



The Sri Lanka camp (Inset) was in a relaxed mood in training yesterday ahead of the second Test against Bangladesh which starts in Pallekele today. Following the draw in the first Test, visitors Bangladesh will look to wrap up the series with a positive result.

PHOTO: SLC

Will pitch be any different from the one used in first Test?

SPORTS REPORTER



After the Pallekele pitch offered very little help to the bowlers in the first Test which ended in a draw, hosts Sri Lanka will be looking for a different approach when they take on Bangladesh in the second and final Test at the same venue from today.

The Pallekele International Cricket Stadium pitch in which the first Test between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh was played received a below-average rating by the match referee. And the hosts will surely want to come up with a better surface and a different strategy for the second Test.

The pitch remained batting-friendly throughout the first Test,

resulting in a total of 1289 runs being scored in the match for the loss of 17 wickets at an average of 75.82 runs per wicket, and, therefore, received one demerit point under the ICC Pitch and Outfield Monitoring Process.

Sri Lanka included left-arm wrist-spinner Lakshan Sandakan and fast bowler Chamika Karunaratne for the second Test, indicating the hosts may opt for a spin strategy against the visitors after the green top at Pallekele hardly offered any assistance to the seamers in the opener.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, have retained the same 15 from the first Test squad for today's game with head coach Russell Domingo hinting that the Tigers might go with the same strategy of having five bowlers and six batsmen in the

line-up.

Pacers Taskin Ahmed and Abu Jayed are the two pacers who are expected to play the second Test. However, it is uncertain if the team management would replace Ebadot Hossain to include uncapped young left-arm seamer Shoriful Islam.

But, unlike the first Test where spinners struggled to get turn off the surface and were unable to trouble the batters, the spin duo of Taijul Islam and Mehedi Hasan Miraz will surely play a huge role in the second Test with the pitch touted to be different than the first Test.

From batting's point of view, the visitors will once again bank on the top order, especially on experienced Tamim Iqbal, who was flawless and struck fifties in

both the innings of the first Test.

According to Domingo, the team management would want to give opener Saif Hassan another chance despite the right-hander managing to score 0 and 1 in the first Test.

Batting will once again hold the key for the Tigers where the likes of Najmul Hossain Shanto, who struck his maiden Test hundred in the opener, alongside skipper Mominul Haque, who also registered his maiden ton away from home, will have to play a vital role.

Bangladesh's confident approach of fielding six batters would also mean that experienced Mushfiqur Rahim and wicket-keeper batsman Liton Das would also have a big responsibility in the middle order.

'We have to play to win and not be happy with draws'

SPORTS REPORTER



There were questions over Bangladesh's approach and attitude towards Test cricket over the years with the fear of losing always forcing the team management to go for a rather defensive mindset.

Since coming from a series of defeats in recent past, including the 2-0 whitewash to a rather inexperienced West Indies side at home earlier this year, the drawn first Test against Sri Lanka in Pallekele did come as a huge relief to the Bangladesh camp.

But according to head coach Russell Domingo, the time has come for the Bangladesh team for a mental shift. According to the South African, a win should now be the priority in order to help the side become a serious Test side.

"It is disappointing when a drawn Test is seen as a massive success. I am not here for drawn Tests. We don't want to lose

Tests but we should have a mental shift. We have to play to win, and not merely be happy with the draws. I have had six or seven Tests with the team now; I think I understand our team and culture. I know the areas we need to improve on, particularly on the mental side regarding [approaching] Tests. There's a long way to go. There's a fear of losing Tests, and that's something that we have to come away from. We have to play to win," Domingo said at a virtual pre-match press conference yesterday.

"At the moment I feel we are playing not to lose. It is a mental shift that we need to make. Until we change that mindset, we will always be okay with mediocrity. It is not something I want to be part of," the coach added.

With the second and final Test of the series against Sri Lanka set to begin today, according to Domingo, the visitors will be aiming for a series win, which will be a great achievement.

Much like in the first Test, the team management is keen to continue with five bowlers and six batters in the line-up for the second Test.

"When you have Shakib Al Hasan in the team, it allows you to play seven batters. When you don't have that all-rounder, you have to be brave and have five bowlers who can get us 20 wickets. If it was solely up to me, it would be the way to go, but there's a panel of selectors that need to be consulted with," he said.

The pitch at Pallekele offered very little assistance to the seamers in the first Test, but Domingo is still considering the same pace trio of Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain and Abu Jayed for the second Test. However, a lot will depend on how the seamers recover after bowling 70 overs in the first Test in hot and humid conditions.

The 46-year-old is also willing to give opener Saif Hassan another opportunity despite the right-hander scoring 0 and 1 in the first match.



New hope for HOCKEY LEAGUE

SPORTS REPORTER



There is a new hope regarding staging of Premier Division Hockey League as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has promised to donate Tk 1 crore to Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF).

The game's local governing body could not hold the top-flight league for nearly three years as most of the lower-table clubs showed their inability to form squads due to financial constraints, which deepened due to the pandemic.

In the last meeting of the league committee, most of the clubs sought financial help from the BHF to take part in the league. BHF president Air Chief Marshal Masihuzzaman Serniabat sought financial help from the Prime Minister to organise the league, BHF's acting general secretary Mohammad Yousuf informed yesterday.

"We are in the process of getting the promised money from the Prime Minister's Office but don't know when we will receive it," Yousuf said. "After getting the money, we will try to sit with the clubs' high-ups in presence of the BHF president because we want to hold the league this year."

The participating clubs took the news positively even though there is uncertainty among some officials.

