



Challenges aplenty for Tigers ahead of ODI series

SPORTS REPORTER

A few aspects of Bangladesh's cricket will be put to test when they begin the important three-match ODI series against Zimbabwe, part of the ICC ODI Super League, today at the Harare Sports Club Ground.

Coming fresh from their commanding 220-run victory in the one-off Test, Bangladesh will hope to carry the momentum to the limited-overs format and bag maximum number of points from the available 30 in this series. In fact, the Tigers, who sit second in the Super League points table with 50 points from five wins in nine games, should target all 30 points from this away series given their tough challenges ahead.

Out of their 15 remaining Super League matches, Bangladesh are scheduled to play three matches against World Champions England at home this year and three against South Africa away next year as part of their Super League commitments.

Hence, with Bangladesh having to fight against the odds to even rescue a few points from these 60 points against England and South Africa, the Tigers would certainly need to ensure maximum points against weaker opponents like Zimbabwe, even while playing

BANGLADESH V ZIMBABWE IN ODIS

Overall against Zimbabwe				
Match	Win	Lose	Tie/NR	
75	47	28	0	
Head-to-head (in Zimbabwe)				
Match	Win	Lose	Tie/NR	
28	13	15	0	

away from home. Moreover, Bangladesh, by having lost their final ODI against Sri Lanka at home earlier this year in May, only made their pathway to the 2023 World Cup even more challenging.

With the importance of this series being stated, it is to be seen how Bangladesh take on this challenge with the current injury concerns in the side and without their key player Mushfiqur Rahim, who is missing the remainder of the series as he left for Dhaka on Wednesday due to a family crisis.

In a latest blow to the squad, ace left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman's chances of starting in today's game was rendered 'fifty-fifty' by skipper Tamim Iqbal yesterday after the pacer sprained his right ankle during Tigers' only warm-up game on Wednesday.

Even Tamim, who missed the one-off Test against Zimbabwe due to a knee injury, will be playing in today's game, and probably the rest of the matches in the tour, by managing his knee pain.

"It [Tamim's knee injury] will take time to recover. It's not something that will recover after five or six days of rest. Now, what we are trying is to manage the pain and play. I think I can play this series by managing the injury," said Tamim during the pre-match press conference yesterday.

While Bangladesh might face difficulty in finding the right team balance owing to the injury concerns and unavailability of key players like Mushfiqur, the fact that the Tigers have last won an ODI series away to Zimbabwe as far back in 2009 will probably contribute to additional pressure on the visitors.

Lastly, despite a resounding victory in the one-off Test in Harare, the outcome of that game was largely overshadowed by Mahmudullah Riyad's retirement issue. And even though Tamim mentioned that the Tigers have moved past the issue, it is also to be seen if they can keep aside the off-field issues and perform during an all-important ODI series starting today.

'We don't know who we are playing against'

ASHFAQ UL MUSHFIQ



Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal expressed consternation regarding the delay in the announcement of Zimbabwe's squad ahead of the three-match ODI series during an online press conference on the eve of the

first ODI yesterday.

"We don't know who we're playing against! Less than 24 hours to go until first ball and we haven't heard about their team," Tamim said when asked about preparations. "It feels a little different to me because we don't even have 24 hours till the match. Usually, we do team meetings at this time but if you don't know the opposition, I don't understand how you would pick a squad. This is quite surprising."

When asked about Liton Das sitting out the tour, Tamim responded: "I have got nothing to say about their participation. All I know is that if any player has to play, he has to quarantine for 10 days in the hotel we're in. I think the ones in charge of maintaining the Covid-19 protocol can explain better."

When asked about Liton Das playing at number four during the practice match, Tamim said: "The batting order is something that is done according to what suits the team best. About Liton, you will when the match starts tomorrow [Friday] morning."

Tamim will rejoin Bangladesh for today's game after missing the one-off Test against Zimbabwe due to a knee injury but said a decision on the participation of Mustafizur was yet to be made.

"It's at a stage where it will take some time to recover. This isn't



something that will be healed by taking rest for five to six days. The physio has outlined a plan and we are trying to manage that and play as much as possible while avoiding injury. I hope to finish the series then take the next decision. Mustafizur is also being looked at by the physio. I'll say the chance of his participation for tomorrow's [Friday] match is 50-50. We'll understand better later today [Thursday]."

With Super League points at stake, the captain is planning to pick the best squad for all three matches instead of tinkering. "I don't think it's important to do something big here because when you're playing the Super League each match has its own significance. We will try to pick our best team whenever we are playing."

Despite the absence of Mushfiqur Rahim and Tamim and Mustafiz being hampered by niggles, the left-hander was confident his squad had enough to fill the void.

"We have to respect Mushfiqur's situation.

Sometimes things are beyond our control. But we have 16 players in the squad so that if someone misses out, we can pick the best possible replacement. Those who are in the squad have more or less good cricketing experience." The skipper also opined that conditions would play a big factor in the match.

