

TIGERS' TEST TRIALS

New chance to fix old problems

The Bangladesh national team is gearing up to return to international cricket with their three-Test tour of Sri Lanka in October, which will end around six months of down time in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Before the Tigers return to cricket in their weakest format, The Daily Star attempts to analyse all aspects of their Test cricket, starting the series with their batting department.



MAZHAR UDDIN

After a long gap, it will be a new beginning for Bangladesh when they step onto the field for the first Test against Sri Lanka, but the challenge will remain the same in the longest format.

Bangladesh's performance since getting Test status has been disappointing. The Tigers have won 14, lost 89 and drawn 16 in 119 with a winning percentage of just 11.76 per cent.

Although the Tigers won their most recent Test played against weaker opponents Zimbabwe by a handsome margin of an innings and 106 runs in Mirpur, it came on the back of a six-match losing streak.

Bangladesh posted their third-highest total of 560 for six in their third innings as Mushfiquur Rahim scored his second double ton and became the only wicketkeeper-batsman to score two double hundreds in Tests. Newly appointed skipper Mominul Haque also scored his ninth Test ton in the same innings, and all seemed well for the Tigers in whites.

But concerns remained for head coach Russell Domingo, who previously stated



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

that he wants Bangladesh to develop a Test culture and adapt to their own style in the longest format.

Of the last four losses, three came in heavy innings defeats, two against India and one against Pakistan. The 224-run defeat against the newest Test playing nation Afghanistan, that too at home, was perhaps the most embarrassing of all.

Against Afghanistan, the Tigers' batting department surrendered helplessly against the spinners with the likes of Rashid Khan and Mohammad Nabi running rampant.

While performances with the willow have been improving at home, bar the occasional embarrassment, Bangladesh's batting has been especially vulnerable away from home and it was evident once again during their two-Test series in India, which was followed by the first Test in Pakistan.

Bangladesh's inability to tackle quality pace bowling was exposed brutally and raised questions about whether the Tigers are yet to adapt to the Test mindset.

In the absence of experienced opener Tamim Iqbal, who opted to skip the tour of India for personal reasons, Bangladesh posted 150 and 213 in the two innings

respectively and eventually fell to a crushing innings and 130-run defeat in the first Test in Indore.

Nothing much changed in their maiden pink-ball Test in Kolkata, where the Tigers were unable to post over 200 runs in either innings and the result was also the same.

Bangladesh then travelled to Pakistan without their best performer in Mushfiquur, who opted to skip the tour, but little changed as Bangladesh posted 233 and 168 and fell to yet another innings defeat.

Bangladesh is yet to get a settled opening pair -- the highest opening partnership in the last five Tests was 39, which is a trend that has consistently been putting the middle order under immense pressure.

Tamim needs to take responsibility and guide newcomers like Shadman Islam who impressed at the start of his Test career but was injured during the first Test in India, and is expected to make a comeback in Sri Lanka.

There will also be focus on another newcomer in Saif Hassan who made his debut, replacing Shadman, in Test against Pakistan but could not make an impact.

With a long tour in the offing and with injury concerns in mind, the team

management should also have some alternatives rather than putting extra pressure on newcomers. In that respect, Liton Das -- who has been in fine form of late -- can be a handy option at the top.

There is also a challenge for skipper Mominul, who is yet to score a hundred abroad despite a fantastic record at home. With the added responsibility of leading the side, Mominul will have to prove his worth at the top of the order and, more importantly, hold the innings together.

The presence of the dependable Mushfiquur in the middle order lends reliability and the experienced cricketer will surely play a huge role in the batting department.

Young Nazmul Hossain Shanto showed some promise on his return to the Test side in Pakistan, which was followed by the Test win against Zimbabwe, during which he scored a swift fifty. The team management will hope that he starts to fulfil his promise in the middle order.

Mahmudullah Riyad, who was dropped from the Test side against Zimbabwe after his poor run in the longest format, could also be considered in the middle order keeping his experience and ability to perform under pressure in mind.

