



Tamim Iqbal plays an expansive sweep as Liton Das follows the strike from behind the stumps during a practice session of the Bangladesh team yesterday at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, where the first Test against West Indies will start on February 3.

Brathwaite shows steely resolve

NABID YEASIN from Chattogram



Concentration, focus and not letting the guard down -- these perhaps are the most precious attributes for a batsman in Test cricket. And all of these were certainly on display from Kraigg Brathwaite, the West Indies Test skipper, during the first day of the three-day warm-up match against the BCB XI at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

While a number of Windies batsmen struggled against the likes of leg-spinner Rishad Hossain and pacer Khaled Ahmed, Brathwaite's patiently built 187-ball 85 spanning over more than four-and-a-half hours was probably indicative of his intentions of amending his below-par records against the Tigers in Bangladesh.

The 28-year-old boasts a record worthy of bragging at home against the Tigers. He smashed two tons and a double-ton -- a 447-ball 212, his highest ever Test score at Kingstown in 2014 -- at an average of 93.83 in the four Tests he played against Bangladesh at home.

But the batsman from Barbados failed to replicate those figures while playing in Bangladesh. At an average of just 13.12, the right-hander could only amass 105 runs in the four Tests -- stats that he would surely like to improve this time around.

Brathwaite showed intent but also left clues yesterday that the Tigers could pick up and use to restrict him from improving his away stats against the Tigers on this tour. As things went yesterday, perhaps the best time for Bangladesh pacers to pick up the

wicket of Brathwaite would be to challenge him outside the off-stump at the start of the innings.

The right-hander did give a solid start to his side by stitching a 67-run opening stand with John Campbell but both openers looked a bit shaky in the beginning, edging a few deliveries from pacers Khaled and Mukidul Islam. Khaled, who picked up a three-for and also troubled batsmen with a hint of reverse swing at the latter stage of the day, was also the one to pick up the wicket of Brathwaite as he had him trapped in front.

The young BCB XI did not include any left-arm spinner, perhaps as part of a plan to not let West Indies acclimatise to the type of spin attack that awaits them in the upcoming two-Test series. But still, Rishad, the only leggie in the BCB XI and the one who bagged a fiver to help bundle the West Indies XI for 257, troubled Brathwaite and others from time to time.

Brathwaite seldom played away from his body and looked most comfortable while playing on the backfoot. Of the 85 runs scored by him, 57 runs came while playing on the leg side.

The BCB XI finished the day with 24 for no loss and the only thorn on their way was Brathwaite. And even though Bangladesh would go in as favourites in the Test series against a side that are missing many of their regular starters, the Tigers would still consider being well prepared against any potential threats that could come in their way of registering first points in the Test championship.



West Indies batsman Kraigg Brathwaite, one of the more experienced players in the side touring Bangladesh, lofts one on the leg side during a three-day practice match against BCB XI at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Will Domingo and Tigers walk the talk?

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram

While fast bowlers have been playing a crucial role behind top teams around the world transforming into better Test units, the situation has not been the same in Bangladesh.

Life is not easy for fast bowlers here, with very little in the way of exposure or the assurance of being a true star in the most glamorous profession in the country.

If you are a seamer, you are an afterthought who has to try his utmost -- in the few overs you are deemed useful -- to extract some help from pitches that offer little purchase for bounce, pace or swing.

You will witness slow and low pitches that offer turn for spinners which often negate the need for a couple of genuine fast bowlers in the playing eleven, especially in the longest format of the game.

But priorities change when Bangladesh travel to places like Australia, New Zealand, England

or South Africa. All of a sudden, everyone expects ill-prepared pacers to deliver. On most occasions, the lack of experience of bowling longer spells and the inability to make the most of favourable conditions that they rarely experienced before leads to pacers struggling overseas.

Ahead of the two-match Test series against the West Indies starting from February 3 at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, the question once more is whether the seamers will be given sufficient exposure at home.

The Tigers' spin department with the likes of Shakib Al Hasan, Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan and Mehedi Hasan Miraz are expected to play a huge role on the ZACS pitch where visitors often struggle to tackle spin.

The last time Bangladesh played a Test match here against Afghanistan in 2019, the team management had not picked even one specialist pacer in the playing eleven.

