

Left-right combo among talking points

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram



By the time Tamim Iqbal and Nazmul Hossain Shanto were facing off-spinners Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nayeem Hasan at the center wicket of the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, the likes of Shadman Islam, Saif Hasan and Yasir Ali had already been dismissed at the MA Aziz Stadium on the second day of a three-day warm-up game against the West Indies.

The BCB XI were bundled out for just 160 runs in their

SQUAD
Mominul Haque (Captain), Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammed Mithun, Liton Das, Yasir Ali Chowdhury, Saif Hassan, Mustafizur Rahman, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam, Shadman Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Taskin Ahmed, Abu Jayed Rahi, Ebadot Hossain and Hasan Mahmud.

first innings in reply to the 257 from the West Indies. Shadman (22), Saif (15), and uncapped Yasir (1), who were included in the Bangladesh Test squad for the two-match series, failed to capitalise on the opportunity.

It was the big man, off-spinner Rahkeem Cornwall, who undid the



Pacer Hasan Mahmud, who is awaiting his first Test cap following impressive performance in the ODI series against the West Indies recently, works on his fitness in training at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. Meanwhile, ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan (R) recovered from a slight groin injury to join full-fledged training.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

BCB XI with his turn and bagged five wickets. The Tigers team management will surely keep a close eye on this cricketer ahead of the first Test, starting from February 3.

Selectors yesterday announced an 18-member Bangladesh Test squad, with wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan and pacer Khaled Ahmed dropped from the 20-member preliminary squad.

Star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan returned to the Test side as expected after completing a one-year ban from the ICC for failing to report corrupt approaches from a bookie. The left-hander also attended a training session for the first time since suffering a groin injury during the third ODI.

Shadman also staged a comeback to the side after a wrist injury forced the left-hander to miss the tour of Pakistan and the lone Test against Zimbabwe last year. The selectors included five left-handed top-order batsman in the form of skipper Mominul Haque, Tamim, Shakib, Shadman, and Nazmul, with at least four expected to feature in the playing eleven for the first Test. Tigers head coach Russell Domingo will be aware that he has quite a lot of southpaws in the side who will be vulnerable against Cornwall's off-spin, especially now that he has proven that he can be a big threat.

It will be interesting to see the strategy from the Tigers think-tank and how they would handle

the left-right combination in the batting department.

Right-handed opener Saif, Mushfiqur Rahim, Liton Das and Yasir could play a huge role in forming the perfect variety in the batting order.

"Obviously the inclusion of Shakib bhai always helps us in both the batting and bowling departments and all the players are hungry to give their best," Liton told the media yesterday.

Meanwhile, it was a refreshing sight to see the selectors included five seamers in the line-up. Young Hasan Mahmud has a bright chance to make his Test debut following an impressive ODI debut in the three-match series against the West Indies. Abu Jayed

and Ebadot Hossain are the two regular pacers in the Test side and they will face stiff competition from left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed and Mahmud for a place in the playing eleven.

The hosts are also loaded with four spinners with Shakib and fellow left-arm spinner Taijul Islam expected to play the lead role while one of two off-spinners like Nayeem Hasan and Mehedi Hasan in line as the third spinner.

The pitch at the ZACS will remain the talking point in the Test series and only time will tell what strategy the Tigers team management opt for against the West Indies.

Hopefuls caught up in spin web

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram



Perhaps there are no other better ways for a player to leave a lasting impact and be strongly considered for the starting XI than to come up with a notable performance in the

lead-up practice match ahead of a series. And the likes of young Yasir Ali, Shadman Islam and Saif Hassan had that chance to give the Tigers team management a sweet headache while naming the starting XI for the first of the two Tests against the West Indies at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium (ZACS) in Chattogram starting from February 3.

It was also a perfect opportunity for them to get some runs and gain much-needed confidence before returning to the longest and toughest format of the game after almost a year as all three of the aforementioned players were named in the 18-member Bangladesh Test team.

However, scores of 15, 22 and 1 from BCB XI's Saif, Shadman and Yasir respectively on the second day of the three-day warm-up match against West Indies XI at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chattogram yesterday would only add to



RAHKEEM CORNWALL 5 for 47

their regrets of having missed out on a golden opportunity to prove themselves.

Saif, who made his Test debut last year against Pakistan in Rawalpindi and has played a total of two Tests, went without being able to add to his overnight score.

Trailing by 233 runs, BCB XI had started the day on 24 for no loss. But in the penultimate delivery of the day's first over, Saif seemed to have been beaten for pace as the young right-hander was trapped in front off an inswinging delivery from Windies pacer Kemar Roach.

Shadman looked solid and was also part of a crucial 74-run second-wicket partnership with Mohammad Naim Sheikh but the way the left-hander was dismissed can be considered a worrying sign for the Tigers.

After a 126-minute stay at the crease, the opener seemed to have suddenly lost his patience, mistiming a pull off a short length delivery from Alzarri Joseph and being caught at extra cover. Yasir fell victim to the day's star performer -- Windies spinner Rahkeem Cornwall -- in the 28th over and left BCB XI reeling at 100 for four. The right-hander was caught at short mid-wicket while trying to negotiate a Cornwall delivery defensively.

Worrying signs were also there in the way most BCB XI batsmen yielded to the spin web of Cornwall and left-armer Jomel Warrican and were bundled out for just 160. It was as if the Bangladeshi batsmen, who usually are used to playing spinners in domestic matches round the year and should have less problems in getting acclimatized to spinning tracks, suddenly capitulated to their own trap. The visitors finished the day on 179 for five with Nkrumah Bonner unbeaten on 80.