"From my experience, the 9:30 am start will offer something to bowlers, especially in the first hour. The challenge for us if we bat first is to be a bit careful, especially for the first hour. If we bowl first, we have to make sure we utilise that hour."



Vali Jonov Otabek

Sheikh Jamal's win intensifies BPL's runners-up race

SPORTS REPORTER

Three-time league champions Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club returned to winning ways in the Bangladesh Premier League with a hard-fought 2-1 win over a strong Saif Sporting Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

With Bashundhara Kings on course to convincingly clinch the title, the race for runners-up had remained wide open and thus the tie was crucial for both teams. In the end, it was Sheikh Jamal who came out victorious, courtesy of strikes from its two foreign recruits - Pa Omar Jobe and Vali Jonov Otabek; and in the process, consolidated their position after the disappointing 1-3 defeat to struggling Arambagh KS in their previous encounter.

After a series of chances for both outfits, Sheikh Jamal finally broke the deadlock from a counter attack during the extra time of first half. Gambian Sulayman Sillah brilliantly released a decisive through-pass for Jobe who smoothly finished the move by sending the ball to the left-hand side of Saif's keeper Shanto.

In the second half, Saif SC managed to level the margin with Nigerian Kenneth Ngwoke converting a spot-kick in the 54th minute before Otabek struck the winner from a free-kick on the edge of the box in the 76th minute.

Sheikh Jamal's 10th victory in 16 matches raised their points tally to 35, one less than second-placed Dhaka Abahani and 14 short of leaders Kings, and with a game in hand in their favour, whereas Saif SC remained glued to the seventh position with 26 points from 17 matches.



Nobel laureate Yunus to receive Olympic Laurel

AFP, Tokyo

Bangladeshi Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus will receive the Olympic Laurel at the Tokyo Games, the second time the trophy has been awarded, the IOC said Thursday.

Yunus, whose pioneering micro-lender has been hailed for cutting poverty across the globe, will be honoured for "his extensive work in sport for development", the International Olympic Committee said in a statement.

The 81-year-old economist turned globe-trotting celebrity speaker won the Nobel in 2006. He will be given the award at the Tokyo 2020 opening ceremony on July 23.

The Olympic Laurel was created five years ago to recognise endeavours in culture, education, peace and development through sport, according to the IOC. It was given for the first time at the 2016 Rio Games to Kenyan former Olympian Kip Keino, who opened a children's home, a school and an athletes' training centre in his home country.

Yunus founded the Grameen Bank in the 1980s and shared the Nobel Prize with the micro-lender. His initiatives include the Yunus Sports Hub, a network of social enterprises that promote development through sports.

REFUGEE ATHLETES torch of inspiration at Olympics

AGENCIES

Afghan refugee Masomah Ali Zada hopes to be a beacon of inspiration for 82 million refugees all around the globe and especially for oppressed women, who were forced to flee their homes either inside their countries or as refugees or abandon their sporting dreams, when she crosses the start line at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics for the Olympic Refugee Team.

Zada sees herself as a representative of women living in repressive societies, and of sportswomen who wear a headscarf. But she takes up the burden voluntarily -- and with pride. "I am going to represent humanity," Ali Zada told AFP.

The 24-year-old road cyclist had stones thrown at her and was physically attacked in her homeland for daring to don sportswear and ride a bicycle in public.

"It's not just for me. It's rather for all the women in



Afghanistan and all women in every country like Afghanistan who don't have the right to do cycling," she said, as the Taliban hardliners sweep across the country again.

Ali Zada will take on 25 other competitors in the Olympic women's road time trial and when she sets off on July 28 on the 22.1-kilometre course, it will be the first time Ali Zada has ever raced in a time trial.

Fifty-six refugee athletes, from as far afield as Syria, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Iran, were given a solidarity scholarship by the International Olympic Committee, of which 29 were chosen to compete in Tokyo under the Olympic flag.

Among them is Anjelina Nadai Lohalith, a 26-year-old refugee from South Sudan. Currently she pounds around a running track outside Nairobi, trying to shave seconds off her time in the build-up to her appearance at the Tokyo Olympics. Her particular talent is the 1,500 metres.

There are no national emblems on her training gear - she will not be running for South Sudan, the country of her birth that she fled in 2002, nor for Kenya, the country that took her in.

Her training was thrown into chaos a year ago when the Covid-19 pandemic hit. As Kenya's government imposed restrictions, she had to leave the training centre in Ngong and head hundreds of miles northwest to her old home in Kakuma refugee camp.

"In the refugee camp, most of the time, it is challenging. It is not a good place (where) you can train," she said.

Her training took a hit but she never gave up. The pandemic "is not something that (just) happened to me only ... I never lose hope because I know there (is) something ahead of me."

Lohalith and other refugee athletes have only recently been able to return to the Tegla Loroupe Peace Foundation training centre.