Spinners dominated on the tailor-made track and Afghanistan rode on their star leg-spinner Rashid

Khan's magic to win the game by a huge margin of 224 runs.

It has been a ploy of the Tigers to undo visitors with spin, but it proved to be their own undoing against Test newcomers Afghanistan. That helped give rise to the idea that Bangladesh need sporting tracks to do well both at home and abroad.

There were winds of change when new head coach Russell Domingo stressed the importance of creating a good cricket culture and emphasised having a good pace-bowling group.

Bangladesh fielded two pacers at home in Abu Jayed and Ebadot Hossain in the lone Test against Zimbabwe last year in Dhaka, which was also the last time the Tigers played the longest version of the game before the Covid-19 outbreak.

Jayed picked up four wickets in the first innings and bowled 24 overs while Ebadot remained wicketless after bowling 17 overs.

Priorities changed once more as the pitch was offering huge turn and very little for seamers in the second innings. Jayed bowled just

four overs and Ebadot bowled five as the spinners did the trick, picking up nine wickets and eventually delivering a 106-run win.

The selectors included six seamers in the 20-member preliminary squad for the upcoming the West Indies series. Jayed and Ebadot being the two-Test specialists, the likes of Mustafizur Rahman, Khaled Ahmed, Taskin Ahmed, and young Hasan Mahmud are also there vying for spots. The right moves have so far been made, in line with the coach's intentions, but will the team management take the bold step of including three pacers in the eleven?

Apart from the uncapped Mahmud, the remaining five seamers have played 35 Tests combined, which reflects the pace story of Bangladesh.

India has effected a big change by encouraging pacers, giving them opportunities and preparing sporting wickets at home over the last five years.

Will the Tigers' think tank take up that challenge or play safe again?



'Good time to show up'

REUTERS, London

Juergen Klopp praised his side for a brave performance as they ended their worrying slump in form with an impressive 3-1 victory at Tottenham Hotspur in the Premier League on Thursday.

The champions had gone five league games without a win, the last four without scoring, but looked much more like their formidable selves as goals by Roberto Firmino, Trent Alexander-Arnold and Sadio Mane secured the points.

Victory lifted Liverpool back into fourth place and while they are still four points behind leaders Manchester City, Klopp said it was a reminder that they have not gone away.

"It was good. It was necessary as well, to be honest! It was a good moment to show up a little bit," Klopp told reporters.

"We are still here, so that's good to know. Now we go home and then we come back in a few hours to play West Ham."

Firmino's goal in first-half stoppage time finally released the shackles for Klopp's side who threatened every time they went forward in the second half.

"I am completely happy about the performance and, yes, it's about the boys. They put a proper shift in," he said.

Freedom at last

AFP, Adelaide

Serena Williams took her daughter to the zoo and Novak Djokovic walked barefoot in a park as the stars of tennis emerged from a fortnight of quarantine ahead of the coronavirus-delayed Australian Open Friday.

More than 1,000 players, coaches and officials jetted into largely virus-free Australia this month for 14 days' lockdown ahead of the opening Grand Slam of the year, with most allowed out for just five hours of daily supervised training.

Big guns Williams, Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Naomi Osaka were among a select group that served their time in Adelaide rather than Melbourne ahead of an exhibition in the southern city on Friday.

Seven-time Australian Open winner Williams, who is gunning for one more Slam title to equal Margaret Court's record of 24 at next month's tournament, spent her two weeks holed up with three-year-old daughter Olympia.

"I'm so glad the quarantine is



over because to be in a room with a three-year-old and being her best friend is definitely difficult, especially after training and working out and then it's like, oh my gosh, it never ends," said Williams.

"But it was fun... honestly I wouldn't trade anything for spending hours with her."

Asked what she did on her first day of freedom, Williams said they headed to the zoo.

"We had a calendar in our room and every day we marked

an x on the days that went by and a big circle on the quarantine ending day, and we promised that we would take her to the zoo to see koalas and kangaroos," said the American.

She later played her first match of the season, with Olympia among a packed crowd at Memorial Drive, beating a sometimes-erratic world number three Osaka 6-2, 2-6 (10/7).

"I haven't seen people in -- it feels like forever," Osaka said. Aggressive restrictions on

incoming travel have helped keep the coronavirus at bay in Australia, making it one of the countries that is still able to have fans at events.

