

Will not having a wrist spinner cost the Tigers?

NABID YEASIN

There could be no argument that the first Test between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium was a dull affair. Scores of 541 for seven (declared), 648 for eight (declared) and 100 for two clearly depict how the pitch in Kandy favoured only batsmen despite having a green top in the beginning.

The result was an inevitable and unflattering one -- a draw. In fact, it was the first time that a Test ended in a draw in Sri Lanka after 28 straight results, another point highlighting the mundaneness of the Kandy Test.

Amid heavy criticism about the pitch and an uproar to levy demerit points to the ground, the second and final Test, set to be played at the same venue from tomorrow, might see a more typical Sri Lankan pitch, where batsmen get help initially before spin starts to take effect as the days pass.

If that is the case, will Bangladesh be able to yield more than a draw on a pitch consisting of something for both batters and bowlers? As history suggests, spin is Bangladesh's strongest suit in any format. And while the Tigers boast a similar arsenal to that of the hosts' in all the departments, Bangladesh's spin armoury misses one lethal weapon that

the opponents possess -- a wrist spinner.

In fact, Bangladesh have been missing this crucial member across all formats of cricket for many years. The 21-member preliminary squad that the Tigers named for the tour included four specialist spinners -- Taijul Islam, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Nayeem Hasan and Shuvagata Hom, all of whom are finger spinners.

While Bangladesh are without even the luxury of employing a different style of spinner, Sri

Lanka -- who have already played all-rounder-cum-leg-spinner Hasaranga de Silva in the first Test -- included a second wrist spinner in the squad in the form of left-arm bowler Lakshan Sandakan for the final Test.

Pacer Lahiru Kumara, who sustained a hamstring injury while fielding during the third day of the first Test, made way for Sandakan. The Lankans have, however, made another change to their squad, with all-rounder Chamika Karunaratne replacing

Dilshan Madushanka, who picked up a hamstring injury during a practise session two days prior to the opener.

Bangladesh are missing premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan but even with Shakib, the spin department has been a bit predictable and easy to deal with in the past, best evidenced by the Afghanistan Test debacle in 2019 in Chattogram and the 2-0 Test series defeat at home to an inexperienced West Indies in February this year.

There have been a number of positives from the first Test including Tamim Iqbal and Najmul Hossain's batting, Taskin Ahmed's bowling and Mominul Haque and the team management's decision to go with five bowlers in an ideal blend of three pacers and two spinners in the squad. But, although Bangladesh took the field with three pacers, their dependency on spin was still evident.

As opposed to 70 overs bowled by pacers Abu Jayed, Ebadot Hossain and Taskin, the two specialist spinners -- Taijul and Miraz -- bowled a total of 103 overs with occasional spinners Mominul and Saif Hassan bowling the rest of the six overs in the only innings that the Tigers had to bowl.

While it is true that the hot and humid Lankan conditions do not bode well for pacers to bowl longer spells, that also means overexposure to similar kinds of spin attack would only help Sri Lankan batters get into rhythm whereas the Tigers might have to adjust accordingly every time Hasaranga or Sandakan is introduced.

But with Bangladesh not having the option of a wrist spinner, the onus will be on Taijul, Miraz, Nayeem and Hom, if he is called into the squad, to come up with variations rather than just focusing on "maintaining discipline," which they always say when asked about their plans regarding bowling in a game.



"This was the first time that I was in the squad of a Test team. So it was really exciting for me. Test cricket is very interesting and I never felt I was out of the playing eleven. What I realised is that playing Test cricket is hard. It's tough for pace bowlers to operate in this kind of weather. But this is all part of the sport, we can't do anything about it."

Young pacer SHORIFUL ISLAM



Mehedi Hasan Miraz



Taijul Islam

WW survivor stalled by virus

AFP, COLOMBO

A new coronavirus wave hitting Sri Lanka has halted a cricket match between two of the country's top schools that has been played for 141 years, continuing even through world wars. The annual Royal v St Thomas's encounter, originally scheduled for next month, has been indefinitely put off after four players tested positive for Covid-19, a school organiser said. The latest edition of Sri Lanka's longest-running sporting event was to have been played over three days without spectators. "What would have been the 142nd Royal-Thomian big-match is not likely to be held this year because of the latest Covid wave," the official told AFP. Even the first and second world wars failed to halt the annual game, that is often compared to the English public school encounter between Eton and Harrow, played since 1805.

Abahani want to host Eagles in early May

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani has officially proposed the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) for the rights to host Club Eagles in AFC Cup playoff match in Dhaka between May 5 and 7 after Maldives expressed its inability to host two playoff matches among Abahani, Eagles and Bengaluru FC on May 8 and 11.

Due to the current lockdown, Abahani failed to host the Maldivian outfit on April 14 in Dhaka and their initiative to arrange that match at a neutral venue on April 21 also did not materialise due to travel restrictions.

Later the AFC asked Abahani whether they can play the match against Eagles in India as the winners of that match will face Bengaluru FC, but Abahani informed AFC about the travel restrictions and closure of Indian Embassy in Dhaka.

"AFC proposed FC Eagles to arrange those two matches in Maldives in May as the winners of three teams will join in group phase matches to be held in Maldives (from May 14-20) but the Maldives Football Association could not obtain necessary permission from its government," BFF's general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag said yesterday.

