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Tamim, Mominul soothe nerves

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh team management will be delighted with what transpired on the second day of the opening round of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) yesterday as stalwart Tamim Iqbal smashed an unbeaten double ton while Mominul Haque hit a century to help put East Zone in a commanding position in their match against Central Zone at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Tamim's double and Mominul's hundred could not have come at a better time, with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announcing a 14-member squad yesterday for the first Test against Pakistan, scheduled from February 7 in Rawalpindi.

Mominul was retained as skipper of the national side while Tamim returned to the national outfit after taking a break from the India tour in November last year.

Tamim, who has usually played the anchor role in recent times, was rather aggressive throughout his yesterday's innings as he produced a career-best score in first-class cricket. His 281-ball 222, laced with 30 boundaries, speaks volume of the aggressive nature.

According to his national and East Zone captain Mominul, who scored a 194-ball 111 and shared over four hours on the pitch with Tamim, the stalwart's innings was 'outstanding'.

"I don't know about you people, but I witnessed it and it was outstanding," Mominul said at the end of yesterday's game.

Tamim ended the first phase of Tigers' Pakistan tour as the top run-getter in the three-match T20I series but his batting approach in the two matches that were played raised questions.

Yesterday's aggressive batting, however, will go some way to brushing off doubts about his approach and give the left-hander a much-needed boost ahead of the Test.

East Zone ended the day on top, piling up 395 for two and Mominul mentioned that he would like to see Tamim carry on to score a maiden first-class triple century today as East Zone look to stretch their 182-run lead further.

Meanwhile, in Chattogram, South Zone skipper Abdur Razzak returned impressive figures of four for 72, featuring six maidens, to help bundle out North Zone for 207. North Zone started the day on 46 for five and while overnight batsman Rony Talukdar scored a 143-ball 55 before being dismissed, it was an unbeaten 111-ball 58 from all-rounder Ariful Haque that helped North Zone stretch their score past 200.

After the exchange South Zone managed 40 for one before stumps.

SCORES IN BRIEF

CENTRAL ZONE: 213 all out in 75.1 overs
EAST ZONE: 395 for 2 in 95 overs (Tamim 222 not out, Mominul 111; Mukidul 1-51)
SOUTH ZONE: 262 all out in 67.4 overs and 40 for 1 in 22 overs (Nafees 19 not out; Taskin 1-12)
NORTH ZONE: 207 all out in 77.1 overs (Rony 55, Ariful 58 not out; Shafiul 6-40, Razzak 4-72)

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal pulls one away during an agressive knock that yielded his second first-class doublecentury. The southpaw hit 30 boundaries during an unbeaten 281-ball 222 in the Bangladesh Cricket League against Central Zone yesterday. His Test and East Zone skipper, Mominul Haque (Inset), also joined the party with a century. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

PAKISTAN-BANGLADESH FIRST TEST

Ashraf, Bilal back in Pakistan squad

AGENCIES, *Lahore*

All-rounder Faheem Ashraf and off-spinner Bilal Asif have been recalled to Pakistan's Test squad for first of two Tests against Bangladesh, which will be played in Rawalpindi from February 7.

The duo gets a recall on the back of excellent performances in the Qaid-e-Azam Trophy, Pakistan's domestic first-class competition. Making way for them in the 16-man squad are left-arm spinner Kashif Bhatti and medium-pacer Usman Shinwari.

Ashraf, 26, showed a lot of promise in his debut Test against Ireland in 2018 when he scored 83 but then faced injury problems and was discarded after the South Africa tour in January last year.

Bilal, 34, played the last of his five Tests against New Zealand in December 2018 and was not selected last year.

"We have followed the horses for courses policy for the Test against Bangladesh," chief selector and head coach Misbah ul Haq said. "I know the two players who have been left out will be disappointed, but they remain firmly within our plans for the red-ball cricket we are scheduled to play later this year.

"Bhatti has paved the way for Bilal Asif considering there are left-handed batters in the Bangladesh top and middle-order, while Faheem Ashraf has been preferred over Usman Shinwari due to his all-round abilities. Following our convincing victory in Karachi, I don't envisage any major changes in the playing line-up but we have tried to cover all our bases just in case the wicket has any surprises for us."

> There is no guarantee that if a team doesn't do well in one format then it will not do better in the other format. They [Bangladesh] are a gritty team and will be under no pressure.
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> **MISBAH-UL-HAQ**
> PAKISTAN HEAD COACH AND CHIEF SELECTOR

Misbah said Pakistan would have to play at their best despite beating Bangladesh 2-0 in the three-match Twenty20 series, with one match rained off.

Bangladesh had agreed to tour Pakistan in three phases and after playing three Twenty20 internationals returned home earlier this week.

They will play the first Test and then return again for the sole one-day international (April 3) and second Test (April 7-11) -- both in Karachi.

Both the Tests are part of the ongoing World Test championship contested by the top nine teams.

India currently lead the championship with 360 points followed by Australia (296), England (146) and Pakistan (80).

The top two teams in the table will play the June 2021 final in England.

SQUAD

Azhar Ali (captain), Abid Ali, Asad Shafiq, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Bilal Asif, Fawad Alam, Haris Sohail, Imam-ul-Haq, Imran Khan, Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Rizwan, Naseem Shah, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shan Masood, Yasir Shah.

Selectors ring in changes for Rawalpindi Test

SPORTS REPORTER

Mustafizur Rahman found himself out of a Bangladesh squad due to indifferent performance for the first time in his career as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced a 14-member Test squad for the first match of a two-Test tour of Pakistan.

