

Improved fitness helped Taskin all around

Pacer Taskin Ahmed's bowling was indeed a positive takeaway for Bangladesh from a rather frustrating Sri Lanka tour. The right-arm pacer was able to consistently trouble batsmen even on a flat pitch, scalping eight wickets in two Tests in difficult conditions. Bangladesh pace bowling coach Ottis Gibson talked to The Daily Star's Ekush Tapader about Taskin's improvement and the condition of the other fast bowlers in the squad.

The Daily Star (DS): What has worked behind the remarkable improvement of Taskin Ahmed during the tour of Sri Lanka?

Ottis Gibson (OG): Definitely it [Taskin's improvement] was because of his new level of fitness. Improving fitness has increased his pace and helped him get into a good rhythm. Due to this, he has also been able to work on technical aspects.

DS: Can you please elaborate the technical aspects he has worked on?

OG: We worked on his run-up for a long time. Even before the New Zealand series, he had the tendency to bowl no balls. I tried to make his run-up a bit easier. In the 70 overs (68) he bowled in the two Tests against Sri Lanka, Taskin did not overstep once. If you can incorporate a comfortable run-up in your bowling then everything else becomes easier. For this reason, his line and length were very good. Besides, he is now able to swing the ball a bit. All in all, I am very impressed with his improvement.

DS: Will he be able to perform well in all three formats? And can he play



all the formats?

OG: If he can hold onto this rhythm, he will be able to perform his best in all formats. However, it is difficult to say what will happen to the bowler if he plays in all three formats continuously. We need to manage this carefully.

DS: How do you assess the performance of other pacers?

OG: The Lankan condition was very difficult for pacers of both sides. We batted for a long time in the first Test and so did they. Especially, in such conditions in

the subcontinent, it is hard to pin the blame on pacers. I think Taskin was the best among pacers of both sides. Only he was able to trouble the batsmen consistently.

DS: Ebadot Hossain was seen bowling at a high speed. He even clocked at 147 kmph, but what is the reason he did not have much success?

OG: Ebadot is perhaps the fastest bowler in the team. But unlike Taskin, he was unable to pitch the ball at good lengths. Alongside the pace, if he can control the ball better and swing the ball, then he

can be a great bowler.

DS: Your assessment of Shoriful Islam?

OG: I am very optimistic about Shoriful and also inspired by his performance. He was called into the squad for the first time during the New Zealand tour and has already played a Test. He is a great talent and could be a star in the making. He will improve with time. He has pace, aggression and also has the natural benefit of being a left-hander.

DS: Mustafizur Rahman was not considered for the Sri Lanka Tests. What are his chances in Tests?

OG: Mustafizur played against West Indies [in Tests]. We worked on his ability to bring the ball into the right-handers. And we were successful too. However, in Tests, there are 90 overs a day. And we need to take that into consideration. We have Taskin, Mustafizur, [Abu Jayed] Rahi, Ebadot and Hasan Mahmud. So we have 4/5 bowlers for Tests. It will be great when Mustafizur will improve further and be fit to play Test in all respects because he already is an amazing pacer.



(L-R) Bangladesh ODI team's players – Mohammad Saifuddin, Mahedi Hasan and Mohammad Al Amin – leave the field following a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

SL to arrive on May 16

SPORTS REPORTER



The Sri Lankan team will arrive in Bangladesh on May 16 to take part in a three-match ODI series, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) revealed as they announced the schedule for the upcoming home series yesterday.

The visitors will quarantine in their rooms for three days before the start of training sessions from May 19 at the BCB Academy ground in Mirpur. The Sri Lankan team will take part in a practice game on May 21 at the BKSP before facing Bangladesh in the first ODI on May 23. The second and third games are scheduled for May 25 and 28 respectively, with all matches being held at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Bangladesh's selectors have already announced a 23-members preliminary squad, which has started training at the home of cricket in Mirpur.

The Tigers will be hosting their second international home series since the pandemic after playing hosts to the West Indies earlier this year during two-match Test and three-match ODI series.

