

SPORT

TIGERS' TEST TRIALS

Can the Tigers spin it right?

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, with the spin department being today's focus.

NABID YEASIN

Historically, Bangladesh have been reliant on spin, especially in the longest version. While having spinners bowl the lion's share of the overs in a Test innings is the norm, there have also been instances of the Tigers taking the field with only specialised spinners and no pacers in the bowling attack.

With spin being their major strength, the Tigers have often opted to make pitches fit for purpose -- a trick that worked greatly over the last four years, barring a few mishaps. However, the situation changes overseas. With the pitch offering little or no assistance to spinners, the slower bowlers are then faced with an added challenge of bowling with more precision and guile.

In this regard, spin bowling coach Daniel Vettori will have a chance to justify his generous lucrative contract. While pitches in Sri Lanka are similar to Bangladesh, they do not break up as soon and so variety and changes in pace and flight come into it. Vettori, the former New Zealand left-arm spinner, had a mastery of all these traits.

Bangladesh are scheduled to tour Sri Lanka in October to play three Tests, all of which could take place in Colombo, where traditionally the pitches are flat and slow. The Tigers could well go on the tour with three main spinners -- Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan and Mehedi Hasan Miraz -- with the prospect of premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan joining the squad from the second Test after his ban ends on October 29.



Over the years, Taijul has proved to be one of the most impactful spinners, at times overshadowing even the impact of Shakib -- the best all-rounder and the best spinner in the squad. Taijul's magnificent form in Tests in 2018 saw him scalp 43 wickets -- the most by a Bangladeshi in a calendar year. He was also the fourth-highest wicket-taker overall in Tests that year. And with Shakib returning to competitive cricket after more than a year, Taijul -- being the most experienced in the format among the rest -- would

definitely need to lead the charge in the spin department.

BANGLADESH'S LAST FIVE TESTS

- 63.53% of the overs bowled by Bangladesh were bowled by spinners.
- Taijul Islam picked 15 wickets in the last five Tests. He is the highest wicket-taker for Bangladesh during that period.
- Nayeem Hasan's match figure of nine for 152 against Zimbabwe in Bangladesh's last Test is the best bowling figures in that period.

Youngster Nayeem, who only has five Tests under his belt, was most impressive in the Tigers' most recent Test encounter, against Zimbabwe in February this year. Standing six feet tall, the off-spinner can use his height -- which sets him apart from the other spinners -- to generate extra bounce, troubling and taking the batsmen by surprise at times. Even if the Colombo pitch does not offer much turn, Nayeem's extra bounce could well come in handy for the Tigers. The 19-year-old played a pivotal role in Bangladesh's innings and 106-run win over Zimbabwe, which snapped a six-match losing streak. Against a stronger team and away from home, the team management will certainly want the youngster to pick up from where he had left off before the pandemic.

Meanwhile, Mehedi, who took the world by storm at the start of his career -- providing amazing performances against England and Australia in 2016 and 2017 respectively that led to two of the

country's most remarkable wins till date -- has seen a severe plunge in his form. The off-spinner was dropped for the Zimbabwe Test after a series of disappointing performances. A comeback after such a disappointing last few Tests -- scalping just six wickets in four Tests -- would surely be a difficult one for Mehedi but the selectors may still rely on the 22-year-old for his ability to spin the ball comparatively better than the others and his ability to chip in with runs in the lower order.

The one thing that Bangladesh's spin department will definitely be missing, and has been for a while in Test cricket, is the presence and impact of a leg-spinner. Even after the BCB's often ill-conceived attempts -- making inclusion of leg-spinners mandatory for teams in the domestic leagues, for instance -- to find and create new leg-spinners, the dearth in the area remains. And it is unlikely that the selectors would include Aminul Islam -- the only leg-spin option available -- as he is yet to make his debut in ODIs.

