

SPORT



Hybrid pitches the solution?

SPORTS REPORTER

A long-standing discontent in Bangladesh cricket has been about the quality of pitches in the country, which have generally left the national cricketers unprepared to tackle challenging conditions while playing abroad.

It is almost a certainty that when a Bangladesh team tours outside the subcontinent and falter, the players blame the unresponsive pitches in the domestic circuit for their inability to adapt to seaming and bouncy pitches, especially in places like South Africa, New Zealand and West Indies.

The weather, environment and the soil in Bangladesh is perhaps one of the biggest reasons why the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) have not been able to prepare sporting pitches, which instead thwart seamers with less carry and bounce.

However, Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League side Chattogram Challengers' English head coach Paul Nixon has prescribed developing hybrid wickets to groom youngsters and help cricket in Bangladesh.

UK-based company SIS Pitches actually design, manufacture, construct, install and maintain world-leading pitches for some of the biggest sports.

The surface installation technology has been developed by industry experts SIS Pitches and



comes as new research reveals it could have significant benefits for players and clubs.

Hybrid pitches have been trialled in net areas and on main ground squares at a number of county cricket clubs since 2017. More recently, the company has installed hybrid cricket pitches at county cricket clubs across the United Kingdom ahead of the 2019 cricket season.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) became the first to install two trial wickets using this technology at the prestigious National Cricket Performance Centre in Loughborough and they have now approved hybrid pitches for use in the Royal London One Day Cup, Vitality Blast and all

formats of second XI cricket for the 2019 season.

According to reports, the pitches improved surface stability, reduced wear, reduced the impact of bowler's foot holes and significantly extended the pitch's durability. Further research this summer will be carried out to gauge whether there is increased pace and carry, and more consistent bounce from hybrid pitches.

In addition, repair works after play were reduced with a faster grass recovery time, while the surface remained more than 95 per cent natural turf, meaning it will crucially still behave like a normal wicket.

"We have hybrid pitches in UK. Hybrid pitches is 80 per cent artificial and there is bounce on

the wicket. It gives the ball more bounce and carry and it can really help Bangladesh. When Bangladesh go abroad there is a bit more carry and bounce. I think Bangladesh cricket should invest in hybrid wickets and I will definitely write that in my findings in Bangladesh at the end of the tournament," Nixon told reporters at the BCB Academy ground yesterday.

Weighing less than two tonnes and standing at 1.20m wide and 2m in length, the SIS Grass Universal machine provides quick, accurate and flexible stitching, with different depths and spacing using precise laser guidance making it a practical solution for groundskeepers who are challenged to maintain uniform grass quality in high-wear areas.

After installation, pitches are maintained for a minimum of eight weeks to allow the profile to settle and for all holes to close and anchor the SIS Grass fibres.

Hybrid cricket pitches have now been installed at Lancashire, Surrey, Lord's, Nottinghamshire, Glamorgan, Somerset, Durham, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire and at Loughborough University.

As the BCB is finding ways to improve the standard of domestic cricket, especially to improve the Tigers' skills in the longest format of the game, it seems that taking advantage of such new technologies and experimenting with hybrid pitches in venues across the country could well be the way forward.



Dhaka Platoon's star opener Tamim Iqbal sharpens his skills at Mirpur's Academy ground nets yesterday before taking on fellow high-flyers Rajshahi Royals (Bottom) At the opposite end of the spectrum, Rangpur Rangers skipper Shane Watson and struggling pacer Taskin Ahmed will be looking for a rare win against fellow bottom-dwellers Sylhet Thunder in today's second match.



Proteas end five-Test losing streak

AFP, Centurion

South Africa broke down stubborn England resistance to win the first Test of their World Test Championship series by 107 runs at SuperSport Park on Sunday.

The win broke a five-Test losing sequence for the Proteas.

England needed 376 to win but despite some committed batting were bowled out for 268 on the fourth day of the five-day encounter.

An enthralling contest swung South Africa's way when left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj bowled Ben Stokes to halt a brief flurry of strokes as Stokes and captain Joe Root tried to lift the scoring rate before the second new ball was due.

The new ball then had an immediate impact with Kagiso Rabada having Jonny Bairstow caught at gully before Anrich Nortje claimed the crucial wicket of Root, who made a fighting 48 before he was caught behind.

It was the second time in the day Nortje claimed a wicket with the second



South Africa pacer Kagiso Rabada (C) celebrates after the dismissal of England's Sam Curran on the fourth day of the first Test in Centurion yesterday.

ball of a new spell after he made the first breakthrough of the day by dismissing top-scorer Rory Burns for 84.

The remaining wickets fell quickly, with Rabada finishing with four for 103 and fellow fast bowler Anrich Nortje claiming three for 56.

Maharaj, who broke England's first wicket stand of 92 on Saturday when he dismissed Dom Sibley, took two for 37.

South Africa produced a disciplined bowling performance, making scoring difficult on a pitch which always offered something to the bowlers with some

sideways movement and uneven bounce.

England added only 50 runs in 25 overs while losing two wickets during the morning.

Rory Burns took his overnight score of 77 to 84 before mistiming a pull against Nortje to be caught at mid-on, while Joe Denly was leg before wicket to Dwaine Pretorius for 31.

Burns and Denly saw off the threat of Vernon Philander and Rabada but found scoring difficult.

Philander conceded only one run in five overs. Rabada gave up 23 in six overs, which included two hooked sixes by Denly.

Burns, who faced most of Philander's bowling, adding only seven runs off 37 balls. The change to Nortje brought an immediate result for South Africa as Burns attempted to pull the fast bowler's second delivery and sent the ball looping to Rabada at mid-on.

Nortje made a second crucial breakthrough when South African captain Faf du Plessis made an inspired bowling change.

