

Mushfiquur, Liton return to squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 19-member squad yesterday for the upcoming five-match T20I series against New Zealand, starting from September 1.

The wicket-keeper batsman duo -- Mushfiquur Rahim and Liton Das -- returned as predicted, while young leg-spinner Aminul Islam made the cut as well. The three aforementioned players had to miss out on Bangladesh's recently-completed historic 4-1 series win against Australia for having opted to exit the bio-bubble for personal reasons, following the Zimbabwe tour.

The only player dropped from the previous T20 squad is Mohammad Mithun, who was one of the players from the 'Tigers' ODI squad for the Zimbabwe tour that the BCB had asked to stay back for the T20Is against the Aussies in order to fill in for the missing players.

The inclusion of technically gifted,

experienced right-handed batsmen like Mushfiquur and Liton is most likely to strengthen the batting line-up, given that the top-order, especially the openers Soumya Sarkar and Naim Sheikh, were found wanting against the Aussies and that the batting order is lop-sided by left-handers as well.

As far as Aminul is concerned, having a diverse option of a leggy in the bowling unit could prove to be a vital component behind Bangladesh's success in the upcoming ICC T20 World Cup later this year.

SQUAD

Mahmudullah (Captain), Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiquur Rahim, Soumya Sarkar, Liton Das, Mosaddek Hossain, Afif Hossain, Naim Sheikh, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Shamim Hossain, Rubel Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed, Mohammad Saifuddin, Shoriful Islam, Tajjul Islam, Mahedi Hasan, Aminul Islam Biplob, Nasum Ahmed.

NABID YEASIN



What is more important: a false sense of achievement or a harsh realisation that will eventually make you stronger? As Bangladesh prepare to host a second-string New Zealand side for a five-match T20I series starting from September 1, that question is the most pertinent one for the team's think-tank.

None of the 16 members of the Kiwis' side for the tour will be included in their squad for the upcoming T20I World Cup, which makes it clear that the Kiwis do not consider this tour ideal preparation for the showpiece event just over a month away. However, the New Zealand squad still have a number of talented players within their ranks.

For instance, touring for the Kiwis is Finn Allen, who emerged as the breakout star in the latest edition of Super Smash, New Zealand's premier T20 league. He plundered 512 runs in 11 innings at a stellar strike rate of 193.93 and smashed 25 sixes, the most in the Super League, in February this year. The attacking opener also has experience against the Tigers, with all three of his T20I caps coming against Bangladesh during the Tigers' tour of New Zealand earlier this year and his T20I-best score of 71 being recorded in the third T20I.

Aside from Allen, the team include the likes of Tom Latham, who will be leading them on this tour, Colin de Grandhomme, Hamish Bennett and Henry Nicholls -- all of whom have their fair share of experience at the international level and in franchise T20 leagues around the globe.

But will these players be able to give the Tigers a real challenge and help them prepare for what is waiting for them in the T20 World

Desperation to win setting Tigers up for failure?



Black Caps coach Glenn Pocknall (L) chats with pacer Hamish Bennett during a training session ahead of their five-match T20I series against Bangladesh.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Cup in the UAE and Oman in October-November this year?

The truth is that even if the likes of Kane Williamson, Trent Boult, Kyle Jamieson and Lockie Ferguson toured, Bangladesh would still be the favourites for the upcoming series if they decided to opt for yet another slow, low and gripping Mirpur pitch similar to the surfaces during a historic first-ever bilateral series triumph against the Aussies earlier this month.

Winning ought to boost confidence, but at times winning in favourable conditions only can severely add to a false sense of achievement. That can be far more detrimental to a team than a few losses in challenging conditions, which could actually help a team grow and adapt accordingly.

The trend for Bangladesh over the past five years goes to show just how a false sense of achievement has impacted the Tigers' performance.

