



Whether training with a football or a cricket bat, the Bangladesh cricketers seemed relaxed and jovial as they continued their preparation at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday for the five-match T20I series against New Zealand starting tomorrow.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Domingo wants ‘to continue gaining confidence’

SPORTS REPORTER



Since the upcoming bilateral five-match T20I series against New Zealand is going to be the final international assignment before the ICC World T20I, it has become crucial for Bangladesh think tank to keep an eye on the mega event when it comes to forming the squad in between the series against the Kiwis.

Following the series, skipper Mahmudullah Riyad and his troop will be playing the Round 1 qualifiers from October 17 in Oman, and given that they finish among top two of the group, will move to the Super 12 of the ICC World T20I in the Middle East.

The selectors are expected to announce the World Cup squad in the middle of the series against New Zealand, however, according to head coach Russell Domingo, it would make the players feel mentally at ease if the announcement is made before the series begins on September 1. According to the South African, it is also important to preserve the winning momentum in the upcoming series to help further elevate the team's confidence.

"I think the squad needs to be announced a day or two before the New Zealand series is completed. I think we have a pretty good idea of who will be in the squad. It would be great to announce the World Cup squad before we play the New Zealand series to put players' minds at ease. They can go out there and play without



AFIF'S INJURY NOT SERIOUS

Afif Hossain, during batting practice yesterday, hurt his right hand while facing a bouncer from Taskin Ahmed. The all-rounder was instantly attended to by physio Julian Calefatto, but it was later confirmed by the team management that the injury is not serious.

the fear of World Cup selection just around the corner. But I don't think we can do that yet.

"Winning the series is important. We are playing at home, so we want to continue gaining confidence before the World Cup," Domingo told the media yesterday.

There has been a lot of talk over the preparation of the batters ever since the 4-1

historic win over Australia where slow and low pitches could hardly help the selectors to assess the batting department keeping the World Cup in mind.

"Batting conditions have been really difficult. It would be great if we got some bigger scores, but that depends on what conditions allow you to do. I think bowling confidence and getting into a winning habit is also very important, so we must make sure we continue to do that," the coach added.

However, the 47-year-old is expecting better surfaces against New Zealand in Mirpur this time around where 150-160 will be a good score.

Among the few spots that the Bangladesh team management will have a hard look at is the opening slot and the question was there to Domingo on Tamim Iqbal's chance to make it to the World Cup squad since the experienced left-hander has been out of the T20I format since March last year due to his knee injury.

"My focus is on the 19 players we have in the squad. Once Tamim is fit, we will cross that bridge. I haven't really thought about it too much," Domingo replied.

The return of another experienced player Mushfiqur Rahim alongside Liton Das will certainly strengthen the side in the upcoming series where Domingo also revealed that Nurul Hasan and Mushfiqur will share the wicket-keeping role for the first four games before deciding on who will be the wicket-keeper in the fifth and final game against the Black Caps.

‘HOT’ SEARS KNOWS how to stay ‘cool’

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Teams from outside the subcontinent have always faced issues touring Bangladesh, or any other neighbouring countries. Coupled with the challenge of making plans and getting used to playing a totally different type of cricket on typical slow, low and turning pitches, often the players would also have to struggle to acclimatise with the hot and humid conditions.

The Dhaka heat is also taking a toll on New Zealand players and young pacer Ben Sears said he had never experienced 'being that hot' during practice sessions.

"It is really hot. It is the first time in training that I have experienced being that hot," the 23-year-old Wellington quick said yesterday ahead of the Kiwis' five-match T20I series against Bangladesh, scheduled to begin tomorrow.

Excruciating heat in the capital made the Aussies suffer a lot during their 4-1 thumping against Bangladesh in the T20I series earlier this month. Especially the fast

bowlers, who need to preserve their energy in order to generate pace and bounce, have suffered bowling on slow Mirpur wickets amid such hot and humid conditions.

Like the Aussies, Sears also felt like he had come to a 'different world' altogether.

"It is really different. Not like home. It is eye-opening. It feels like a different world," the pacer said.

Sears, however, had found a way to stay 'cool'.

"Just getting used to that, learning how to bowl when you are feeling uncomfortable. It was interesting. But if you stay hydrated, it's cool," added Sears.

