

HIGHLIGHTS

Yesterday was the fourth instance that Bangladesh failed to scalp a single wicket after an entire day of a Test. Sri Lanka's Dimuth Karunaratne and Dhananjaya de Silva played out 76 overs, adding 283 runs on the fourth day.

The unbeaten 322-run stand between Karunaratne and Dhananjaya is the fifth-highest partnership for any wicket against Bangladesh and the highest fourth-wicket partnership against Bangladesh in Tests.

With a maiden 200, Karunaratne became the 26th batsman to score a double hundred against Bangladesh in Test history.

Karunaratne's unbeaten 234 is the second-highest individual score by a Sri Lankan cricketer against the Tigers, behind Kumar Sangakkara's 319 in Chattogram in 2014, which happened to be the highest individual score by any batsman in this format against Bangladesh.



Sri Lanka skipper Dimuth Karunaratne celebrates his maiden double hundred while Dhananjaya de Silva congratulates him during a wicketless fourth day of the first Test against Bangladesh at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy yesterday. PHOTO: SLC

Don't think it is right to play now, says Hassan

SPORTS REPORTER



Although the Tigers are having a busy time with their international commitments, the scenario is quite the opposite for the domestic

players in Bangladesh. The Dhaka Premier League was suspended after its first round due to the Covid-19 outbreak in March last year and since then local cricketers have been going through an anxious time.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) arranged the first-class National Cricket League in March this year, but that was also suspended after the first two rounds for an indefinite period owing to a fresh upsurge in Covid-19 infection rates earlier this month.

The Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan announced that they are planning to begin the DPL from May 6. However, the tournament will not be taking place in its original 50-over-a-side format as a busy international schedule will not allow for a wide enough window for such an undertaking. Thus, the tournament this time will be played in T20 format.

A majority of local cricketers have been struggling financially and cricketers from

the third to first division have all been waiting for the leagues to begin.

The DPL remains the chief source of income for most cricketers in the domestic circuit and the decision to begin the tournament was welcomed by the players.

However, keeping the current Covid-19 situation in the country in mind, the BCB also had to think about the health safety of the players. Although the Bangladesh Football Federation has already announced that it will begin the second phase of the Bangladesh Premier League from April 30, there is still no good news from BCB boss Nazmul Hassan in terms of restarting the DPL.

"It is difficult to start the league in this situation. If this situation continues, in my opinion, I don't think it is right to play now. Until we are unable to ensure a bio-secure bubble for players, there is no question of playing in such a situation whether it's for one team or ten," Hassan told media yesterday.

"The BCB is trying its best and if they (clubs) can ensure us they can be able to continue the tournament by creating a proper bio-bubble then only we can play. But at the moment I think the chances are very slim."

'Even good balls are being put away for boundaries'

SPORTS REPORTER



As the pitch at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium remained a belter of a surface for the batters, host Sri Lanka rode on skipper Dimuth Karunaratne's maiden double hundred alongside Dhananjaya De Silva's century to complete a wicketless fourth day of the first Test against Bangladesh yesterday.

It was a tough day at the office for the Bangladesh bowlers in hot and humid conditions, with the pitch hardly changing from what it was like at the start of the Test match. Pacers Taskin Ahmed, Abu Jayed and Ebadot Hossain did try to put in some effort, but the lack of bite in the pitch hardly led to the two Lankan batters being tested.

Karunaratne and Dhananjaya added 322 runs, which is the highest fourth-wicket partnership in Sri Lanka. It was also the fourth instance a pair batted out the entirety of a day of a Test match against Bangladesh. Both batsmen were aggressive from the start of the fourth day's play, adding 102 in the 31 overs of the first session and keeping the scoring rate high.



Taskin, who made his comeback to the Test side after four years, has bowled 25 overs in the innings so far -- the most among the three seamers.

Considering the flat surface, it is a tough ask for an inexperienced Bangladesh pace bowling line-up to do produce the extraordinary out of nothing. The three seamers have played a combined of 21 Tests in their career so far before this match.

"It's really difficult for the bowlers if you have such wickets in Test cricket. It is the type of surface where there are fewer options to create chances. Even good balls are being put away for boundaries. It would have been better if there was some help for the bowlers on the pitch. There is no other alternative to having patience and bowling at the right areas consistently," Taskin told media yesterday.

Now just 29 runs behind Bangladesh, the hosts are expected to take a first-innings lead on the fifth and final day. Despite the game being headed towards a draw, Lankan coach Mickey Arthur believes a win is still on the cards for the hosts. "We're certainly thinking about winning. That's how we want to play our cricket. That's such an important culture to inculcate in a dressing room. We're not here to make up the numbers."

"I think we are a team that's hard to beat. We'll show some intent tomorrow (Sunday) and who knows where the day goes? It is very flat, but pressure is a funny thing. If we get ourselves enough in front and leave ourselves enough overs, who knows what could happen?," Arthur told media.

Short camp in Dhaka, 10-day camp in Qatar

Day, Watkiss to return in first week of May

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh national football team will start their training camp for June's World Cup Qualifiers in the middle of next month at home and will have around 10 days of conditioning camp in Qatar, informed a Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) official yesterday.

The players of the national team are currently with their respective clubs as the second phase of the Bangladesh Premier League is set to begin on April 30, and according to the official, the local camp will begin around the middle of May.

"We are planning to hold four rounds of matches of the Bangladesh Premier League by May 11. The national team players then, except for the ones with AFC Cup engagement, will join the national team camp. Players will likely not be released for Eid-ul-Azha this time as we previously saw players returned with Covid-19 symptoms last year once they came back from such a festival," BFF's general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag told The Daily Star. The camp will be conducted by the full coaching staff, with head coach Jamie Day and his deputy Stuart Watkiss set to return to Bangladesh in the first week of May. They will watch a couple of rounds of matches of the league, which will be held at all four venues like in the first

phase, before choosing a squad at the end of the four rounds.