In that period, Bangladesh won 25 of the 40 games played across formats at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, which typically behaved more or less the way it did during the recent tour of Australia. A winning rate of 62.5 per cent should have seen Bangladesh make massive strides in the game, at least going by the logic that counts winning as the only measure of success.

However, while Bangladesh kept bolstering their confidence in Mirpur, the Tigers saw the other side of the coin when playing overseas over the same period, losing 48 of 67 games played across formats

with a winning rate of just 23.88 per cent.

After hammering Australia 4-1 in their last T20I series, Bangladesh are now in high spirits and looking to put up another dominant showing against the Kiwis in the coming month.

But if the team management decides to employ the same tactic against the Kiwis as they did against Australia, it would probably only serve to improve their winning rate on a favourable Mirpur pitch. That would also mean that the quality of cricket during the New Zealand series will also be far from what is required for an ideal preparation ahead of an event as big as a T20 World Cup.

It is true that teams need to utilise home conditions to make the most of them. And like every other home series, the Bangladesh team management must opt to use the home conditions to assist their

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cause this time around as well. Only this time, the difference should be that they prepare a true cricketing wicket that will genuinely challenge the Tigers' abilities.

That may see them lose a few T20Is, but will certainly help the players recognise their shortcomings and rectify them before the T20I World Cup, which, in fact, is the true purpose of this series.

Saif and Police earn victories

SPORTS REPORTER

Saif Sporting Club notched up a 3-1 win over Uttar Baridhara Club, courtesy of a brace from Nigerian John Okoli, in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The day's other match witnessed a stoppage-time strike from Mohammad Jewel which guided Bangladesh Police to a single-goal win over Arambagh KS, who have been relegated already, at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur.

However, both winning sides stayed in their previous positions of the 13-team table of BPL, with Saif SC in the sixth position with 38 points from 21 matches while eighth-placed Police raised their tally to 25 points from 22 outings.

Robson proving to be the difference-maker

SPORTS REPORTER



When Bashundhara Kings roped in Brazil's Robson Da Silva, popularly known as Robinho, on loan from top-tier Fluminense FC, the Bangladesh Premier League champions had his marauding runs down the left flank in mind and hopes their Argentine talisman Hernan Barcos could capitalise on Robson's flawless crosses and decisive passes in the AFC Cup.

However, Barcos left Bashundhara Kings after the expiration of his contract, having played only one match in the abandoned 2020 AFC Cup. He made an undeniable statement in that game, the former Argentine international netting four times in an overwhelming 5-1 win over TC Sports Club in Dhaka.

And while Robson was denied the opportunity to pair up with Barcos in the AFC Cup or domestic competitions, he found a partner in another Argentine, Raul Becerra, and has become the most lethal striker in the league with 19 goals from 20 matches.



The 26-year-old also effectively translated his rich scoring form to the AFC Cup to give Bashundhara Kings a winning start and prove that he was as important as Barcos had proved in the 2020 campaign.

Robson also has a splendid ability with the ball at his feet and he has easily danced past three or four players many times in domestic matches before finding the back of the opponent net or feeding the ball to others. He is undeniably dangerous in the opposition's box, but the top-left

corner of the box seems to be his favourite striking position, as a number of his 19 goals came from that spot during league matches.

So when the Brazilian received the ball in his favourite position in the 10th minute against Maziya S&RC in an AFC Cup match on Wednesday, the Kings held their breath in anticipation. But frustratingly, Robson drove straight into the hands of the Maziya goalkeeper at the near post as he attempted his trademark curler into the top right corner.

Having survived the initial pressure from Maziya S&RC, Robson grew into the game and began to penetrate, but it was not until the 39th minute that he truly made amends, striking a stunning goal from a bullet-like drive that blazed in at the near post with the goalkeeper motionless.

Despite being the hero of the match, Robson was polite in giving credit to his teammates and management.

"Since I've been with Bashundhara, my confidence has increased. I feel the support of the staff and my teammates as well as the management. I know I need to be one of the players pushing and making plays that make the difference," Robson was quoted as saying on the Asian Football Confederation website after the match.