Rubel Hossain, Nazmul Hossain Shanto and Soumya Sarkar made a comeback to the Test team alongside star opener Tamim Iqbal, who last played a Test against New Zealand in March last year.

Pacer Rubel played his last Test in 2018, but the 30-year-old has not been in good shape in longer version cricket, having taken just 13 wickets in six National Cricket League (NCL) games.

Mominul Haque will once again lead the Tigers in Tests despite the thumping defeat in his first assignment -- the two-Test series in India last year – but the left-hander is in god touch, having struck a hundred in the Bangladesh Cricket League yesterday.

Apart from Mustafizur, two openers Shadman Islam and Imrul Kayes along with all-rounders Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Mosaddek Hossain, who were all part of the Tigers' squad in India, missed out due to injuries. Bangladesh will also miss experienced wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim who had earlier withdrawn from the Pakistan tour.

> Rubel [Hossain] has got the experience. He is ahead as the fourth fast bowler in the team. Rubel also did well in the recently-concluded BPL. As he has the experience, we want to see him afresh. Soumya [Sarkar] was picked as he can bat both at the top order and also in the middle order. Soumya returned to the team because Shadman [Islam] is missing due to injury.
>
> **MINHAJUL ABEDIN**
> CHIEF SELECTOR

Mustafizur's place had come under question in recent times because of sub-par performances across all formats as 24-year-old had taken just one wicket in the only Test he played in 2019, and scalped just eight victims in five Tests since the start of 2018.

There has also been a suspicion that Mustafizur, once the boy wonder of Bangladesh cricket, is not as interested in playing Tests as he is the shorter formats. However, Mustafizur was never dropped from the Test team in the past, including the previous one-off Test series against Afghanistan last year, when the selectors said the left arm seamer was rested after he was not included in the squad.

This time, however, chief selector Minhajul Abedin gave a clear message to the left-arm seamer, saying that Mustafizur was dropped for his poor performance.

"He [Mustafizur Rahman] is dropped. We have dropped him for his performance. His performance in the longer version was not up to the mark. We think there are better options than him in the team," Minhajul told The Daily Star yesterday.

The first of the two-match Test series against Pakistan will start from February 7 in Rawalpindi. The Bangladesh squad is scheduled to travel to Pakistan on February 4. The Tigers will travel to Pakistan again in April for the third and final phase of the tour to play the second Test.

SQUAD

Mominul Haque (Captain), Tamim Iqbal, Saif Hasan, Nazmul Hossain Shanto, Mahmudullah Riyad, Md Mithun, Liton Kumar Das, Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Ebadat Hossain, Abu Jayed Chowdhury, Al-Amin Hossain, Rubel Hossain, Soumya Sarker.

'Not forgotten'

AGENCIES, *Los Angeles*

LeBron James spoke for everyone as the Los Angeles Lakers honored the memory of franchise icon Kobe Bryant on Friday, delivering a simple message: "Not forgotten."

At the apex of arguably the most painful week in franchise history, Bryant's memory permeated every corner of the house he built.

His legacy was felt everywhere -- from the trumpets on the corner of Figueroa to the knot in ageless Lakers PA announcer Lawrence Tanter's throat.

It resided on the shoulders of James, who pushed back tears to grab the mic and address a crowd broken with sorrow, reeling from the absence of the city's most beloved son.

James read the names of the nine people who perished on that fateful Sunday morning and then tossed the rest of his notes.

"I would be selling y'all short if I read off this, so I'm going to go straight from the heart. I know at some point we will have a memorial for Kobe, but I look at this as a celebration tonight.

"This is a celebration of 20 years of the blood, the sweat, the tears, the broken down body, the getting up, sitting down, the countless hours, the determination to be as great as he could be. Tonight we celebrate the kid who came here at 18 years of age, retired at 38 and became the best dad we've seen over the last three years.

"We're going to continue his legacy not only for this year but as long as we can play basketball, because that's what Kobe Bryant would want. So in the words of Kobe Bryant: 'Mamba Out,'" James said, recalling Bryant's

sign-off when he retired. "But in the words of us: 'Not forgotten.' Live on brother."

No one will remember the final score or any specific performance. It wasn't one of those nights. But the 48 minutes of basketball were exciting and hard-fought. Worthy of the ultimate competitor.

Bryant also lingered on the concrete slabs nearby, where hundreds of the Mamba faithful said their peace with ink and chalk. Such manifestations of pure love are only reserved for those in the pantheon – a place to which Kobe punched his ticket long before the era of social media and fleeting fame.

His memory filled every gap this week, and could be seen in the giant teddy bear outside Staples Center and the countless balloons, candles, drawings and letters. It was present in the hair rising magic of the cello and the weight of Usher's rendition of 'Amazing Grace'. In the angelical voice of Charlie Puth and the powerful verse of Wiz Khalifa.

Kobe was already the property of the eternal, with his 8 and his 24 hanging in the rafters of the true mecca of basketball. Banners and jerseys, after all, do hang forever.

Bouquets of red roses held open two courtside seats in honor of Bryant and Gianna, while yellow roses sculpted the numbers of 8 and 24 in massive arrangements on the court.

We'll remember him in the purple and gold sunsets from the upper concourse balcony. In the M-V-P chants and the constant strive for perfection. In the smile of those who remember who brought a new era of greatness to Los Angeles.

Not forgotten. Never.

DROPPED, NOT RESTED

> We dropped him (Mustafizur Rahman). We dropped him because of his performances. His performances in longer-version cricket are not that good. We feel we have better options than Mustafizur and others are good compared to him.
>
> **MINHAJUL ABEDIN**
> CHIEF SELECTOR