

Mosaddek returns, Aminul and Shafiqul exit

SPORTS REPORTER

All-rounder Mosaddek Hossain, pacer Al Amin Hossain and left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed were included in the 20-member Bangladesh squad for the tour of New Zealand.

The national selectors announced the squad for the three-match ODI and T20I series yesterday.

Bangladesh will be without star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan in New Zealand as he will be with his family for the birth of his third child and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had already granted him leave from the tour.

The BCB also granted Shakib permission to take part in the Indian Premier League after the dashing southpaw was roped in by Kolkata Knight Riders for the upcoming season during the auction on Thursday.

The 33-year-old will also be missing the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka as the tour is expected to take place in April, when the IPL is also supposed to start.

Apart from Shakib, another left-arm spinner Taijul Islam was not



included in the Tigers squad that played against the West Indies in the last ODI series.

Leg-spinner Aminul Islam and Shafiqul Islam, who were part of the last T20I squad which played against Zimbabwe in 2020, were dropped. Al-Amin and Nasum, who were part of that squad, were retained for the upcoming series.

However, it will be a comeback for Mosaddek who played his last ODI in Sri Lanka back in 2019 and his last T20I in India in 2020, after which took leave to tend to his ailing mother. Since then, the all-rounder was not considered for any format of the game for the Tigers.

There are also seven pacers in the squad. Chief selector Minhajul Abedin said they wanted to include

back-up options in case of injuries as they have to abide by quarantine protocols after reaching New Zealand.

"Obviously possible [to win in New Zealand]. We have got an experienced side and we have won the three-match ODI series against the West Indies when playing after a year's gap. We are considering Taijul Islam in Test matches while we want to see Nasum Ahmed in the T20 format. Mosaddek has been included as the back-up all-rounder as we wanted to create a pool across formats," Minhajul told the media yesterday.

The Tigers are scheduled to travel to New Zealand on February 23. The visitors will remain isolated in their hotel for four days after

arrival. Bangladesh will start training from the fifth day for the next 10 days but only among themselves to complete the 14-day quarantine period. Tigers' spin bowling consultant Daniel Vettori is expected to join the side in New Zealand.

After the quarantine period, the visitors are expected to undergo a training camp in Queenstown for five days before taking part in the first of three ODIs on March 20 in Dunedin.

BANGLADESH SQUAD FOR NZ TOUR

Tamim Iqbal, Mosaddek Hossain, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammad Mithun, Liton Kumar Das, Mahmud Ullah Riyad, Afif Hossain, Soumya Sarkar, Naim Sheikh, Taskin Ahmed, Al Amin Hossain, Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud, Saif Uddin, Mustafizur Rahman, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Rubel Hossain, Sheikh Mahedi Hasan, Nasum Ahmed

The second and third ODIs will take place on March 23 and 26 while the first of the three T20Is is scheduled for March 28 in Hamilton. The remaining two T20Is will be played on March 30 and April 1 in Napier and Auckland respectively.

Franchise hockey offers hope

SPORTS REPORTER

With Premier Division Hockey League in the shelf for the last three years, the proposed franchise hockey league is giving hope to hockey players as a source of earning while raising hope of a revival of the game, once considered most promising after football.

Despite repeated appeals from the hockey players for holding the premier league, Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) has apparently been helpless due to the lack of unwillingness of some clubs to take part over financial constraints.

"Every club official wants the league to get underway but surprisingly they can't take a decision when they sit for a meeting. And so we are starving year after year," national team's midfielder Mohammad Nayeem Uddin told The Daily Star.

"Introducing the franchise league is like a bumper harvest for the players, who always want regular harvest. We want hockey to be back on the pitch and want every player to earn a living. Majority of the players don't have jobs except for some who have jobs in services teams," Nayeem added.

The introduction of the franchise league will definitely give the players an opportunity to earn money while the budding players will have encouragement to continue playing the game.

However, introduction of the league will depend on how the BHF responds to the proposal placed by T Sports, who are already involved with cricket and football in a big way.

"It is a big challenge to convince corporate houses because we have to make a sustainable model for the league. We believe we can manage four to five houses for the first year but they may not remain with us if we don't ensure a sustainable league," Ishtiaque Sadeque, CEO and managing director of T Sports, told The Daily Star.