Considering past trends in Sri Lanka -- usually a place where pitches are batting-friendly -- the selectors would have to select spinners who can bowl according to their specific role and fit into the overall composition of the team. It may be time for selectors to analyse the opposition's strengths and traits more deeply than before and observe how spinners fare during their practice matches in order to pick those best suited to the conditions.

For the spinners themselves, it is imperative that they sit with team management and get a clear idea of their exact roles.



LITON BACK IN BUSINESS

Liton Das joined the Tigers' individual training for the first time since the coronavirus outbreak. Bangladesh are gearing up for the upcoming tour of Sri Lanka and are scheduled to travel in late September, and the wicketkeeper-batsman will be a vital player for the Tigers on the three-Test tour. In the last five matches, the right-hander's batting average was 33.85, better than his overall Test average of 26.03 (20 matches), but even that does not truly reflect the ability he possesses.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

LITON'S LAST FIVE TESTS

RUNS SCORED: 237
INNINGS: 8
100S: 0
50S: 1
Ave: 33.85 (CAREER: 26.03)
HIGHEST SCORE: 53 AGAINST ZIMBABWE
IN MARCH 2020
CATCHES: 6
STUMPINGS: 0



With their trophies lined up and matching shirts reading "Triple 2020", Bayern Munich players celebrated their treble with club staff at the Allianz Arena following their return from Lisbon with the Champions League trophy yesterday.

PHOTO: BAYERN MUNICH

SHORT CORNER

Don't burst the bubble, Kohli warns IPL stars

India captain Virat Kohli has warned Indian Premier League players of serious "repercussions" for the tournament if they breach coronavirus safety rules.

With all eight teams in quarantine in the UAE ahead of the September 19 start, the Royal Challengers Bangalore skipper said: "One mistake from us could literally spoil the whole tournament." Kohli made the warning in a virtual meeting with players.

"It might happen at a stage of the tournament where we cannot afford to lose that player. If we get harmed by it, then the whole system, the whole team, the whole culture loses. I want everyone to understand the repercussions." -- AFP

Heavy rain still denying Anderson 600th

The start of the fifth day of the third and final test between England and Pakistan at the Rose Bowl was delayed after heavy morning rain on Tuesday.

James Anderson is seeking to become the first seam bowler in history to reach 600 test wickets. He has taken six wickets in the match to leave him within one of the milestone.

-- REUTERS

Police kicked Maguire's legs, threatened career, court hears

Harry Maguire's sister was allegedly injected with an unknown substance by two Albanian men, sparking the brawl in Greece last Thursday which led to the England star's arrest.

Alexandros Anagnostakis argued to the court that Maguire's sister Daisy had been approached by the men before they injected her, causing her to faint.

After asking to go to hospital they were instead taken to the police station where they are alleged to have met officers. Mr Anagnostakis claims it was there that Maguire was kicked in the leg by officers and told "his career was over".

Prosecutors retorted by claiming Maguire tried to get out of his arrest by saying: "Do you know who I am? I am the captain of Manchester United, I am very rich, I can give you money, I can pay you, please let us go."

Despite the incident, Maguire was called up to the Nations League squad on Tuesday. "It is clearly a decision that is not straightforward and a decision that I could only take on the information I have," England manager Gareth Southgate said.

-- AGENCIES

BFF's admin expenses keep rising

ANISUR RAHMAN

Despite little engagement at national and international stage last year and lower division competitions and youth development remaining irregular, the Bangladesh Football Federation's administrative expenditure increased 30 percent in the last fiscal.

Total administrative expenditure in 2019 rose from Tk 7.79 crore to Tk 11.79 crore, making up 33 percent of BFF's total expenditure. Yet the BFF is reluctant to clear Tk 4.2 crore that it owes to clubs in form of prize money and participation money over 2009-2019 period, according to an external audit report which was approved by the BFF executive meeting on August 11.