Djokovic only played one of his two scheduled sets against Jannik Sinner due to a large blister on his right hand, winning 6-3 in his first competitive game of the year.

"We didn't play in front of this big a crowd in 12 months so this is something very special," he said, having earlier opted for a quiet walk to celebrate finishing quarantine. "You know, just putting bare feet on the ground, just doing something that I didn't have a chance to do so, just having the space I think that's what we all kind of missed," the 17-time Grand Slam winner said.

Spanish great Nadal, who is aiming for a record-breaking 21st Slam title in Melbourne, moving him past the injured Roger Federer, plays third-ranked Dominic Thiem in his exhibition clash.

He said it had been difficult to think about tennis for much of 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, but added: "Here we are, starting another year... I'm excited to be back."



Yasir Shah and Naumal Ali, the two Pakistan spinners who shared 14 wickets against South Africa in the Karachi Test, celebrate the dismissal of Quinton de Kock yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Spin battle was key'

AFP, Karachi



Skipper Babar Azam praised spin bowlers Nauman Ali and Yasir Shah who shared 14 wickets between them to lead Pakistan to an emphatic victory against South Africa in the first Test in Karachi on Friday.

Nauman, the 34-year-old who was playing his first Test, took 5-35 while Yasir grabbed 4-35 to wreck the hopes of Quinton de Kock's side and secure a seven-wicket win.

The South Africans, visiting Pakistan for the first time in 14 years, fell to 245 all out in their second innings on the fourth day.

Pakistan achieved the paltry 88-run target in 22.5 overs for the loss of three

wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

34-year-old left-arm spinner Nauman finished with figures of 7-73 while leg spinner Yasir had 7-133. Azam, who captained Pakistan for the first time in a Test, said his spinners were outstanding.

"It (the win) was a combination of everything that helped us. We planned for the slower track and the combination with Nauman, who didn't show any pressure, and Yasir broke them."

Pakistan took a 158-run lead by scoring 378 in reply to South Africa's first innings total of 220 all out. Fawad Alam smashed the third hundred with 109 while Faheem Ashraf (64) and Azhar Ali (51) were valuable contributors after Pakistan had slumped to 33-4 at close on day one.

Bangladesh Games gather steam amid excitement

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangabandhu Bangladesh Games are taking shape after a long break due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) all but finalising the venues for 31 disciplines, including one venue from each of the eight divisions across the country.

The ninth edition of the multi-sports extravaganza, which has been scheduled to begin on April 1, had been suspended in March 12 last year, just 18 days before the event's inauguration. Everything was in place, but the pandemic forced athletes to stay indoors, breaking the momentum that had been building.

However, athletes have been out their confinement for the past three months as they resumed training on a limited scale. Some federations even dared to organise tournaments in order to keep athletes engaged, gave the BOA confidence to take the decision to hold the Games in one phase. In the preliminarily stages of planning, they had considered staging it phase-by-phase.

Although the number of participants has been reduced from 10,500 to 8,500, the number of events and gold medal will remain same, with 396 gold medals and 546 bronze medals on offer.

Some disciplines like football, cricket, chess, athletics, taekwondo, handball and karate have been going on full-steam while most others have only staged training programmes. However, organisers are looking forward to the Bangladesh Games on the back of good preparation. They last week attended a meeting with BOA higher-ups to updates them on training and other preparations.

"Everyone was positive at the meeting and are eagerly awaiting a return to grounds because they have been out of action for a long time," said BOA treasurer Kazi Razibuddin Ahmed Chapal yesterday.

"They were also instructed to prepare because the national federation will take care of everything in terms of staging the respective events while the BOA will bear all the expenditure," Chapal, who is also general secretary of Bangladesh Archery Federation, added.

"We, the archery federation, decided to give archers more room to compete in a different, windy conditions after a long gap. We will hold the National Archery Championships despite participating in the Bangladesh Games, which is considered a national championship for each discipline."

Of the 31 disciplines, most events will be held in Dhaka and BKSP while cricket (Sylhet, Barisal), archery (Kuakata), volleyball (Narail), karate (Bandarban), rugby (Rangpur), tennis (Rajshahi) and weightlifting (Mymensingh) are going outside the capital.

The BOA had before estimated a budget of 38.5 crore for last year's Bangladesh Games but they have yet to revise it for this year.