Another T Sports official informed that they are planning to use the same model used in BPL T20 to rope in six corporate houses for six divisions, who will play in double-legged league matches before top four teams will take part in play-offs for the final clash in May.

Each team will have an icon player, who will get maximum payment, followed by players of A, B, C category alongside a player under foreign players' quota.

"T Sports will invest more in marketing to create a hype in hockey. The players may not get big payments like BPL cricketers do, but they will get good payment from the second edition. We want to make hockey a brand," said the official, adding that they will also provide a certain amount of revenue to the BHF.

BHF's acting general secretary Mohammad Yousuf said they are taking the T Sports proposal positively as an additional event in their calendar and that they have already formed a committee to meet with the company and finalise everything within a short period of time.

"I don't know how much franchise hockey league will contribute to hockey, but I can say people will feel interested again about hockey if we can introduce the league the way we want to," said Ishtiaque.



'Pressure on Djokovic'

AFP, Melbourne

Russia's Daniil Medvedev insisted the pressure was all on Novak Djokovic in the Australian Open final after he breezed past Stefanos Tsitsipas in straight sets (6-4, 6-2, 7-5) in the semis on Friday.

Medvedev, now into his second Grand Slam decider on the back of a 20-match winning streak, said the world number one has "more things to lose" on Sunday.

"I like that I don't have a lot of pressure because he never lost in eight times that he was here in the final," said the 25-year-old world number four.

"So it's him who has all the pressure, getting to Roger and Rafa in the Grand Slams (list).

"So I just hope that I'm going to get out there, show my best tennis. As we see I can beat some big names if I play good.

"For sure he has more experience, but more things to lose."



A Bangladesh Army player (R) jostles for possession against a player from AHM Kamruzzaman XI during a match of the Shaheed Smriti Hockey Competition at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday. Bangladesh Army won the match 2-1.

MEDVEDEV POWERS INTO FINAL

Russia's Daniil Medvedev overpowered Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece to make his first Australian Open final Friday, where he will bid to stop world number one Novak Djokovic from clinching an unprecedented ninth title. The 25-year-old, ultra-confident on the back of his unbeaten run, which includes three titles, has been knocking on the door of Grand Slam success for some time, but has yet to win a title.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Lockdown warrior faces the 'new boss'

REUTERS, Melbourne

Jennifer Brady spent two weeks in hard quarantine gathering mental strength for her tilt at a maiden Grand Slam title and will hope there is plenty in reserve when she takes on Naomi Osaka in Saturday's Australian Open final.

While some of those in hard quarantine complained about not being able to train before the Grand Slam, Brady likened it to a long decompression session that probably helped her bulldoze through the draw against better-prepared players.

Now the rising 25-year-old faces the ultimate test of her resilience against Osaka, who beat her in the U.S. Open semifinals on the way to her third Grand Slam triumph.

"I don't know how I'm going to feel on Saturday," said the American.

"I can say I can enjoy the moment and just try to play tennis and not really think too much about it, but there's going to be moments, there's going to be games, there's going to be points where I'm going to be thinking about, 'Wow, this could be my first Grand Slam title.'"

The odds are against it though, with third seed Osaka rated a virtually unbackable favourite by bookmakers to raise a second Daphne Akhurst Memorial Cup at Rod Laver Arena on Saturday, two years after beating Petra Kvitova for the 2019 title.

Brady, the 22nd seed, has shown grit to get this far, winning consecutive three-

set matches against semi-finalist Karolina Muchova and Jessica Pegula, but compared to Osaka's tough draw the American has had an armchair ride.

Brady made heavy weather beating a profligate Muchova, needing five match points to finish it, while Osaka crushed Serena Williams in two sets and sealed victory on the first match point.

Add that to the fact that Osaka is on a 20-match winning streak and has never lost a Grand Slam final, it would seem former college player Brady is up against it.

"For me, I have this mentality that people don't remember the runners-up," said 2019 champion Osaka after leaving a defeated Williams in tears.

"You might, but the winner's name is the one that's engraved."

At 23, Osaka is fast developing the aura that helped Williams amass 23 Grand Slam titles.

