



Will this match on March 6, 2020, the last for Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as Bangladesh's ODI captain, be his last for the Tigers too?

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Saif Hasan and Nurul Hasan, seen here in jovial mood at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday, were rewarded for their good form with a call-ups to the preliminary Test squad for the upcoming West Indies series.

PHOTO: BCB

With focus on future, selectors move on from Mashrafe

SPORTS REPORTER

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was at the centre of all discussion when Bangladesh's most successful ODI captain's name was missing from the 24-member preliminary squad named yesterday by the national selectors for the three-match ODI series against the West Indies.

There was much interest about whether the selectors would give the pacer another opportunity. He had retired from T20Is in 2017 and in March last year, stepped down as ODI captain, with the board handing the baton over to Tamim Iqbal.

However, the 37-year-old pacer has not announced his retirement from ODIs yet, even though there were murmurs that Mashrafe may retire as early as at the end of the 2019 World Cup, a tournament in which he managed to pick just one wicket from eight games.

The selectors, led by Minhajul Abedin, finally took the bold step and moved on from the Mashrafe era and give opportunities to young uncapped pacers like Hasan Mahmud and Shoriful Islam to

PRELIMINARY SQUAD

ODI SERIES:
Tamim Iqbal, Taskin Ahmed, Shakib Al Hasan, Al Amin Hossain, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Shoriful Islam, Mushfiqur Rahim, Hasan Mahmud, Mohammad Mithun, Saif Uddin, Liton Das, Mustafizur Rahman, Mahmud Ullah, Mehidy Hassan Miraz, Afif Hossain, Taijul Islam, Mosaddek Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Soumya Sarkar, Parvez Hossain Emon, Yasir Ali Chowdhury, Mahedi Hasan, Naim Sheikh, Rubel Hossain

TEST SERIES:
Momimul Haque, Taskin Ahmed, Tamim Iqbal, Khaled Ahmed, Shakib Al Hasan, Hasan Mahmud, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mustafizur Rahman, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mehidy Hassan Miraz, Mohammad Mithun, Taijul Islam, Liton Das, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Yasir Ali Chowdhury, Shadman Islam, Saif Hasan, Nayeem Hasan, Abu Jayed Rahi, Ebadot Hossain

prepare a fresh batch before the next World Cup. When asked how difficult it was to reach the decision to move past Mashrafe, the chief selector said it was taken after consulting with the team management keeping the future in mind. "As there was no cricket for the last 10 months, we decided to start afresh and also kept in mind the focus on the upcoming 2023 ODI World Cup and also

the ICC's Test Championship. We have huge respect for Mashrafe as he has done tremendously well for the country and it was a tough decision for us.

"But we also have to accept the reality and move forward as the whole team management agreed to the decision keeping the upcoming World Cup in mind, so we had to drop him. We also need to give the exposure to youngsters keeping the future of Bangladesh cricket in mind," Minhajul told the media at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Mashrafe returned to competitive cricket last month through the Bangabandhu T20 Cup. The veteran pacer bowled brilliantly for Gemcon Khulna and even picked up a five-wicket haul in the crucial first qualifier that once again brought him back in the

limelight. However, it was difficult for the selectors to be swayed by Mashrafe's performances in T20 cricket and picking him for the ODIs, especially considering his long history of injuries and match fitness issues.

The selectors also announced a 20-member preliminary squad for the TTest series with another experienced campaigner, Mahmudullah Riyad, not finding a spot after being dropped from the previous Test series against Zimbabwe. Left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman returned to the Test squad after being rested during the last series against Zimbabwe in March last year as the pacer has looked in good rhythm recently.

MINHAJUL ABEDIN
CHIEF SELECTOR

Koeman wants a new striker

AGENCIES

Ronald Koeman said Barcelona were missing a target forward as they scored just once from 20 shots on goal in a 1-0 victory over Huesca on Sunday, and called for the club to sign a new striker.

Lionel Messi returned to the Barcelona side after recovering from an



ankle injury and Koeman opted to play him in attack alongside Martin Braithwaite and Ousmane Dembele.

The trio attempted 15 shots between them but it was Frenkie de Jong who scored the decisive goal, volleying Messi's chipped pass into the net after 27 minutes.

Koeman, who sent on Antoine Griezmann for Braithwaite nine minutes from time, admitted that he lacks a natural striker to lead the line in between the creative talents of Messi and Dembele.

"I trust each player in our squad. But if we choose to have three midfielders there is room for three forwards. With Leo we bet on someone with great depth like Dembele, and we have to choose between Martin or Antoine and Martin has done it



STARTING THE NEW YEAR WITH A BANG

It is fitting that these two goal-machines -- Cristiano Ronaldo and Robert Lewandowski -- started the new year with a bang. The Portuguese star scored two goals as Juventus eased past Udinese with a 4-1 win while Lewandowski got in on the act late, yet bagged a brace as Bayern Munich came from a goal down to beat Mainz 5-2.

PHOTO: TWITTER



South Africa opener Dean Elgar jumps in the air to celebrate his century against Sri Lanka during the second day of the second Test at the Wanderers in Johannesburg yesterday. The left-hander scored 127 off 163 deliveries as the hosts ended the first innings on 302 runs with a 145-run lead. South Africa then dismantled the Sri Lankan top order quickly to take a stranglehold of this Test, having won the first by an innings and 45 runs.