Meanwhile, with many foreign players having already left India following the Indian Premier League's suspension on

Tuesday, the question among Bangladesh fans was when Mustafizur Rahman and Shakib Al Hasan would return.

Both cricketers were included in the 23-member preliminary squad and will likely return to the country on the same flight, with their respective franchises Rajasthan Royals and Kolkata Knight Riders expected to share the cost of chartered flights.

While international flights resumed in Bangladesh on May 1, no passengers are

SRI LANKA TEAM'S BANGLADESH TOUR

Arrival – 16 May
One-day practice match at BKSP – 21 May
1st ODI at SBNSC – 23 May (D/N)
2nd ODI at SBNSC – 25 May (D/N)
3rd ODI at SBNSC – 28 May (D/N)
Departure – 29 May

allowed to fly in from India due to the escalation of the Covid-19 situation in the neighbouring country. However, a special charter flight may be arranged for Shakib and Fizz after getting special approval from relevant authorities.

"We're hopeful that Shakib and Mustafizur will be back in the country tomorrow or the day after tomorrow," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mohammedan break Saif SC jinx

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammedan finally broke Saif SC's resistance after three years as the Black and Whites came out with a 2-1 win in their Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The struggling giants had failed to overcome the hurdle posed by new sensations Saif SC for nearly three-and-a-half years after defeating them 3-0 on their first meeting in Saif SC's debut season in 2017. Since then, they have met six times in the league and Federation Cup but Mohammedan lost thrice and drew thrice.

The triumph also helped Mohammedan leapfrog Saif SC into fifth position in the 13-team table as well as avenge their 1-2 defeat to Saif SC in the reverse matchday. With a seventh victory, Mohammedan also raised their point tally to 27, two behind archrivals Abahani and 13 less than leaders Bashundhara Kings.

Although Mohammedan have been playing without head coach Sean Lane, the Black and Whites looked rejuvenated under the guidance of assistant coach Alfaz Ahmed. They kept their attacking attitude intact throughout the match against Saif, who launched the first attack before Nigerian Kenneth Ngwoke saw his shot hit the side netting in 20th minute.

Mohammedan also squandered an easy opportunity when Jafar Iqbal whipped a nice cross in to an unmarked Rakib Khan Evan, who was too late too in connecting with the ball with just the keeper to beat in the 25th minute before Ngwoke again drove miles off target 11 minutes later.

After resumption, Mohammedan kept pressing for the lead but were denied by woodwork three minutes into the

second half. Souleymane Diabate headed a Habibur Rahman cross onto the near post before new-singing Cameroonian Yassan Ouatching gave Mohammedan a deserved lead in the 52nd minute. The tall striker made no mistake tapping home after Diabate's header ricocheted off the crossbar.

Diabate then got an opportunity to double the lead but the Malian striker drove straight to goalkeeper Pappu Hossain in the 56th minute before Ngwoke was denied by Mohammedan goalkeeper Hossain Suzan two minutes later.

Saif SC finally hit back to level the margin in the 68th minute when John Okoli ran down the left, entered the box and cut back for substitute Maraz Hossain, who drove past goalkeeper Suzan.

However, Mohammedan restored their lead seven minutes from time and left the field with a seventh triumph after Diabate availed a through-pass from Jafar Iqbal, rounded defender Emanuel Ariwachukwu and fired home from inside the box.

In the day's second match between, a second-half strike from captain Charles Didier steered Ctg Abahani to a 1-0 win over strugglers Arambagh.

Following a barren first half, the game burst into life late in the second half after captain Didier found the back of the net with a brilliant free-kick in the 78th minute. Ctg Abahani were then awarded a penalty after defender Shahad Mia handled a chip from Nasirul Islam, but Didier squandered that chance before Shakhawat Hossain Rony was denied by woodwork two minutes from the final whistle.

The sixth triumph meant Ctg Abahani remain seventh with 22 points from 14 games while Arambagh suffered 13 defeats in 14 matches and have only one point.



Mohammedan players celebrate one of their two goals in a 2-1 win over Saif SC at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



PHOTO: REUTERS

Manchester City midfielder Riyad Mahrez celebrates one of his two goals against Paris Saint-Germain in their Champions League semifinal second leg in Manchester on Tuesday. (Inset) PSG's Marco Verratti remonstrates with the referee while (bottom) Neymar cuts a forlorn figure during the game.