"Actually we don't know anything about it officially. If the federation provides financial help, it becomes easy for the

small clubs to take part in the league. We also want the players to be benefited from the league but the covid-19 situation is a crucial factor at the moment," said Victoria SC's sports secretary Nuruzzaman.

Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club's hockey secretary Badrul Islam said, "I heard it unofficially. If the federation meets at least 50 percent demand of the clubs, there is no reason for us not to play the league. No doubt, the donation will brighten the chance of starting the league but there are also some issues to settle as some clubs are still closed since the casino scandal and those clubs need to get their tents open to run camp for the league."

Abahani's hockey secretary and BHF vice-president Jaki Ahmed Ripon is, however, not sure about the nature of the donation as he believes the fund the Prime Minister promised to provide is for other purposes including arrangement of international competitions such as Junior Asia Cup and Asian Champions Trophy in Dhaka.

"No discussion regarding the Tk 1 crore fund has taken place yet and the federation will decide in which sectors they will spend this fund," Ripon said, adding that Abahani is always in favour of playing.

He also added that the current situation of coronavirus is not suitable for the league to be held and that clubs like Victoria SC, Wanderers Club and Dilkusha SC need to get the tents opened to run camps.



(L-R) Pakistan pacers Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf and Shah Nawaz Dhani share some words yesterday, ahead of the first Test against Zimbabwe which starts in Harare today. The visitors will be looking to make it a clean sweep in the two-match series after winning the T20 series 2-1.

PHOTO: PCB

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE



Real Madrid striker Karim Benzema scored a spectacular volley to salvage a 1-1 draw against Chelsea in their first leg match of the Champions League semifinal in Madrid on Tuesday.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID FC

Tuchel rues missed chances

REUTERS, Madrid



Chelsea coach Thomas Tuchel said his side should have wrapped up their Champions League semi-final first leg with Real Madrid in the first half on Tuesday and rued missed chances in the 1-1 draw that could have put the game beyond their opponents.

U.S. forward Christian Pulisic fired Chelsea in front in the 14th minute in the Alfredo Di Stefano Stadium, and the visitors created plenty more opportunities in the first half as 13-times winners Real struggled to make any inroads at the other end.

Yet Chelsea's inability to score a second away goal proved costly as Karim Benzema's fine effort levelled things up before the break with his side's only shot on target in the opening period.

"I have a feeling we should have won the first half and we could have perhaps decided this game in the first half an hour when we were playing so strong," Tuchel told the BBC.

"The second half was a tactical game and you could feel we only had two days in between two away games which made it physically and mentally demanding and you could feel it in the decision making.

"We suffered a bit and an extra day would have been nice."

Having scored the away goal, Chelsea are in the driving seat to reach a first Champions League final since 2012 ahead of next week's return leg at Stamford Bridge.

"It is just the first half (of the tie), we knew against Real Madrid it would be tough," Chelsea's Cesar Azpilicueta told BT Sport.

"We started with courage, we had to perform at our best level. The semi-final of a Champions League asks you to play your best. We missed that last pass where we could choose the best option."

Zidane glad Real still alive

REUTERS, Madrid



Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane admitted he was relieved to finish Tuesday's Champions League semi-final first leg against Chelsea with his side still in the tie following a 1-1 draw after being outplayed for large parts of the game.

"I'm so happy with the players because we're still alive," Zidane told reporters.

"We struggled a bit for the first 25-30 minutes but then we improved and were much better in the second half and had control. We're happy what we did in the game overall."

Real had breezed past Liverpool and Atalanta in their last two home knockout games but were really put to the test by Chelsea's intense pressing game and Zidane credited Thomas Tuchel's side for keeping his team at bay.

"We are good at pressing teams high up the pitch but our opponents were very good, very competitive. They've had 21 games and not conceded in 16 of them (before Tuesday's game) and they proved why. They are in the semi-finals for a reason," he added.

Real keeper Thibaut Courtois, who made a vital early save to deny Chelsea forward Timo Werner, agreed that the Premier League outfit had been the more impressive side but warned that his team would put them under pressure in the second leg in London.

"They were more aggressive and more intense, we wanted to start the game like they did, they gave everything. The first goal came at a difficult time for us but we were able to lift ourselves up and the second half was less crazy," he said.

"The 1-1 score means next week's game is like a final. I don't think it will end 0-0 and if Chelsea sit and wait for us they could be making a big mistake."

"The character of the pitch hardly changed over the course of five days. There was no shift in balance between bat and ball as the game progressed. The pitch remained batting friendly throughout, resulting in a total of 1289 runs scored in the match for the loss of 17 wickets at an average of 75.82 runs per wicket, which is very high. Therefore, in keeping with the ICC guidelines I rate this pitch as below average."

Match referee Ranjan Madugalle on first Test pitch

BPL resumes at BNS on Friday

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday confirmed resumption of the Bangladesh Premier League on Friday according to its previous decision despite the extension of the ongoing lockdown by another week.

Instead of holding the matches in four venues -- Dhaka, Gazipur, Cumilla and Munsiganj, the game's local governing body decided to use only one venue, that of Bangabandhu National



Stadium in Dhaka, during the lockdown to maintain Covid-19 protocols while adhering to government restrictions.

BFF's senior vice-president Abdus Salam Mursheddy informed that they would hold two to three matches per day to complete three to four rounds before the Eid-ul-Fitr vacation. Besides, the AFC Cup fixture of Abahani has also forced them to matches more frequently.

Replying to a query, Mursheddy said, "Health is our first priority and we have made it mandatory for everyone involved with the matches to have Covid-19 tests. The teams will have to submit Covid-19 test reports 72 hours before the start of respect matches."