Sears, who is known for hitting speeds over 140kph, also realised that bowling quick in such conditions might not be the way to go. Even Mitchell Starc, one of the quickest bowlers around, was dropped for the final three T20Is by Australia after the left-arm pacer conceded runs at economy rates of 8.25 and 9.33 in the first two games against the Tigers.

"You try to bowl fast but the wickets are different. You need to be smarter with it. The fast ones in the nets sometimes feel like the one that might get smashed. It is just picking and choosing when to bowl what, and maintaining variety. Bowling off cutters are helpful," Sears said.

After being called up for the first time in the Kiwi side for any tour,

Sears is hoping to earn his first cap for New Zealand in the series and according to the young pacer, achieving that would be 'pretty wild'.

"It would be awesome. I think it is a bit of a weird tour. I am probably the 15th bowler in the country picked for it, because everyone is out. It is, however, an awesome opportunity to come over here. It is pretty wild."



Lionel Messi made his much-anticipated Ligue 1 debut for Paris St Germain at Reims on Sunday, with the capital side running out 2-0 winners thanks to Kylian Mbappe's brace. Messi, wearing the number 30 jersey, came off the bench in the 66th minute to replace Neymar at the Stade Auguste-Delaune, where fans in the sell-out 21,000 crowd had earlier chanted his name as he emerged to warm up. (Inset) After the match, the Argentine superstar happily obliged to Reims goalkeeper Predrag Rajkovic's request by posing for a photograph with the goalkeeper's son. Messi also signed banners created by the home fans welcoming him to French domestic football.

PHOTO: REUTERS/COLLECTED

‘Indian players more confident than us’

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Having played the AFC Cup in Maldives, Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings returned home five days ago before their nine footballers, including key player Tapu Barman, headed to Bishkek with the Bangladesh national football team to take part in the Three Nations Cup involving hosts Kyrgyzstan and Palestine.

Bashundhara Kings' captain Tapu expressed his satisfaction with his latest campaign where Kings finished second behind group champions ATK Mohun Bagan, and he also deemed Indian footballers' confidence to be higher than Bangladeshi players, while sharing his experience of AFC Cup with The Daily Star on the eve of departure for Kyrgyzstan on Saturday.

"We had positive performances throughout the AFC Cup and deserved to progress to next round but it wasn't possible to compete with 10 players against a strong team like ATK Mohun Bagan.

"If we had played with 11 players in second half, then we would've had a great chance to qualify for

the knockout stage by preventing Mohun Bagan from levelling and creating more opportunities for ourselves to widen the margin, instead. However, I'm pleased with our AFC Cup performance," opined Tapu.

Tapu believed the referee killed off the match after ordering defender

their hopes of progressing into the knockout stage in their maiden appearance ended after surrendering a lead to play out a 1-1 draw against Mohun Bagan, who ultimately qualified.

Replying to a query, central back Tapu said, "I think there is no big difference between Bangladesh



Sushanta Tripura a marching order in the last moment of the first half following a bookable offense.

Kings returned with heads held high after remaining unbeaten in three Group D matches of AFC Cup in which they beat Maziya S&RC 2-0 before being held to a goalless draw against Bengaluru FC. And finally,

and subcontinent nations of India and Maldives. If you see Mohun Bagan, they have six to seven Indian national players like central-back Subhasish, left-back Pritom Kotal, Manvir, Amrinder, Lenny, Aushutosh Mehta, against whom there was no big difference in performance rather we played

better, I think."

Tapu also reckons that Indian players gained such overall maturity because of playing competitive matches of Indian Super League while the Bangladesh national players played hardly a few competitive matches of Bangladesh Premier League.

"The Indian players are high in confidence from playing Indian Super League because maximum foreign recruits there are of good quality and the local players cashed in by playing with them. I don't think we are trailing behind them however, I admit that some of our players get nervous in the international matches. If you look back at the World Cup Qualifying match against India in Qatar, we all looked immature whereas they played really well.

"Due to lack of match temperament, a few of our players can't hold their concentration for full 90 minutes, so it hampers our strength where we are punished for silly mistakes in international matches," said Tapu, who believes playing against Kyrgyzstan and Palestine in Three Nations Cup would be of great help before SAFF Championship in October.

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