



Bangladesh players seem in high spirits during their first practice session yesterday at the Lincoln Green since landing in Christchurch on February 24.

PHOTO: BCB

Tigers' mood picks up as they start training

SPORTS REPORTER

Mushfiqur Rahim's picture on his official Facebook page showing the cricketer smiling broadly said it all as he and the rest of the Bangladesh squad participated in their first practice session in Christchurch since landing in New Zealand on February 24.

The challenge facing the Tigers is a multi-faceted one. They returned to international cricket after a long pandemic-induced gap with the West Indies series at home, following a number of series cancellations last year. On top of that, their past forays in Kiwi soil is yet to yield a single win over the hosts and if that in itself is difficult, the players have found the strict quarantine protocols difficult at the beginning.

The New Zealand government is strict on maintaining protocols -- both Pakistan and West Indies had their training privileges revoked in November last year during their tour of the country.

The Bangladesh players were all confined to their own rooms for the first three days of self-isolation. After that the players were allowed to walk inside the hotel premises for 30 minutes each day. ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal said he felt he was seeing his teammates "after years" following self-isolation while spinner Mehedi



Hasan Miraz remarked that being confined to a room "felt like a jail". Time inside a bubble can stand still.

However, things are looking up. The Tigers returned to training yesterday after they tested negative in all three coronavirus tests so far. All-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin, following their first practice session in small groups, relayed in a video message yesterday that their job was to adjust to the conditions as well as possible.

"After home quarantine for the first seven days, on the eighth day we went to practice in small groups. Everything was good and it was a first-time experience with such quarantine [protocols] and coming to the New Zealand tour. As sportsmen we try to adjust ourselves to all kinds of conditions," he said.

The vibes were good within the Bangladesh camp after the start of training. "In today's practice, we mostly worked on our fielding -- short and high catches. Because there's a matter of weather and windy conditions here, we practised catching in order to adapt to that. Then we also undertook batting and bowling in short sessions. There was also a little fitness training at the end as we haven't been able to work on fitness in seven days. We did some running as per the trainer's instructions. As more days pass, I will be looking to adjust better with the short practice session."

The positivity of the camp was reflected in Saifuddin saying they would like to take back a result this time around. The all-rounder echoed ODI skipper Tamim's sentiment of changing the record.

"There obviously are expectations [to win matches] because we are a very good team in ODIs. So, if we can all play at our best, if the day is ours, then, of course, the result will talk in our favour. Besides, there are also T20s. And as we are yet to fill in the achievement column [in New Zealand], we will try to ensure we can take something back this time around," Saifuddin said.

The Tigers' key focus will still be on adhering to the 14-day mandatory quarantine period after which things will get much easier as they will be able to mix with locals and roam around during the rest of the tour.

Abahani, Sheikh Russel complete first phase with wins

SPORTS REPORTER



Abahani and Sheikh Russel KC completed the first phase of their Bangladesh Premier League campaign with wins over Uttar Baridhara Club and Bangladesh Police respectively at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Abahani survived a scare to notch up a hard-fought 2-1 win against Baridhara after Sheikh Russel thumped Bangladesh Police 5-0.

The outcome helped Abahani regain second place with 25 points from 12 matches, five points clear of fourth-placed Sheikh Russel, who now have 20 points from 12 games.

Following a disappointing 1-2 defeat against Uttar Baridhara in their previous game, Sheikh Russel bounced back brilliantly as they toyed with helpless Police throughout the game.

Former champions Sheikh Russel took only six minutes to break the deadlock when Nigerian Obi Moneke headed home a Habibur Rahman throw-in from inside the box before Brazilian Lopes Rodrigues doubled the lead in the 28th minute.

Mohammad Abdullah increased the lead further in the 34th minute as Sheikh Russel went to the half-time break with a comfortable 3-0 lead. Abdullah completed his brace in the 69th minute when he saw his cross from the right flank make it into the back of the net.

courtesy of Police goalkeeper Saiful Islam Khan's poor attempt to clear with fist.

Despite having struck four goals, Sheikh Russel looked hungry for more and they netted their fifth in the 83rd minute -- a tap-in by Tajik defender Siyovush Asrorov.

In the second match under the floodlight, Uttar Baridhara, boosted by a surprising win over Sheikh Russel in the previous money, gave their opponents a run for their money before suffering their fifth defeat in the league.

Abahani, the six-time champions, however, squandered a lot of opportunities with goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Shohel making some crucial saves that eventually helped the Sky Blues leave the ground with their heads held high.

Brazilian Francisco Rodrigues gave Abahani the lead in the 26th minute, converting a penalty after Mohammad Sohel brought down Abahani's Jewel Rana inside the box.

After the resumption, Abahani's lead was doubled in the 55th minute, thanks to an own goal by defender Saiddoston Fozilov. The Uzbekistan defender fired home from inside the box while attempting to clear a powerful cross from Haitian Kervens Belfort. Afterwards both sides squandered a good number of opportunities before Uttar Baridhara reduced the margin through a tap-in from Egyptian Abdel Rahim in the 90th minute.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Abahani's Brazilian forward Francisco Rodrigues celebrates his team's first goal against Uttar Baridhara Club while (Right) Sheikh Russel's Mohammad Abdullah celebrates one of his two goals against Bangladesh Police during yesterday's Bangladesh Premier League matches.