PHOTO: AFP

Moen Ali tests positive

REUTERS, UNDATED

England all-rounder Moen Ali has tested positive for COVID-19 upon arriving in Sri Lanka and will self-isolate for 10 days, as will fast bowler Chris Woakes who was deemed a possible close contact, England's cricket board said on Monday.

The squad was tested on arrival at the airport in Hambantota and Ali is likely to miss the first Test as Sri Lanka's government protocols require the 33-year-old to quarantine for 10 days.

Rodrigues steals semis berth for Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER



A stoppage-time strike from Brazilian Francisco Rodrigues steered Abahani to a hard-fought 1-0 win over Uttar Baridhara Club in the fourth and final quarterfinal of Walton Federation Cup at Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

After sub-par performances in two group matches, Rodrigues finally shone in the quarterfinal to rescue Abahani with a powerful drive from inside the box after captain Nabib Newaj Jibon chested down a long ball from Afghan defender Masih Saighani.

That goal however was a result of a controversial move from Abahani. Abahani resumed the play without throwing the ball to the feet of Uttar Baridhara Club's players, who sent the ball outside following an injury of their own player on the ground. And Abahani eventually scored from that attack.

Following the goal, the match was halted for nearly three minutes and one Baridhara official was also sent off for his unauthorized entrance to the pitch.

"It was an injustice because Abahani did not follow the fair-play tradition and we also don't have anything to do with it because it is part of play," said Uttar Baridhara coach Jahidur Rahman Milon. "What will we learn from big teams like Abahani if they don't show respect on the ground?"

Referring to an AFC Cup encounter against Indian outfit Chennaiyin FC, Abahani coach denied existence of the fair

play tradition.

"How many times they tried to consume time with the goalkeeper laying down on the floor? He did it six to seven times to waste time. If we speak about fair play, it doesn't exist. Fair play exists when you win the match. When you are losing, which team will give the ball back?" said Lemos.

"I felt Baridhara did everything to win but they also wasted a lot of time. We needed to win the match and wanted to play football but they did not come to play football. In the AFC Cup against Chennaiyin FC, we put the ball up for them and they killed us."

Back to the match, Abahani dominated throughout and created a few good chances but Uttar Baridhara goalkeeper Mamun Alif and the backline stood tall to frustrate the Sky Blues until Rodrigues scored the decisive goal.

Alif denied Jibon in the eighth minute before Masih Saighani saw his goal-bound header cleared from the goalline by defender Papan Singh in the 20th minute.

Uttar Baridhara tried to attack on the break. They came close in the 36th minute when national forward Suman Reza's dipping shot from 30 yards out went just inches over the Abahani crossbar. Egyptian defender Abdel Rahim again frustrated Jibon by stopping a goal-bound shot in the stoppage time of the first half.

After resumption, Abahani's Jewel Rana squandered an easy opportunity before Rodrigues rescued the Sky Blues in the stoppage-time.

Abahani will take on holders Bashundhara Kings on Thursday after Saif SC face Chattogram Abahani on Wednesday in the first semifinal.



Brazilian forward Francisco Rodrigues takes his shirt off after scoring a stoppage-time goal to help Abahani beat Uttar Baridhara Club in the fourth quarterfinal of Walton Federation Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Kiwis eye big lead

REUTERS, Wellington



New Zealand's Kane Williamson proved why he is currently the top-ranked test batsman with a brilliant 112 not out to keep his country on course for a handy first-innings lead against Pakistan in the second and final test in Christchurch on Monday.

Williamson's burgeoning 215-run stand with Henry Nicholls, who was batting on 89, helped the hosts finish day two on a strong 286-3 in reply to Pakistan's first innings total of 297.

New Zealand are already 1-0 up in the series and need only a draw to rise to the top of the world rankings for the first time.



Earlier, openers Tom Blundell (16) and Tom Latham (33) fell in successive overs while Ross Taylor departed early after making 12 at the Hagley Oval.

With New Zealand potentially in trouble at 71-3, Williamson was initially circumspect and scored 10 runs off the first 50 balls he faced. The New Zealand captain then brilliantly paced his innings, accelerating once he notched up his half-century.

Williamson, who had scored 251 and 129 in his last two test innings, smashed four fours in a Naseem Shah over to go from 78 to 94 en route to his 24th test century.

"He just loves batting," New Zealand batting coach Luke Ronchi said. "He works really hard in periods and then he'll play these amazing shots to score his runs. He just makes the game look easy when others seem to not find it so easy."

Nicholls got two caught-behind reprieves to remain on course for his seventh test century with Shaheen Afridi being the luckless bowler in both cases. Early in his innings, Nicholls was caught by wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan but the bowler was found to have overstepped.

On the second occasion, Rizwan spilled a regulation catch behind the stumps.

Aus GP likely to be postponed

REUTERS, London

The Australian Formula One Grand Prix in Melbourne looks set to be rescheduled from its season-opening slot to later in the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic and a tightening of local quarantine rules.

Tickets for the March 21 race at Albert Park have yet to go on sale. A Formula One spokesman, asked on Monday about media reports of a likely postponement, said the sport looked forward to racing again in March.

He did not specify where, with Bahrain's Grand Prix also scheduled for March.

"In 2020 we proved that we could return to racing safely and delivered what many thought was impossible in March," he said. "We have set out our 2021 calendar and look forward to the return of F1 in March this year."

Local organisers were not immediately available for comment but various reports said a postponement, rather than a cancellation for the second year in a row, was likely to be announced later in January.

Construction work to erect fences and grandstands around the temporary street circuit would normally start by the end of the month. Last year's Australian grand prix was called off, only hours before first practice was due to start.