First innings destroyer Vernon Philander sent down three overs with the second new ball but was not making the batsmen play many deliveries, so Du Plessis called on Nortje with immediate success.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 284 and second innings 272.

ENGLAND: First innings 181 and second innings 268 all out (Burns 84, Sibley 29, Denly 31, Root 48, Buttler 22; Rabada 4-103, Nortje 3-56, Maharaj 2-37)

Result: South Africa won by 107 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Quinton de Kock.

SHORT CORNER

Petersen gets maiden SA call up

South Africa added batsman Keegan Petersen to their squad for the second Test against England in Cape Town next week, replacing the injured Aiden Markram, Cricket South Africa said on Sunday.

The uncapped 26-year-old scored 111 for South Africa A against England last week in the last warm-up game before the first test in Pretoria, where opener Markram injured his finger.

Petersen has played 88 first class matches, with an average of 40.66.

Markram will undergo surgery on his finger this week and will miss the rest of the four-Test series against England. The second Test at Newlands is from Jan. 3-7.

'Pakistanis have big hearts'

Former Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq has hit out at Danish Kaneria and said that religion had no role to play in cricket.

Speaking on his Youtube channel. Inzamam, the captain under which Kaneria played the most, said that Kaneria was preferred over Saqlain Mushtaq as the management believed that he was the country's future. "I have been hearing about this controversy with Danish, that when he played then some boys didn't think well about him or didn't want to eat with him or go out with him.

"The captain who Danish played the most under is me, and I never felt this thing, that there is any such thing in our team, that any player treats another player badly if he is a non-Muslim. I never noted even a single example of any such thing in our team."

The former captain also said that Pakistanis have big hearts and that, they accept everyone with big heart. "I am not ready to accept that we have such small hearts that we did a thing like this, that we didn't accept someone. I think Pakistanis have big hearts and we can accept everyone in our hearts."

Siddle calls time

AFP, Melbourne

Veteran Australian bowler Peter Siddle announced his international retirement Sunday after a 67-Test career, with national coach Justin Langer praising him as giving his "heart and soul" to the team.

The 35-year-old had been called up to the second Test squad in Melbourne but was not selected in the side to face New Zealand and decided to call it quits.

"Just being able to play, to walk out, wear the baggy green -- I'd watched guys like Punter (Ricky Ponting), Steve Waugh, guys like that wear it, represent Australia," he said.

"Every time I stepped out was amazing, I don't think I could pick one special one. At the end of the day, to play one is amazing, to end up playing what I did is truly special."

Siddle, who played a key role in helping Australia retain the Ashes in England earlier this year, went to the Australian dressing room at the Melbourne Cricket Ground to tell his teammates personally.

"The year after I retired from playing, Matty Hayden and Ricky Ponting were raving about this guy called Peter Siddle," Langer said.

"If it came from them, you knew it was right and so it proved throughout his brilliant international career.

"He is an unbelievable bloke and an extremely good cricketer. He is the everything of what a team player is. He has given his heart and soul to the Australian team and the game of cricket."

Siddle took 221 wickets from his 67 Tests including eight five-wicket hauls. He also played 20 one-day internationals and two Twenty20s.



Australia rout New Zealand, seal series

AFP, Melbourne

Nathan Lyon took four wickets as Australia thrashed New Zealand by 247 runs to win the second Test at Melbourne and the series Sunday with a battling century from opener Tom Blundell proving futile.

The Black Caps, chasing a massive 488 to win, were in serious trouble after a fiery James Pattinson ripped through the top order to leave them reeling at 38 for three.

But some fighting partnerships spearheaded by Blundell delayed the inevitable until Lyon worked his magic as the pitch deteriorated.

We want to win every Test match, there's no doubt about that. We know we've wrapped up the series here today, which was pleasing, but with the (ICC) Test Championship every Test is really important. So winning the series is almost less important until we wrap up next week hopefully with another good win.

TIM PAINE
AUSTRALIA CAPTAIN



Spinner Nathan Lyon's (C) four-wicket haul helped Australia to a crushing 247-run victory against New Zealand on the fourth day of the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne yesterday.

Blundell was last man out for a swashbuckling 121 -- his second Test century and his first for two years -- as New Zealand were dismissed for 240 with Trent Boult not batting after fracturing his hand in the first innings.

It was the second heavy defeat for the Black Caps, who lost by 296 runs in Perth and will be playing for pride

only in the final Test at Sydney later this week.

It was Head's first innings century and Paine's quick-fire 79 that took the Test out of New Zealand's reach after captain Kane Williamson's bold decision to bowl after winning the toss.

No team had ever chased down more than 418 in Test history, though

the record was set against Australia by the West Indies in Antigua in 2003.

"I felt like there was enough in the surface to bowl first," said Williamson.

"It was obviously very important for us to be on top of our game and the surface did offer some sideways movement and swing. But credit to Australia for getting through that first session and putting 400 on the board.

"They've got a fantastic attack with pace and bounce but their accuracy stood apart and they did seem to get more out of that surface."

Williamson called Blundell's 121 a "magnificent" innings.

"Obviously it was hard work out there, the task was immense. But you look at some small positives... that was a truly fantastic innings," he said after the defeat -- their second Test loss inside four days.

SCORES IN BRIEF
AUSTRALIA: First innings 467 and second innings 168 for 5 decl (Warner 38, Wade 30 not out; Wagner 3-50)
NEW ZEALAND: First innings 148 and second innings 240 all out (Blundell 121, Nicholls 33, Watling 22, Santner 27; Pattinson 3-35, Lyon 4-81)
Result: Australia won by 247 runs and led the 3-match series 2-0.
Player-of-the-match: Travis Head.