Pacer Mohammed Siraj struck the biggest blow when he trapped England skipper Joe Root in front with an inswinger on a pitch where Indian spinners claimed eight wickets on the opening day of the fourth Test in Ahmedabad yesterday. [Bottom] Tempers flare as India skipper Virat Kohli and England all-rounder Ben Stokes engage in heated exchange.

PHOTO: REUTERS

England caught in spin web again

REUTERS

England endured a top-order collapse before they registered a below-par 205 in their first innings in the fourth and final Test against India in Ahmedabad on Thursday.

A sixth consecutive sub-200 total looked on the cards for the tourists after they slumped to 30-3 in the morning session. Ben Stokes (55) and Dan Lawrence (46) propped them up but England might regret not making the most of the perfect batting conditions at the Narendra Modi Stadium.

India, who are 2-1 up in the four-test series, were confident against a spin-heavy England attack with James Anderson as the lone frontline seamer, while Stokes battles an upset stomach.

"We're more than capable of scoring at least 300 on that pitch," Stokes said afterwards. "It's frustrating, but we can't dwell on it too much. Overall, it's a much better wicket than the last time we played



here."

Axar Patel was the wrecker-in-chief in that match, which India won in two days, and the left-arm spinner returned to haunt England again after Joe Root elected to bat.

Indian spinners claimed eight of the 10 English wickets...Patel (4-68), Ravichandran Ashwin (3-47) and Washington Sundar (1-14)...on a pitch which looked quite different from the one used for the third test in which 30 wickets fell in five sessions.

"It was a batting wicket, and it was coming onto the bat nicely, so we planned to bowl patiently and keep bowling at the same spot," Mohammad Siraj said.

Triple delight for Alif

SPORTS REPORTER

BKSP student Abdur Rahman Alif continued to shine against seniors as the 10th-grade student of Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) clinched gold in men's recurve event of Bangabandhu 12nd National Archery Championships in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

Alif, who came into



the limelight after beating Ruman Sana in the semifinals on way to winning the gold medal in the Victory Day Archery tournament in December, beat national archer Hakim Ahmed Rubel 7-3 to win back-to-back gold medals.

It was also triple delight for Alif who, pairing with his BKSP teammates grabbed gold in the recurve team and mixed events to help BKSP finish behind Dhaka Army Archery Club (DAAC), who topped the table with five gold and two silver medals.

Mehenaj Akter Monira of DAAC beat Najmin Khatun 6-0 in the final to win the women's recurve gold medal before grabbing women's recurve team gold along with Nasrin Akter and Rabeya Akter.

Koeman can't ask for any more from his team

REUTERS, Barcelona



Barcelona coach Ronald Koeman praised his side for their never-say-die attitude after they reached the Copa del Rey final with a 3-0 win after extra time over Sevilla on Wednesday to pull off the latest in a series of great turnarounds in the competition.

Barca lost the first leg 2-0 but Ousmane Dembele's thumping early



missed a penalty.

Martin Braithwaite's extra-time header completed a 3-2 aggregate win and continued a remarkable journey in this year's Copa, in which Barca needed extra time to knock out third division Cornella 2-0 and came from behind to beat second division Rayo Vallecano 2-1.

They were 2-0 down at Granada until the 88th minute in the quarter-finals but levelled with two late goals before winning 5-3 after extra time. "We always believed, we have never thrown this Cup away," Koeman told reporters. "It's

a question of mentality, and as a coach I can't ask for any more from my team than what I saw tonight. We kept on fighting in extra time, it was incredible. I'm very satisfied with how hard we worked tonight. We deserved the win."

Unlike previous coaches, Koeman has prioritised the Copa del Rey and rested players in league matches to keep them fresh for Cup games, saying the competition was Barca's best chance of a trophy due to Atletico Madrid's dominance in La Liga and the fierce competition of the Champions League.

'I told myself: Wait Polly, take a chance'

REUTERS



Akila Dananjaya went from hero to zero in the space of two overs, claiming a hat-trick before being smashed for six sixes by Kieron Pollard as West Indies beat Sri Lanka by four wickets in their first Twenty20 international at Antigua on Wednesday. "I felt after hitting a couple of sixes, I understood how the pitch plays, it was important to be positive and play your shots," Pollard said. "Back yourselves to clear the boundary." "A couple of things went through my mind before the sixth ball, I thought should I go for the six or take the 30 runs in the over, he went around the wicket and bowled it onto my pads, I told myself 'Wait Polly, take a chance'," he added. "That's how I have played my cricket all along, especially against the spinners."

HIGHLIGHT

West Indies captain Kieron Pollard on Wednesday became only the third man to hit six sixes in an international over in the opening Twenty20 international against Sri Lanka. Pollard followed in the footsteps of South Africa's Herschelle Gibbs (2007 World Cup against Netherlands) and India's Yuvraj Singh (2007 T20 World Cup against England) by achieving the rare feat. The hapless bowler was Akila Dananjaya who in his previous over had claimed a hat-trick of wickets.