ball, to be used for the first time by either side come the second Test. PHOTO: AFP

A mobile entertainment unit

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Indore

While the Bangladesh team were undergoing net sessions at the Holkar Stadium in Indore, the mood around the visiting journalists -- unable to linger pitch side due to the ground's specific, thoroughly followed regulations and forced to make their way into the stands -- lightened amidst the prevailing seriousness of the Tigers' camp due to the presence of one humorously-cheerful soul named Nur Boksh.

He immediately caught the attention of those around him through his laughter -- a throaty burst that comes straight from the heart and hits the funny bone -- and his constant playing of the ektara, the instrument of choice for wandering bards, which kept the particular stand close to the players' nets in vibration.

Nur, an 81-year-old fan of the Bangladesh team, is an avid follower of the cricket team and made it to Indore after forays in Delhi, Rajkot and Nagpur. "I am a freedom fighter and fought under major Mohammad Abdul Jalil in



PHOTO: EKUSH TAPADER

sector nine during Bangladesh's war of independence" he said. "I get pension. My son and his wife are job holders. Money is not an issue for me and I travel on my own account. I told them: 'you spend your money and I will spend mine.'"

A happy-go-lucky person, his spirit carries him through at this old age.

"I feel joy. I like looking at so many people and travelling," he said. Nur had joined the army after independence and now gets a pension from the army as well. Despite that, travelling through the cities at this age must be a difficult task. Asked, Nur replied: "Am I not strong? My heart is good. I can move because my heart is in good condition. When

I see that I can't stay at a hotel due to money crisis, I lay down wherever I can manage."

Draped in a Bangladesh flag and often with the red and green of Bangladesh and the symbol of a Tiger, Nur's image has been carried by international media as well. Yesterday, a crop of Indian reporters thronged around him to quench their curiosity.

Asked in Hindi about how he manages tickets and the financial solvency to meet the financial demands of a tour, Nur said: "I try to do things on my own," before looking at one of his partners, also a Bangladesh fan. The other fan informed the media present that apparently Mushfiqur Rahim, Bangladesh's wicketkeeper-batsman, had supplied the tickets for the matches and one of the tickets would be shared with Nur.

His spirit in cheering for the Tigers was unquestionable and his smile will certainly pique the curiosity of those that find him in the stands coming Thursday during the first Test at Indore.

No Shakib in T20I, ODI rankings

SPORTS REPORTER

The International Cricket Council (ICC) did not include Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who is currently serving a two-year ban, in their updated T20I and ODI rankings.

However, Shakib remained third in the Test all-rounder rankings after the ICC released an updated list on Monday. Shakib was second in T20I all-rounder rankings and ninth in T20I bowling rankings. Australia's Glenn Maxwell now holds the second spot in T20I all-rounder rankings while fourth placed Mahmudullah Riyad remains the only Bangladeshi in the top ten. Meanwhile, Afghanistan's Mohammad Nabi topped the list with 339 points. Shakib, who was the top-ranked all-rounder in ODIs with 394 points, is now missing from the list with England's Ben Stokes topping the chart with 319 points.

SHORT CORNER

Faisal 2nd in World Golf Cup

Bangladeshi amateur golfer Faisal Khan won the runner-up trophy in the grand final of the 2019 Turkish Airlines World Golf Cup, finishing one shot behind the eventual winner.

The amateur event was held at the Cornelia Diamond Golf Resort and Spa in Antalya, Turkey from November 2 to 5.

Khan was disappointed to finish second after leading the way right through, nevertheless he was happy to finish runner-up in his first international participation. The top three players were rewarded with spots in Pro-Am of the 7-million-dollar Turkish Airlines Open. --SPORTS REPORTER

BD cruise into quarters

Bangladesh emerged Group C champions to move into the quarterfinals of the inaugural Junior Kabaddi World Championship after an easy 48-36 points win over Chinese Taipei in Iran yesterday.

The boys in red and green, who earlier beat Afghanistan by 84-11 points in their opening match, will play the quarterfinal against Group A runners-up on Thursday even though the opponents of the four-team group have not been decided yet. --SPORTS REPORTER

Bodybuilder Robin's feat

Bangladesh's Robin emerged runner-up in the 60kg weight category of the IFBB 73rd World Bodybuilding Championship, which was held from November 5 to 10 in Fujairah, UAE. Athletes from all over the world represented 48 countries at this event. The prestigious overall bodybuilding title went to Iran's Mehdi Arzeshmand. --SPORTS REPORTER