

Evergreen Taylor to bat on

AFP, Wellington

Veteran New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor ruled out retirement Friday following the Black Caps' victory over India in the inaugural World Test Championship, saying he could still contribute to the team.

The 37-year-old hit the winning runs in New Zealand's triumph, easing the pain of defeats in the past two one-day World Cup deciders.

Taylor, who has played a key part in developing the Black Caps from also-rans into a genuine cricketing force, acknowledged his advancing years but said he had no immediate plans to quit.

"I'm just looking forward to going home and seeing the family," he told Newstalk ZB.

"Obviously I'm coming towards the end of my



career but you don't want to make decisions based on emotion and things like that.

"Hopefully I've still got a few games left in me for New Zealand."

Taylor has previously not ruled out staying on until the 2023 one-day World Cup in the hope of completing unfinished business from 2015 and 2019.

He is New Zealand's leading run-scorer in Tests and one-dayers, demonstrating his worth with vital contributions in the win over India and the Test series victory over England that preceded it.



Sohan's time to break through

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI AND SABBIR HOSSAIN



Nurul Hasan Sohan's form this season in the Bangabandhu Premier Division League saw him earn a well-deserved call-up for the national team in all three formats for their upcoming tour of Zimbabwe, but given the lack of faith from the selectors in the past, question remains whether Sohan's present form can make a difference this time.

His form with the bat, shaping into a natural rearguard mould, has been synonymous to Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi's ability to seize match control late and reach big scores while facing sub-par bowlers. It was done with consistency too, and would be an asset for the national side looking for someone at number seven to demolish the bowlers in the death overs and

that regard the mentality matters.

His mentality has that keen brand of aggression that can often be promiscuous but it was the consistency of that brand in the ongoing DPL that has seen him back in focus. According to Sohan, it comes from a seminal tendency to take up challenges.

Having been overlooked in the past, does it put more pressure on him to perform? "Pressure is always there, but as a professional player you have to welcome it. I feel that I always like to take up challenges. It's not like if you take up challenges, it will end in success. It can also end in failure but I feel that I am never afraid to take a challenge and instead quite keen for a challenge. More than pressure, it's a big opportunity for me since in four-five years I am yet to become a national team regular, either due to team combination or other factors," he told The Daily Star.

Sohan brought in innovative strokeplay, for instance in the match against Mohammedan, hitting 66 off 34 facing Taskin Ahmed and Abu Jayed. He showed the ability to get on top of deliveries and also get under them when required to get the optimum connection this season -- a power-hitting force, with a strong forearm presence in shot-making. He had to hone that ability and work with local coach Mizanur Rahman Babul saw him get into better stances while playing his shots after the disappointments of the second Test in West Indies where he departed to first-ball duck in both innings. The intent was based on natural aggression too.

"After the last time I played in the national team, I worked with Babul sir especially on my batting. I worked on the weak points and am doing that even now and hopefully it will help me since I was very comfortable working

with him," Sohan said.

Already known for his wicket-keeping skills, Sohan's task of becoming a national team regular is more difficult than anyone else's due to the presence of more established batsmen like Liton Das and Mushfiqur Rahim behind the wicket with Mohammad Mithun also able to fill the role behind the stumps.

"I want to contribute to team's winning cause according to the situation of the match. 10-15 runs can sometimes be crucial so instead of scores match scenarios are important to me. There is a lot to learn," he said.

His lower-order batting can help his case but given the selectors' impatience, it remains to be seen whether he would be given enough time now to gain vital experience in case he does not turn up with the bat and make an argument for the pipeline that BCB claims to have.

Title-decider in Mirpur today

SPORTS REPORTER



The last super league game between Prime Bank Cricket Club and Abahani Limited today proved to be the title-deciding encounter in the Dhaka Premier League T20 competition as both teams have equal 22 points from 15 matches so far.

Both teams had the opportunity to take one step forward towards the title but lost their crucial encounters in the previous round against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club and Prime Doleswar Sporting Club respectively on Thursday.

That makes this season's DPL title decider going down to the wire. The high-voltage match will begin at a revised time from 2:00pm instead of 9:00am at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The other super league game between Mohammedan Sporting Club and Prime Doleswar will begin at 9:30am while the schedule for the Gazi Group versus Sheikh Jamal match will remain unchanged and will start at 6.30pm in Mirpur.

Prime Bank had more chances to confirm their maiden title but Anamul Haque's side went on to lose two out of five super league games kept, extending their wait for the title till the final game.

Abahani, on the other hand, lost only one game in their previous encounter against Sheikh Jamal, courtesy of Mohammad Ashraful's blistering unbeaten 72 which helped them chase down a challenging target of 174 runs.

