



Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal plays one of his trademark shots during practice yesterday ahead of today's second ODI against the West Indies at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. A win would see the Tigers seal the series. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Shakib's batting position connected to NZ tour?

MAZHAR UDDIN



The change in Shakib Al Hasan's batting position from number three to four has generated much discussion even before the start of the three-match ODI series against the West Indies. The change was made despite the cricketer putting in an all-time great performance in the 2019 World Cup while batting at three.

The star all-rounder scored 606 runs, including five fifties and two centuries, at an outstanding average of 86.57 in the flagship event and in many eyes, Shakib was the player of the tournament for his extraordinary performance.

But after completing his one-year international cricket ban imposed by the ICC and leading into his international comeback in the series against the West Indies, skipper Tamim Iqbal and the team management said they wanted young Nazmul Hossain Shanto to move up to

ODIs and three T20Is. With the possibility of Shakib missing the tour in mind, the team management wanted Nazmul to gain experience at number three during the ongoing West Indies series.

Although a player of Shakib's calibre can bat at any position at any given time, the Tigers' think tank will give the highest priority to their best performer if he is willing to bat at his preferred position in the coming days.

At the same time, it is also a huge opportunity for someone like Nazmul to grab this opportunity and perform at the new position, much like Shubman Gill and Mayank Agarwal did in the absence of India's regular players during their stellar series win down under.

"We all know how well he [Shakib] batted at number three during the World Cup. He is happy to bat at number four and I even told him that whenever he wanted to bat at number three again, we can talk and he was perfectly okay with it," Tamim told the media ahead of the three-



number three.

According to Tamim, as Shakib was coming back after a long gap, he needed some breathing space to adjust. Tigers' head coach Russell Domingo said on the other hand that they wanted to develop some young batters and the subcontinent is the best place to give them exposure at the top.

There may however be a more straightforward reason. Sources with knowledge of developments said there is a good chance that Shakib will not go on the tour of New Zealand to be with his family during the birth of his third child.

Bangladesh are scheduled to depart for New Zealand in late February to play three

match ODI series.

Nazmul came in at number three in the first ODI but the youngster failed to utilise the opportunity and was dismissed for just one run. Shakib on the other hand spent some time in the middle and scored 19 runs batting at number four before being dismissed during the chase of the paltry 123-run target.

"Look, the team management made a decision and as a player, I have to respect that. It is not important whether I agree or not. I always try to play for my team and my team's achievements are bigger than my personal milestones and it doesn't make a huge difference," Shakib said after the first ODI on Thursday.

Positivity in the air

SPORTS REPORTER



Barring a brief halt caused by a sudden outpour at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Wednesday in the first of their three ODIs against the West Indies, everything went well for Bangladesh on their return to international cricket after a Covid-19-induced 10-month break.

The pre-series focus had been on long-term planning and proper execution and, in that regard, the Tigers made a perfect start while also grabbing 10 points with a convincing six-wicket victory in their first match of the ODI Super

League, the qualification pathway for the 2023 World Cup.

Premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan marked his return to Bangladesh colours following a year-long ban imposed by the ICC in 2019 for failing to report corrupt approaches by returning astounding figures of four wickets for eight runs from 7.2 overs and scooping the player-of-the-match award.

Tamim Iqbal's attacking captaincy and him getting runs while leading the troops lent bright hopes of a secure leadership for the future in the post-Mashrafe Bin Mortaza era. Meanwhile, young pacer Hasan Mahmud's fiery three-for on debut and Mustafizur Rahman finding his rhythm while

a number of other promising pacers wait in the pipeline for a go hints towards a compact future pace attack.

On the back of all these positives, the Tigers would like to -- and should -- seal the three-match series with another win in the second ODI today. The Tigers did not let their guard down even after bundling the West Indies for 122 -- their second-lowest total against Bangladesh in ODIs -- in the first game and similar focus needs to be on display today.

What the Tigers perhaps need to do is try not to capitulate in their own setup of a spinning track and find better ways to negotiate the visiting spinners, especially Akeal

Hosein, who took three of the four wickets that Bangladesh lost while chasing a meagre total in the first game.

Bangladesh came into the series with some major tweaks in their approach, one of which was to play Soumya Sarkar at number seven. The first match did not require Bangladesh to look too far down their batting order and how Soumya adapts to that role is yet to be seen.

It will be interesting to see how the left-hander, who usually opens the innings and is known for his sweet timing of the new ball, goes about his business lower down the order, where the prime requirement is to make quick runs through power-hitting.



'GOAL MACHINE' RONALDO 760 UP

Juventus superstar Cristiano Ronaldo poses with Italian Super Cup and man-of-the-match trophies on Wednesday. Breaking records has become routine for Ronaldo throughout his extraordinary career. He was hailed as the most prolific professional goalscorer in history after notching his 760th senior goal to help Andrea Pirlo win his first trophy as a coach five months after taking over at his former club as Juventus beat Napoli 2-0 in the final. The title of greatest goalscorer is much contested, and global governing body FIFA does not keep an official record, but several media outlets reported that Ronaldo's strike had taken him past Austro-Czech Josef Bican to the top of the list. Bican, as well as Brazilian strikers Pele and Romario, scored in excess of 1,000 goals during their careers but those statistics include strikes in amateur, unofficial and friendly matches. Ronaldo's career tally includes goals for four top-flight clubs and Portugal with his closest active rival being Argentine Lionel Messi, who last month scored a single club record 644th goal for Barcelona. The 35-year-old Ronaldo, who is the leading goalscorer for his country with 102 goals, has scored 85 goals for Juventus.