Once prone to the occasional breakdown on court, Osaka has been all business at Melbourne Park and paid tribute to her coach Wim Fissette and team for helping her forge a stronger mental game.

The first Japanese player to win a Grand Slam title, Osaka said she wanted to pay her team back with another trophy.

"Of course, it's nice to see your name on a trophy or your name on a wall," said Osaka, who holds a 2-0 record against Brady in WTA Tour events.

"But I think bigger than that, I feel like I'm playing with a different purpose for this trip.

"I just want to do really well as a vessel for everyone's hard work."

Man Utd, Spurs enjoy big wins

REUTERS, London

Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur built hefty leads with emphatic away wins in their Europa League last 32 first-leg matches but AC Milan were held to a 2-2 draw at Red Star Belgrade as the competition resumed on Thursday.

On night of high-scoring matches, United crushed Real Sociedad 4-0 in a game played in Turin because of COVID-19 restrictions between the UK and Spain with Bruno Fernandes scoring a brace for his side.

Tottenham won 4-1 away against Austrian side Wolfsberg in the Puskas Arena in Budapest while Swiss side Young Boys, Scotland's Rangers and Olympiakos all hit four.

Arsenal drew 1-1 in the "away" leg of their tie against Benfica, although the match was played in Rome.

Fernandes has become the heartbeat of Manchester United and the Portuguese midfielder opened the scoring after 27 minutes with his 20th goal of the season.

He curled in his second after 57 minutes before Marcus Rashford and Daniel James completed the rout.

"We deserved to win but maybe not by four goals. On a night like this when we find spaces we can be a dangerous team," United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said.

Tottenham's domestic form has been woeful but they claimed a first away win in the knockout phase of the Europa League since 2008 to put one foot in the last 16.

Gareth Bale set up Son Heung-min before scoring a classy second as he marked a rare start with a strong display before being substituted midway through the second half.

Lucas Moura made it 3-0 with a solo effort but Wolfsberg improved after the break and Michael Liendl pulled a goal back from the penalty spot. Tottenham substitute Carlos Vinicius touched home his side's late fourth.



Manchester United forward Bruno Fernandes celebrates one of his two goals during his side's 4-0 win against Real Sociedad in their Europa League fixture at the Allianz Stadium in Turin on Thursday. PHOTO: REUTERS

"I think we have one foot in the next round. I liked the performance in the first half," Spurs manager Jose Mourinho said.

Arsenal fell behind against Benfica when Pizzi netted a penalty but Bukayo Saka levelled two minutes later and the Premier League side would have won had their finishing been better, Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang wasting several chances.

AC Milan were seconds away from victory in Belgrade but a stoppage-time header by substitute Milan Pavkov earned 10-man Red Star a 2-2 draw.

The Italians led 1-0 and 2-1 thanks to a Radovan Pankov own goal and a Theo Hernandez penalty but Red Star, who had Milan Rodic sent off in the 76th minute, hit back through a Guelor Kanga penalty.

Ajax secured a 2-1 win at Lille thanks to late goals by Dusan Tadic and Brian Brobbey after Timothy Weah had put the hosts in front. There were goals galore elsewhere.

Jhony, Riley stunned by IPL deals

REUTERS, Sydney

Jhony Richardson was "mentally exhausted" and Riley Meredith left "dumbfounded" after both Australian fast bowlers struck it rich at the Indian Premier League (IPL) auction in Chennai on Thursday.

Punjab Kings splashed out 140 million Indian rupees (\$1.93 million) for Richardson and agreed an 80 million deal for uncapped Meredith.

Both pacers were keeping tabs on the auction from their quarantine in a Christchurch hotel ahead of Australia's Twenty20 series in New Zealand.

"I mentally exhausted myself of all these emotions of feeling sick and excited," Richardson told a video conference.

"It's life-changing to be honest.

"Your emotions take over and you double check it, you triple check and quadruple check it."

"I was scribbling on papers, nervous hands, still sinking in..."

In another room at the same hotel, Meredith was using an online currency converter to figure out how much he would receive.

"I was on Face Time with my girlfriend at the time and we just absolutely couldn't believe it was happening," said Meredith.

"It was like it was fake, to be honest. We're both pretty dumbfounded."

This year's IPL is scheduled to be played in April-May though exact dates have not been announced yet.