Guardiola's City finally crack the CL code

REUTERS, Manchester



Manchester City finally cracked the Champions League code with an impressive 2-0 win over Paris Saint Germain on Tuesday, the 4-1 aggregate triumph earning them a first ever spot in the final of Europe's elite club competition.

After stumbling in the latter stages of the Champions League in his four previous campaigns with the club, Guardiola dropped his usual focus on the tasks ahead to reflect on banishing the one major question mark over his stewardship of the club.

"To reach the final of this competition is so difficult," he told reporters.

"It is the toughest one, the quality of the opponent and the composure you have to have to suffer the toughest moments."

Those moments had proved too tough for City in each of the past four seasons.

Last season's 3-1 quarterfinal loss to a very beatable Olympique Lyonnais followed defeats to Tottenham, Liverpool and Monaco in the Champions League knockout stages.

"It remained in my head for weeks and it was painful, I cannot deny," Guardiola said recently.

Many had wondered whether the Spaniard's obsession with the competition had led him to overthink games or transmitted

nerves to his players, but this season was different.

City have not sneaked into the final or battled through against the odds, they have marched to Istanbul by winning every knockout game -- home and away.

Indeed, they are unbeaten throughout their entire Champions League campaign this season, winning 11 games and



drawing just once.

Throughout the Guardiola years, City have produced some glorious attacking football but also, especially in Europe, some shaky defensive displays.

This year, though, they have combined the flair in the final third with a rock solid defence that has conceded just four goals in the Champions League so far.

The addition of Ruben Dias, the Portugal central defender signed from Benfica, has proven to be a masterstroke. The arrival of the 23-year-old has transformed City in the same way that Virgil van Dijk gave Liverpool the solidity

they were lacking before their Champions League triumph two years ago.

Teenager Phil Foden, cautiously introduced into the side by Guardiola, has come of age during this campaign, effectively replacing Raheem Sterling in the attack.

Riyad Mahrez, who scored both goals on Tuesday, has flourished, while Ilkay Gundogan has come out of his shell to become an all-round midfielder.

City's exits in Europe have all featured moments when they have let the game get away from them -- losing their cool, their shape and their focus. But this season there has been a solidity and maturity that is so vital at the highest level and both in Paris and at home, City were firmly in control.

"In big occasions there are going to be nerves. We have to control that. You put the pressure on yourself," said right-back Kyle Walker, reflecting on the earlier exits. "You go back to Anfield and throwing it away in the first leg. The second year we are at Tottenham and lost in the first leg before chasing it here."

"Last year, it was different, over one leg - a proper cup game. To finally get the victory over there and then come here and win is full credit to this squad."

Chelsea or Real Madrid await but whether it is an all-English final or a clash with the 13-times winners, City will start as favourites -- and justifiably so.



Kuipers swore at PSG players?

REUTERS

Paris St Germain's Leandro Paredes was verbally abused by Dutch referee Bjorn Kuipers during Tuesday's Champions League semifinal second leg loss to Manchester City, his teammate Ander Herrera has claimed.

City reached the final of Europe's elite club competition for the first time thanks to a 2-0 victory at the Etihad Stadium to secure a 4-1 aggregate win.

French champions PSG were left angered by the referee, who sent off PSG's Angel Di Maria in the 69th minute for an off-the-ball stamp on Ferdinandinho.

"We talk about respect towards referees," midfielder Herrera told French multimedia outlet RMC Sport, while revealing that the official had sworn at Paredes. "If we say that, we get a three or four-match ban."

Herrera's teammate Marco Verratti said in his post-match interview that he too was abused by the official.

PSG manager Mauricio Pochettino told reporters he believed his players and that European soccer's governing body UEFA could investigate the incident.

"I didn't hear anything from the touchline, if something is there and is how they explained, maybe UEFA will investigate the situation," Pochettino said.

"But now that's not an excuse I can put in front of you... the most important thing is we're not in the final and that's why we feel really sad."