"Considering everything, Abahani has expressed their desire to host Eagles on any day between May 5 and 7," Shohag said. "If the ongoing lockdown is extended by another week, we will communicate with the ministries concerned to arrange the match and provide assistance to FC Eagles for coming to Dhaka but they must adhere to Covid-19 guidelines and spend a minimum quarantine period."

AGENCIES

Two continental giants-- Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester City, lock horns in the first leg of their semi-final at the Parc des Princes tonight.

Les Parisiens prevailed on away goals against reigning champions Bayern Munich to march to the final four, while Man City secured a 4-2 aggregate victory over Borussia Dortmund to end their recent quarter-final hoodoo.

Both sides enjoyed successful domestic results at the weekend, although City's was far more noteworthy, as they beat Tottenham Hotspur in the EFL Cup final while PSG enjoyed a 3-1 Ligue 1 win over Metz.

In spite of one of the most dazzling

HIGHLIGHT

Manchester City eliminated PSG in their only previous knockout tie in European football, progressing 3-2 on aggregate in the champions league quarterfinals in 2015-16, with Kevin De Bruyne scoring the winner in the second leg at the Etihad.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

PSG, Man City face off in first-leg showdown tonight



but fruitless performances from Neymar, PSG were unable to replicate their goal-laden display from the Allianz Arena in their second-leg meeting with Bayern, as the Brazilian and his fellow attacker Kylian Mbappe could not find a way through an inspired Lucas Hernandez and co.

But PSG's attacking prowess has been evident in recent weeks, as Pochettino's men have scored at least three goals in seven of their last nine games in all competitions, and they also appear to have ended their home rut at just the right moment before City make the short trip across the channel.

A success over two legs against City would see PSG become just the ninth team in history to reach the final in two consecutive campaigns, but with only three wins to boast from their last eight in all competitions at the Parc des Princes, Guardiola's serial winners will endeavour to make their journey to Paris a memorable one.

For all of their domestic dominance, however, City and their impassioned supporters are still pining for that first Champions League crown which they so crave, and one of their own in Phil Foden

QUOTES

"The target in the last 10 years has been to win the Champions League and the club is working really hard to try to be there and win."

MAURICIO POCCHETTO
PSG Coach

"This is the second time we have got to the semi-finals, so there is not much history for our club here, but we will start to build it."

PEP GUARDIOLA
Manchester City coach

was the hero of the hour in both legs against Dortmund with two late goals in a pair of 2-1 successes.

The Premier League champions-elect just could not break the quarter-final curse in seasons gone by, but by dumping Dortmund and Erling Braut Haaland out of the tournament, City will make an appearance in the final four for the first time since the 2015-16 tournament, where then-manager Manuel Pellegrini could not mastermind a victory over eventual winners Real Madrid.

BCCI assures safe return for IPL players

REUTERS

India's cricket board, the BCCI, on Tuesday told players it will ensure their safe return home once the ongoing Twenty20 tournament is completed, in a charm offensive as the COVID-19 pandemic grips the country, local media reported.

In a letter to players, BCCI interim CEO Hemang Amin assured players full support during and after the tournament, which is being played under biosecurity protocols and ends at the end of May.

"The BCCI will do everything to ensure that you reach your respective destinations seamlessly," Amin wrote, according to local media reports.



Jibon ready for rehab

SPORTS REPORTER

Following knee surgery in Kolkata on April 17, national football team striker Nabib Newaj Jibon is counting the days ahead of his return to Dhaka to fully start his rehabilitation process.

The Abahani striker has been in 14-day quarantine at a Benapole hotel after arriving at the Benapole port on Monday evening with special permission from the foreign affairs ministry as he feared being confined to India due to travel restrictions.

"It is a feel-good factor to return home, but I feel loneliness at the hotel like I felt in the hotel in India. I also feel some pain in my leg," Jibon told The Daily Star. "If there are no symptoms of Covid-19 in the first three days of quarantine, I will start the journey for Dhaka after getting the permission from the authorities concerned. I have been asked to follow some exercises for full rehabilitation."

Jibon was ruled out of the rest of the

season for Abahani and the national football team, but Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu believes Jibon can return to the field in the latter part of season.

"He was under a doctor's supervision for more than one week in India after successful surgery. His overall condition is good and I believe he can return to the ground and practice with the ball within two-and-a-half months. But everything depends on him of how he is doing his rehabilitation," said the former national footballer.

"We want Jibon to stay at the club like Saad Uddin did during his rehabilitation process because he will be inspired to follow every process to be cured while staying at the club and club physios will also have chances to look after Jibon," said Rupu.

Jibon, who originally suffered an injury to his right knee during a match against Nepal in November last year, played in the Federation Cup and one match of Bangladesh Premier League match before sustaining further injury in a club practice session.

In Cricket and Conversation with **RAMACHANDRA GUHA**
AUTHOR, THE COMMONWEALTH OF CRICKET
LIVE ON The Daily Star
THURSDAY APRIL 29 at 4 PM
YouTube f LIVE
MODERATOR ASRAR CHOWDHURY
Cricket Enthusiast and Columnist, The Daily Star

Notable columnist, professor and cricket enthusiast Asrar Chowdhury reviews THE COMMONWEALTH OF CRICKET on this Thursday, April 29, for Daily Star Books. On the same day, he will sit down with the historian and author Ramachandra Guha, LIVE at 4 PM, to discuss the book, the fascination with the sport in the subcontinent, and the contemporary politics of cricket.