PHOTO: TWITTER

'POGBA IS ONE OF THE BEST WHEN IN FORM'

Manchester United's Paul Pogba celebrates his stunning second-half strike with Bruno Fernandes during a 2-1 victory against Fulham on Wednesday. "The efficiency he is playing with is amazing. One of the best when he is in this form," said former defender Rio Ferdinand.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Foreigners power contenders

SPORTS REPORTER



Foreign forwards dominated the show in the Bangladesh Premier League as all three title contenders edged past their respective rivals yesterday.

Saif SC survived an initial scare against hosts Mohammedan in notching a 2-1 win, their first win coming in their second match at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Stadium in Cumilla.

At the Bangabandhu National Stadium, a first-half strike from Nixon Guytherme steered Chattogram Abahani to a 1-0 win over Arambagh while three-time league champions Sheikh Jamal defeated Muktiyoddha Sangsad 2-0 courtesy of strikes from the Gambian duo Omar Jobe and Solomon King.

Of the seven goals struck across three matches yesterday, five foreigners scored between the day's first and last strikes from local players.

With two successive wins, Sheikh Jamal joined leaders Bashundhara Kingss, Abahani and Sheikh Russel on six points each, while Saif SC are in the second position with four points.

MOHAMMEDAN VS SAIF SC
After stumbling against lightweights Rahmatganj in the opening match, Federation Cup runners-up Saif SC were hungry to prove a point



Saif Sporting Club's Arifur Rahman celebrates scoring his team's opening goal during a 2-1 victory over hosts Mohammedan Sporting Club in a Bangladesh Premier League match at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Stadium in Cumilla yesterday. PHOTO: BFF

but faced a tough challenge from Mohammedan, who lost to Saif on penalties in the Federation Cup quarterfinals.

On the back of a morale-boosting 3-0 win over Arambagh, the hosts got off to a fine start against Saif SC and came close twice to taking the lead. Midfielder Habibur Rahman Shohag was denied by the woodwork before striker Aminur Rahman Sajib wasted a chance

inside the box in the 40th minute.

After surviving those close calls, Saif hit back and scored two goals within four minutes. Winger Arifur Rahman darted into the box and placed into the far post in the 44th minute before Nigeria's John Okoli doubled the margin with a solo effort two minutes into added time of the first-half.

Mohammedan pulled one back in the 61st minute as Japan's Uryu

Nagata nodded home a Shohag free-kick, but they could not find a second.

CTG ABAHANI VS ARAMBAGH

After losing 1-2 to Sheikh Jamal in their first match, Chattogram Abahani got their bearings right and secured a hard-fought 1-0 win over Arambagh.

Ctg Abahani were deprived of a lead in the 26th minute when a flick from Rakib Hossain came off the crossbar before Brazil's Nixon Guytherme nicely controlled a Chinedu Mathew cross inside the box and drove home in the 30th minute.

Ctg also came close to widening the lead twice but Arambagh goalkeeper Abul Kashem Milon and defender Rasel Munshi thwarted good efforts from Charles Didier and Mathew in the second half.

MUKTIJODDHA VS SHEIKH JAMAL

Sheikh Jamal carried their momentum into the second match and took a 38-minute lead when Omar Jobe brilliantly tapped home from between two players. In the 60th minute, Solomon King raced into the attacking third from midfield and fired home from outside the box.

Muktiyoddha, who initially faced trouble in forming their due to financial constraints, pulled one goal back through Mehedi Hasan in stoppage time of the second half.

Root wants improvement to wrap up series

REUTERS, GALLE



England captain Joe Root has warned his players not to get ahead of themselves and to continue improving as they seek to wrap up the series against Sri Lanka in the second and final Test at Galle International Stadium on Friday.

England won the first match at the same venue by seven wickets in a dominant performance to record a fourth successive away victory for the first time in 64 years. They have not won five tests in a row on the road since 1913.

Another victory on a famously difficult ground for visiting teams



would be a feather in the cap and a big boost ahead of England's four-test series in India that follows directly after.

"Sri Lanka are a proud team and have a great record at this ground so we have to play smart cricket again. We can't be happy with what we have achieved on this trip so far, we need

to get better," Root told reporters on Thursday.

"We can't get ahead of ourselves and think we're something we're not. This will not be an easy game, we will have to play some good stuff for five days if we want to keep taking steps forward as a team."

Root confirmed that spinning all-rounder Moeen Ali will not be available for selection after his release from COVID-19 quarantine, which will likely mean another run-out for Dom Bess and Jack Leach, who each picked up five-wicket hauls in the first test.

"The two spinners had success, but both have great attitudes where they want to get better and improve their performances."