West Indies' pace against Bangladesh's spin is usually how the matches between these two sides pan out. But maybe, the Tigers should prepare better for the likes of Cornwall and Warrican so that they cannot repeat or better their respective practice game figures of five-for and three-for in the first Test and instigate a batting debacle like Afghan spinners did in 2019 in the last Test played at the ZACS.

ASIAN ONLINE SHOOTING

Poor outing for BD shooters

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladeshi shooters capped off a frustrating campaign in the First Asian Online Shooting Championship, which concluded today.

Abdullahel Baki, Bangladesh's best prospect in rifle shooting, finished 14th among 40 participants with 619.3 points in men's 10m air rifle event. Robiul Islam finished 13th with 619.4 points while Rabbi Hasan Munna finished 19th with 617.7 points in the same event. Indian shooters grabbed the top three positions in the qualification round of this event.

Meanwhile, in women's 10m air rifle event, Bangladesh's Rithika Chowdhury, Syeda Atkia Hasan and Tabasum Nafisha finished in 20th, 27th and 28th positions respectively out of 45 competitors.

On Friday, Bangladesh's best pistol shooter Shakil Ahmed had finished 21st among 46 participants with 566 points in 10m air pistol event. Bangladesh's Abdur Razzak had finished 37th and Noor Alif had finished 40th in the same event.

In women's 10m air pistol, Bangladesh's Nilufa Yasmin, Ardina Ferdous and Armin Asha had finished in 17th, 23rd and 25th positions respectively.

Organised by the Kuwait Shooting Federation with support from Asian Shooting Confederation, the two-day online meet featured air rifle, pistol and shotgun events for both men and women and was competed by elite shooters from 22 countries of Asia.



BFF'S TALENT HUNT LAUNCHED

Bangladesh Football Federation officials pose for a photograph with budding footballers who turned up at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday for a nationwide talent hunt programme launched at eight different venues of the country. The programme, which will select footballers aged up to 15 for the SAFF and AFC events next year through residential camp in Kamalapur, will run up to February 25 in phases across the country. Apart from BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, BFF's technical director Paul Smalley and national team coach Jamie Day were present at the event.

PHOTO: BFF



'I didn't miss the game at all'

REUTERS, Melbourne

Nick Kyrgios did not miss tennis or most of his fellow players during his year away from the game, the 25-year-old maverick said ahead of his return to action at an Australian Open warm-up event next week.

The outspoken Australian will take on Frenchman Alexandre Muller in the opening round of the Murray River Open on Monday in what would be his first competitive match in a year.

"I'm not going to lie. I didn't miss the game that much," Kyrgios said on Saturday. "I'm a competitor. I compete with everything I do. I was playing computer games, that kind of stuff, getting my little competitive edge there. I didn't really miss the game at all."

Kyrgios said he did not even touch a tennis racquet for the first four-five months.

"I don't miss too many people on tour to be honest, apart from all the Australian guys and a couple of good friends." "I feel mentally completely refreshed, ready to go again."

Stokes, Archer, Burns hit training ground

AGENCIES

All-rounder Ben Stokes, pacer Jofra Archer and reserve opener Rory Burns on Saturday had their first training session at the Chepauk after successfully completing six days of hard quarantine, while other members of the squad cleared their second Covid-19 test.

The trio were not part of the Sri Lanka Test series with Stokes and Archer being rested for workload management purpose while Burns skipped the previous tour due to the

birth of his first child.

The full England squad is scheduled to start its training from February 2 ahead of the series opener against India, starting February 5. Jonny Bairstow, Sam Curran and Mark Wood will be available only for the last two Tests as part of the ECB's rotation policy.

"The first group of players - Archer, Burns and Stokes - will practice each morning for the next three days. They are limited to a two-hour session," England's media manager Danny Reuben informed.



PHOTO: ECB

Players unhappy with Langer?

PTI

Australia head coach Justin Langer's intense "micro-management" coaching style has apparently not gone down well with a lot of players even as the former opener termed the insinuations as something that "couldn't be further from truth".

The fissures in the Australian camp have come out in the open after an under-strength India came back from behind to hammer Australia 2-1 in their own den.

According to a report in the 'Sydney Morning Herald' quoting multiple sources close to the Australian set-up, some players are apparently not happy with Langer's management style because of his intensity and mood swings.

The report suggested that Langer is no longer able to cope up with demands of being a three-format coach. Langer, however, refuted the claims that his relationship with players had soared.

"Couldn't be further from the truth," adding that "leadership isn't a popularity contest."

Barca aim for five wins in a row

AGENCIES

Barcelona will be looking to make it five La Liga victories in a row when they continue their 2020-21 campaign at home to a revitalised Athletic Bilbao tonight.

Ronald Koeman's side have picked up 12 points from their last four matches to move into third position in the table, but they are still 10 points behind leaders Atletico Madrid, who also have a game in hand.

Barcelona's players face Bilbao with revenge on their minds after losing to the Basque side in the Spanish Super Cup final almost two weeks ago. After inflicting Barca's only defeat in their past 13 matches in all competitions, Bilbao are their opponents for the third time this month after the Catalans won 3-2 away in

their delayed league fixture on Jan. 6.

Barca have not been without their problems this season, but the Catalan giants now have their sights on second-placed Real Madrid in Spain's top flight.

As well as four straight league victories, the Catalan giants also progressed to the quarter-finals of the Copa del Rey on Wednesday night courtesy of a 2-1 victory over Rayo Vallecano.

"We know about our situation in La Liga, it's complicated," he admitted. "Until the day it's no longer possible, we'll try to win. In the Champions League there are more teams but there is no clear favourite. We already know that we have two games against PSG that we'll try to pass through. The ambition is to win titles, but you have to be realistic," said Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman ahead of the clash against Athletic Bilbao.