Day and Watkiss, however, will not get the full squad at their disposal in Dhaka as BPL champions Bashundhara Kings, who boast a number of national team players, will be in Maldives for the AFC Cup group stages from May 14 to 20. Abahani, who too have a few players of the current national team, could be involved in that AFC group stage if they qualify through two playoff rounds.

"The players of Bashundhara and Abahani (if they qualify for the group stages) will fly to Qatar straight from Maldives right after their assignment. The ones who will be in the camp in Dhaka will also fly for Qatar around the same time so that

the whole squad can start a conditioning camp in Qatar 10 to 12 days ahead of the qualifying matches. Meanwhile, we will try to arrange one or two practice matches there for the team," Shohag added.

Bangladesh will play against Afghanistan on June 3, will take on India on June 7 and will wrap up the second round of qualifiers against Oman on June 15, all the matches to be played in Qatar. The men in red and green are bottom of Group E with a single point from five matches, with Qatar leading the table with 16 points. Oman, Afghanistan and India occupy the next three positions.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH (First innings): -541 for 7dec in 173 overs.
SRI LANKA (First innings): -512 for 3 in 149 overs (Karunaratne 234 not out, Lahiru 58, Oshada 20, Mathews 25, Dhananjaya 154 not out, extras 21; Taskin 1-91, Miraz 1-123, Tajjul 1-136)

SMILING TIGER on crutches

AFP, Miami

A smiling Tiger Woods appeared on crutches with a cast on his lower right leg and foot Friday in a photo posted on his Instagram account.

The image was the first of Woods since he suffered serious right leg injuries in a one-car crash February 23 near Los Angeles.

Two months later, the 15-time major winner appeared alongside his dog in the image, taken in his home practice facility in Jupiter, Florida.

Woods said that work was progressing faster upon his three-hole backyard practice course than he was progressing in his recovery.

"My course is coming along faster than I am," Woods wrote. "But it's nice to have a faithful rehab partner, man's best friend."

Woods, 45, has won 82 US PGA Tour titles, level with Sam Snead for the all-time record.

Before Woods was injured in the crash, he was working to overcome a back operation in time to play at the Masters earlier this month.

Woods has released no timetable regarding how extensive his injuries are or when he might walk normally again, much less return to his golfing career.

Police found Woods was driving nearly twice the legal speed limit when his SUV went out of control and rolled several times before stopping.



Woods was hospitalized for weeks before returning home to Florida last month.

He underwent hours of surgery to repair a shattered lower right leg and ankle, including the insertion of a rod into his tibia and screws and pins being used to stabilize his ankle.

Woods had undergone a series of back operations before making a fairytale comeback that saw him win the 2019 Masters for his first major title since the 2008 US Open at Torrey Pines.

AFP, Quang Ninh



Legs stiff from long days in the rice terraces of northern Vietnam, scores of female farmers dressed in colourful cloth headbands and skirts gather on a gravel pitch for a game of football.

The all-female squads of Huc Dong commune, a mountainous village only 40 kilometres from the Chinese border, have little time to practise and may spend months away from the sport when it's time to tend their crops.

But the commitment of the women, who hail from the San Chi ethnic minority group, has earned them respect -- plus a little money and fame -- in football-mad Vietnam.

Since they began playing in 2016, the women have featured regularly in national press and across social media. But they are far from the only success story in women's football in Vietnam, with the national side multiple South East Asian championship winners.

Trying to catch a pass from her teammate, striker May Thi Kim bumps against her competition as she aims for the goal on the community's gravel hilltop stadium overlooking the paddy and bamboo-covered valley.

Her team from Mo Tuc village is facing off against friends from neighbouring Luc Ngu in a sports event that is part of the traditional Soong Co festival on Saturday.

As the team dribbles the ball closer to the goalposts, spectators -- many of whom are their husbands, children and tourists -- cheer the women on. "I used to watch football on TV," Kim, 29, told AFP, recalling the beginnings of the team five years ago.

"I told the youth union they must let us women play."

Kim and her fellow players in Huc Dong commune-- 14 in all across two teams --

For the love of football



play in black skirts, long-sleeved blue shirts and headbands that have been part of their traditional dress for generations. "There is no difference playing football in either the traditional clothes or sportswear," Kim told AFP before the match.

That said, their skirts have been shortened, shirts loosened -- and some of the women play with colourful long football socks. Midfielder La Thi Thao, 15, says she might be more comfortable in regular shorts and T-shirt, but is happy to show off the clothing of her tiny community, which numbers just over 2,000.

It helps "people, including tourists, understand us better", she said.

All the players in Huc Dong, including Kim, make a living from hard grind on the terraced paddy fields and in the forests, where they grow cinnamon, star anise and pine trees.

Their steep climb into the tens of thousands each day as they traverse hills and navigate rocky streams.

But although strong, the women did not have the physical agility at the outset that football

demands. "When we first started, it hurt every muscle," Kim said, admitting they had very little time to train due to the combined pressures of farming and housework.

Coach May A Cang has trained them hard to improve their flexibility, asking the women to run regularly to limber up their muscles. It was tough work at first, with the women soaking their legs in warm salted water and medicinal leaves for pain relief -- but gradually their bodies adapted to the training.

While Cang has taken on a coaching role, he admits that even he was initially hesitant when his wife, a squad member, wanted to join the team.

"I thought her playing could hurt her legs and then she could not go to the field to work," he said. "But she told me she would train and would know how to play properly."

The women believe they have proved their doubters wrong -- some have even transferred their passion on to their daughters. "Even if it hurts, we are ok to take it for our love of football," Kim said.