"The main thing compared to our league was the intensity. It was a high-intensity game. I want to praise the team. All of them were very confident with the plan as we analysed them in detail and we knew that if we stuck to the plan, we would get some points."

Inter's turbulent summer leaves Serie A crown up for grabs

AFP, Rome

Inter Milan kick off the new Serie A season on Saturday in the midst of fan protests and money troubles that threaten to derail their title defence before it has even begun.

A dramatic summer for the champions reached its lowest ebb last week when star striker Romelu Lukaku was sold to Chelsea, a transfer that enraged not just supporters but reportedly also CEO Giuseppe Marotta and new coach Simone Inzaghi.

The Gazzetta dello Sport reported that Inter's cash-strapped Chinese owners Suning forced the sale of Belgium forward Lukaku after having already offloaded buccaneering right-back Achraf Hakimi, a key figure in their first Serie A triumph



since 2010, to Paris Saint-Germain.

The club's financial problems were clear well before the league crown was claimed, and last month previous coach Antonio Conte left Inter knowing his team could be dismantled. They are still strong in key areas and have one of Italy's Euro 2020 heroes in Nicolo Barella, but the squad has certainly been downgraded.

Lukaku has been replaced with Edin Dzeko, a capable forward familiar with Serie A, but the Bosnia striker is 35 years old and scored just seven league goals last season. Dutch defender Denzel Dumfries however is an intriguing choice for the vacant spot at right-back after his exciting displays at Euro 2020. How he and Dzeko fare will be key to Inzaghi's chances at Inter

after doing an excellent job on a small budget at Lazio.

Ready to pounce will be Juventus, who have Massimiliano Allegri back at the controls and added Euro star Manuel Locatelli to a midfield which was the Old Lady's weak point under Andrea Pirlo last season. Rumours of Cristiano Ronaldo's desire to leave Juve have not dampened enthusiasm around the team's chances as the chaos that has enveloped Inter and Allegri's return has boosted hopes in Turin of reclaiming the title from their old enemies.

Also sniffing to overtake Inter is a new cast of managers led by Jose Mourinho at Roma, who on Tuesday celebrated the arrival of Tammy Abraham from Chelsea. Mourinho was welcomed back to Italy this summer, memories of treble glory at Inter over a decade ago leaving Roma fans hoping the once Special One's star has not definitively waned.

Elsewhere Maurizio Sarri will try to bring his brand of passing football to Lazio while Luciano Spalletti has a chance to get a talent-packed Napoli back in the top four on his return to club management after two years away.

Spirited West Indies aim to seal series

AGENCIES



Less than five days after playing one of the most memorable Test matches in recent history, West Indies and Pakistan will once again take the field on Friday in the second and final game of the series.

West Indies scraped through by the barest of margins to register a thrilling one-wicket win against Pakistan in the first Test of the series as the hosts registered full 12 points on the ICC World Test Championship 2021-23 table.

Since the second Test too will be played at Sabina Park in Jamaica, both teams could opt to go with an all-pace bowling lineup after the spinners went wicketless in the first game.

West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite could look to off-spinner Roston Chase to provide some variety and bring in another fast bowler, perhaps Alzarri Joseph, to complete the pace quartet. Pakistan too might ring in a couple of changes if they too want to go with the all-pacers strategy, which would mean Yasir Shah sitting the second match out.

The bowlers might have hogged most of the limelight in the first Test, but it also highlighted how important it is for batters to grind it out in difficult conditions, especially in low-scoring encounters such as these. While several batters on both sides got off to starts, they could not convert it into big scores.



Left-arm seamer Shaheen Afridi, who picked up eight wickets in the first Test, will once again be vital for Pakistan as they look to turn the table against the West Indies in the second Test at Sabina Park, starting on Friday.

PHOTO: TWITTER