Abahani, however, will be delighted with the way Liton Das returned to form and scored 70 in the previous game. Opener Naim Sheikh is also in fine touch, but the likes of Najmul Hossain, Afif Hossain and Mosaddek Hossain will have to step up in the absence of regular skipper Mushfiqur Rahim, who was ruled out of the super league stage with a finger injury.

Prime Doleswar, who are just one point behind Abahani and Prime Bank with 21 points from 15 games, will look to confirm second place when they take on Mohammedan, yet to win a game in the super league phase. The night game between Gazi Group and Sheikh Jamal will be a battle for pride as both teams are already out of title race.



Mosaddek Hossain



Anamul Haque



All roads lead to Wimbledon for Federer

REUTERS, London

For Roger Federer, Wimbledon 2021 will not only be the last Grand Slam he contests before celebrating the "big four-oh" but also a chance to put behind him the memory of his 2019 heartbreak at the grasscourt major.

The Swiss has held aloft the gilded Challenge Cup a record eight times. But equally memorably, he lost a chance to win a ninth title in 2019 when he astonishingly failed to convert two championship points against Novak Djokovic.

That near-miss prevented him from winning a record-extending 21st Grand Slam title, and since then a combination of injuries and the COVID-19 pandemic have conspired to curtail his on-court action.

When Wimbledon's favourite son walks out on the manicured lawns next week, he will be hoping his surgically repaired knees can deal with the rigours of winning seven best-of-five-set matches.

Exactly how Federer, who turns 40 in August, will be able to cope with such

demands on his body is something that even he does not know because since that fifth-set tiebreak loss to Djokovic in July 2019, he has played only 34 matches, including just eight since February 2020.

Before injuries started disrupting his career from 2016, Federer regularly contested more than 70 matches a year.

"It's a huge challenge for me. Everybody who has multiple surgeries or a tough surgery knows what I'm talking about," said Federer, who had left knee surgery in 2016 on a torn meniscus before going under the knife twice in 2020 on his right knee.

"Things don't come easy. You second-guess yourself... and that's sometimes the biggest worry: the worry of pain or the worry of how you're going to feel the next day or when you wake up.

"All this stuff, it takes a little bit of a toll on you sometimes."

His lack of match-fitness will be severely tested not only by the Djokovic of this world -- who incidentally will be eager to flatten anyone who tries to stop him from joining Federer and Rafael Nadal on 20

majors -- but also by an army of younger and fitter players.

The likes of 20-somethings Stefanos Tsitsipas and Alexander Zverev no longer fear facing Federer and have beaten the Swiss great on multiple occasions.

Federer has made no secret that at this stage of his career, anything he does or does not do on a tennis court is done with the sole purpose of making sure he is in the best shape possible to make another title run at Wimbledon.

With that in mind, he quit the French Open after winning his third-round match. It was a move that annoyed many critics who felt that if anyone else had pulled out to protect their body, they would have been crucified for using another Grand Slam tournament as a dress rehearsal. Others rushed to defend the world number eight.

"Roger has earned the right to do anything he wants in tennis right now," American great Chris Evert said.

"Wimbledon is his dream, that's the golden tournament for him. He should be excused for any withdrawal he has."

Defending champion pulls out

AFP, London

Simona Halep said she was "really down and upset" at not being able to defend her ladies singles title at Wimbledon due to a calf injury.

The 29-year-old Romanian had been battling to be fit since withdrawing from her second round match at the Italian Open in mid-May.

"It is with great sadness that I'm announcing my withdrawal from The Championships as my calf injury has not fully recovered," she said.

Halep's withdrawal came minutes before the draw for the championships which get underway on Monday.

Halep secured her second Grand Slam singles crown beating Serena Williams in 2019 -- due to the coronavirus pandemic the Grand Slam event was cancelled last year.

She joins four-time Grand Slam

champion Naomi Osaka in withdrawing.

With doubts also over the fitness of world number one Ashleigh Barty, the cards could be falling right for 39-year-old Williams as she seeks a record-equalling 24th singles Grand Slam title.

Halep said missing the French Open and now Wimbledon had been trying for her mentally.

"I gave it everything I had in order to be ready to play Wimbledon and after having such special memories from two years ago, I was excited and honoured to step back on these beautiful courts as defending champion," she said. "Unfortunately, my body didn't cooperate and

I'll have to save that feeling for next year.

"I can honestly say that I'm really down and upset about having to take this decision.

"This period has been difficult but to miss the last two majors has made it even more challenging mentally and physically."



Multan Sultans players celebrate with the Pakistan Super League trophy after beating Peshawar Zalmi by 47 runs in the final in Abu Dhabi on Friday night. Half-centuries from Sohaib Maqsood and Rilee Rossouw, coupled with Imran Tahir's three-wicket haul helped them defend 206 in style. It was the first PSL title for Sultans while For Zalmi, it was the third time in the last four seasons that they faltered in the final. Maqsood was adjudged as both player of the final and player of the tournament.