If Shakib Al Hasan, whose one-year ban from international cricket will be lifted after October 28, can join the side from the second Test, it will be a huge boost for the Tigers' batting department. However, it should also be mentioned that Shakib would be returning to any type of competitive cricket after a year's gap.

The team management also has a tendency to include an extra batsman at number seven or eight as a measure against the dreaded collapse. However, the message from the team management should be that the top six or seven need to do the bulk of the scoring, instead of having failure insurance in the form of an extra batsman, which also has the effect of weakening the bowling attack.

It will be crucial for the selectors to focus on the whole composition of the team rather than relying on waiting for an individual, and building a proper structure of a Test unit.

It is a new opportunity to mend age-old errors -- better late than never.

I'll miss the boo boys, says Smith

AGENCIES, Sydney



Steve Smith will miss the boos and jeers from the spectators during next month's limited-overs series in England which will be played behind closed doors, the Australia run-machine said on Sunday before leaving for the tour.

The former Australia captain was jeered by the crowd in last year's Ashes series for the 2018 ball-tampering scandal that unfolded in South Africa on his watch.

"I do like batting there. But unfortunately there's no crowd there to egg me on and give me a bit more motivation. Still, there is going to be plenty of eyes on the TV and it is going to be great to be back out there playing," Smith told reporters before departing for Australia's first international tour since the COVID-19 pandemic halted professional cricket.

The first Australian team to leave these shores since the pandemic began, the Australians -- plus coaches and support staff -- boarded a charter flight direct to the East Midlands. The squad will spend a few days in a hotel attached to Derby's cricket ground before a three-hour bus ride to Southampton's Rose Bowl and its associated hotel.

Beginning on Sept. 4, Australia will play three T20Is in Southampton before moving to another bio-secure venue in Manchester for an equal number of one-dayers.

Smith said the enforced break from cricket had left him mentally refreshed and "raring to go".

"I've watched a bit of the Tests England have played, and we know their white-ball cricket over the last few years has been exceptional, so it's going to be a good series."

"It'll be interesting to see how long the bubble(s) lasts for, how long we're going to have to be in that. We're lucky to be able to go and play, we'll just do what we need to and play it day by day, stick together as a bunch and help each other out. I'm sure there will be tough moments for all the guys being away from their families for long periods of time," Smith said.



U-21s enjoying BAF camp

SPORTS REPORTER



The 18 under-21 hockey team players are enjoying their time at the Bangladesh Air Force's Bangabandhu Base at the Dhaka Cantonment since joining the conditioning camp two weeks ago following a five-month break due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) took the initiative to bring the under-21 players back into action following the break with the hope of giving them some space to regain their fitness. The players, confined inside the BAF base, are training under supervision of coaching staff of BAF hockey team.

"We needed this conditioning camp because we were sitting idle for nearly

condition is far better than it was on the first day."

The players underwent Covid-19 test on August 9 and training started the following with 14 players as two players had tested positive. Later, four more players joined the camp following negative Covid-19 tests.

"We want to continue this conditioning training till mid-September. If we can bring the players back to their right fitness, I think it will help them in tactical training under the national coach," hoped Moniruzzaman, who captained BAF team for 11 years.

Nayeemuddin also urged the authority concerned to continue the training after the conclusion of the conditioning camp for good results in the Junior Asia Cup.

"We have joined the camp with



PHOTO: BHF

five to six months due to the coronavirus pandemic. The date of U-21 AHF Junior Asia Cup can be fixed anytime, so it is really important for us to remain in training," Mohammad Nayeemuddin, a member of the team, said yesterday.

"We are really enjoying the environment, ground and gym facilities, accommodation and food here and everything looks different here because BAF's coaches and representative of BHF president wing Commander Rafiqur Rahman is helping us a lot," said Nayeem, who has also been a member of the senior national team since 2017.