"Actually we could not get full money as per agreement from the last three sponsors, so we also could not clear the participation money. Participation money also increased significantly," BFF finance committee chairman and senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshey explained, adding that they could not yet clear a big portion of prize money of Super Cup while the BFF owes majority of its prize money to well-off clubs.

At BFF's last annual general meeting in November, high administrative cost was in centre of discussion and many raised questions whether BFF was using too much money on non-development sectors, keeping lower division leagues and youth development neglected.

Out of Tk 3.82 crore additional expenditure for administrative purposes in last fiscal, Tk 2 crore has been spent for salary and allowances of BFF staff, who received Tk 5.65 crore, a rise of Tk 2 crore from the previous year.

Other administrative expenditures included technical director's salary [Tk 1.14 crore], air tickets [Tk 35.12 lakh] fuel, utility, maintenance, stationary, printing, courier, entertainment, gifts, sports goods, conveyance for FIFA/AFC meeting attendance, etc.

"The BFF staff includes all coaches [except head coach Jamie Day and technical director Paul Smalley] including 18 local coaches, foreign coaches of football academy and supporting staff of the national team. The number of BFF staff has not increased much," Murshey said. "However, I must agree

competitions, participating in international competitions, clearing outstanding bills of 2018 and 2017. Out of Tk 25.24 crore expenditure, BFF had spent a major portion in preparation and participation of four FIFA World Cup Qualifying fixtures (Tk 3.02 crore), women's football activities (Tk 3.90 crore), head coach Jamie Day (Tk 2.96 crore), the 2018-19 Bangladesh Premier League (Tk 2.32 crore), 2018-19 Bangladesh Championship League (Tk 86 lakh) and prize money and telecast fee for 2018 Bangabandhu Gold Cup (Tk 93 lakh) and 2018 SAFF Championship (Tk 81 lakh).



that we should spend more in development activities such as long-term training and residential camp. I would have had the freedom to spend the money if I were the BFF president."

As per the audit report, BFF showed Tk 36.09 crore as its income in 2019, of which approximately Tk 33 crore came from AFC [Tk 7.29 crore], FIFA [Tk 6.98 crore], government [Tk 10.1 crore] and sponsors [Tk 8.5 crore]. The game's local governing body spent Tk 93 lakh more than its income, with the expenditure being Tk 37.03 crore.

The audit report also showed that the BFF spent Tk 25.24 crore directly in organising domestic

as of December 31, 2019, the audit report showed BFF's financial position of having a total of Tk 21.94 crore of liabilities, out of which Tk 11.38 crore were non-current liabilities [Bank loan of Tk 8.10 crore and others Tk 3.27 crore] and Tk 10.56 crore as current-liabilities [accounts payable Tk 6.76 crore and bank overdraft Tk 3.79 crore].

"We have already settled the loan with IFIC (Tk 8.10 crore)," said Murshey. "BFF doesn't have fixed income except for donation from FIFA and AFC; BFF is run by crediting money. So there will be some deficit and liabilities. I think we should have adjusted those things."

McMillan in as interim batting consultant



SPORTS REPORTER

Former New Zealand cricketer Craig McMillan has been appointed batting consultant for the Bangladesh team's tour of Sri Lanka, slated for October, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) informed through a press release yesterday.

McMillan has been talked about as a potential candidate since South African Neil McKenzie resigned from his post four days back, ending a two-year stint.

The board was keen on retaining McKenzie's services as he had impressed, but he informed the board in a letter of his decision, citing the need to be closer to his family.

McMillan has been handed the role on a temporary basis and it is understood that his performance will be tested with the team in the almost two-month-long tour of Sri Lanka.

In a decade-long international career for the Black Caps, McMillan scored over 8,000 international runs across formats. Following his retirement as a player, McMillan performed the role of New Zealand's batting and fielding coach from 2014-2019. He also has coaching experiences with Canterbury, Middlesex and Indian Premier League (IPL) team Kings XI Punjab.