"The response of the players is really good. They are helping me a lot in maintaining schedule, training two sessions a day," coach Mohammad Moniruzzaman said. "As it is totally a conditioning camp, it is not possible to judge their present condition before we go through a test on Thursday. But the

a target of doing well in Junior Asia Cup. If there is no continuation of this training, then all of our efforts will go in vain," Nayeemuddin said, also urging the game's local governing body to start domestic competitions immediately.

BHF's acting general secretary Mohammad Yousuf said they would continue the training camp if their proposal of hosting the Junior Asia Cup in early January is accepted by the Asian Hockey Confederation.

"AHF wants the U-21 Junior Asia Cup to be held February but it will be tough for us to host Junior Asia Cup and Asian Champions Trophy in February and March. So we have proposed to host Junior Asia Cup in the first week of January," Yousuf said. "If our proposal is accepted, the training of the under-21 team will continue, otherwise we may start the training camp of the national team."



Fans of Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain have been kept away from the stadium, but they have still found ways to show support. Here, a man is holding the controversial 'half-and-half' scarf. These scarves are traditionally made to commemorate the biggest of European nights and date back decades, but have been the victim of some recent backlash for being ubiquitous, appearing outside stadiums for nearly every single match.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

UEFA considers future 'final 8' format

REUTERS, Lisbon



UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin says the single-game knockout format, used in the Champions League this year from the quarter-final onwards, has produced more exciting football than the usual two-legged games and could be revisited in the future.

The format was changed in order to allow the competition to be completed in a shorter time-span after the COVID-19 pandemic halted play for several months.

Eight clubs headed to Lisbon and the final will be contested later on Sunday, pitting Bayern Munich against Paris St Germain.

"We were forced to do it but in the end we see that we found out something new. So we will think about it in the future for sure," Ceferin told Reuters in an interview.

"(There has been) not so much tactics. If it is one match, if one team scores then the other has to score as soon as possible. If it is two legged system then there is still time to win the next match," he said.

"More exciting matches for sure but of course we also have to think about the fact that we have less matches and broadcasters (can) say 'you don't have as many matches

as before, this is different' so we will have to discuss when this crazy situation ends."

The 'final eight' tournament took place without fans in stadiums and the prospect of supporters from eight clubs descending on one city could cause logistical problems.

The current format is locked in place contractually until 2024/2025 but discussions are due to begin later this year on the structure for the competition for the next phase.

"Look for sure it is a very interesting format. Now, I doubt as much as the calendar is now, that we could do a final eight (tournament), because it would take too much time. But a format with one match and a system like it is now, I think it would be much more exciting than the format that was before," he said.

"If we would play this system then, but we haven't discussed with anyone its just an idea, we would play in one city. If you play in one city, you can have a week of football or something like that. But it is far too early to think about it.

"We have seen it as a big success and the viewership over TV has been huge, maybe it also good because it is August and people are at home, some of them at least, but interesting, interesting tournament."

Anderson closes in on 600

REUTERS



England seamer James Anderson claimed his fourth wicket of the innings to reduce Pakistan to 41-4 and expose the middle order before rain forced early lunch on the third day of the third and final test at the Rose Bowl on Sunday.

Resuming on 24 for three, Pakistan added just six more runs before Anderson forced a thick edge from Asad Shafiq, who was caught by England skipper Joe Root in the slip cordon. Rain interrupted play twice in Southampton before players took early lunch, with Pakistan trailing England by 542 runs.

Anderson is now just three wickets away from becoming the first pace bowler to claim 600 test dismissals. Only Anil Kumble (619), Shane Warne (708) and Muttiah Muralitharan (800) have more.

Zak Crawley (267) shared a record-breaking 359-run partnership with Jos Buttler (152) as England declared their first innings on 583-8 on Saturday.



James Anderson moved to 597 career scalps with a fourth wicket of the innings on a rain-affected third morning of England's series decider against Pakistan. Anderson is on the verge of becoming the first Englishman and fast bowler in the history of Test cricket to join the elite 600 club.

PHOTO: REUTERS