



Bangladesh team director Khaled Mahmud gives some tips to batsman Mahedi Hasan during a training session ahead of the three-match T20I series against Pakistan in Mirpur, starting from tomorrow.

PHOTO:
FIROZ AHMED

Selected sans credentials

MAZHAR UDDIN



Four uncapped players were included in the squad for the Pakistan series in the form of Bangladesh Under-19 World Cup-winning captain Akbar Ali, Test specialist Saif Hasan, a relatively ordinary performer in recent times in pacer Shohidul Islam and Yasir Ali, who has been around the set-up but is yet to play an international game.

There were two more inclusions in Najmul Hossain Shanto, another batsman who was considered mostly for the longer-version after a string of poor performances in white-ball formats, and leg-spinner Aminul Islam, who has not been considered of late despite a promising entry into international cricket.

Known more for his ability to grind it out in the middle, than his prowess as an explosive batsman,

Saif was always considered a longer-version specialist until his inclusion for the upcoming T20I series against Pakistan.

Saif has scored 365 runs across 17 games at a strike rate of 113 and an average of 28.07 in the Dhaka Premier League T20 competition, where he also hit three fifties.

Not considered among the top choices even in the domestic T20 competitions, Saif was indeed a surprise inclusion and is expected to make his T20I debut against Pakistan.

The idea of including Saif is to have someone anchor the innings so Bangladesh do not lose too many wickets early on, which clearly reflects the team management's defensive mindset.

Interestingly, Akbar, who was preparing for his next National Cricket League game, was called up at the last moment. Since winning the Under-19 World Cup in 2019, Akbar has not been able to catch the eye with performances

in the domestic circuit.

He did play some handy knock during the Bangabandhu T20 Cup last year at a strike rate of 150, scoring 171 runs in 10 games with a high score of 45. But Akbar's inclusion as a second choice wicketkeeper for the upcoming Pakistan series seems to be a makeshift solution that will certainly put the youngster under tremendous pressure.

Pacer Shohidul was among the top five wicket-takers in the Bangabandhu T20 Cup last year, scalping 15 wickets in eight games but the right arm seamer was not able to make an impact in the DPL T20 last season.

His seven-wicket haul in the ongoing National Cricket League for Dhaka Metropolis probably also encouraged selectors to include him ahead of pacer Rubel Hossain, who was part of the T20 World Cup squad.

Najmul has been rated as a future prospect since the start of

his career and the left-hander was among the top six run-getters in the DPL after scoring 368 runs in 16 games at a strike rate of 126.29. But his lack of consistency has remained the biggest problem so far and he was dropped from the T20I side back in April this year following a string of poor performances.

There is always a cry for producing leg-spinners in the Tigers' set up but the team management has not been able to nurture any existing ones in the system and Aminul is another example of that. After making his T20I debut in 2019, Aminul played seven games until his last in 2020.

It will be interesting to see whether the team management places enough faith on these youngsters against a high-flying Pakistan team or if the Tigers think-tank once again look for alternatives if they are unable to perform this time around.

A knee-jerk reaction to popular demand?

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh Cricket Board's attempt to restructure and reshape the T20 outfit following the World Cup debacle may appear a logical thing on surface, but a deeper look into the six changes made to the squad can only raise question marks over the whole process.

When a squad needs overhaul, the idea is to gradually go through the rebuilding phase. It is unlikely that key players -- with the World Cup squad formed of the best of the bunch available -- will be dropped after a major debacle without due rationale. Dropping players even as the pipeline is not providing players -- especially in the T20 format -- appears to be an approach where immediacy was preferred over a governing idea of finding a new way in T20s. Liton Das and Mushfiqur Rahim's exclusions, in particular, are of significance in this argument.

Liton's average of 19.19, spread over 46 T20Is, is enough evidence that he has not done particularly well in the format.

was the issue, there are plenty of other batters too who could be blamed for non-performance in the T20 World Cup.

Liton has failed to deliver according to his calibre in the past few series. But him failing to grasp two catches in the crucial match against Sri Lanka may have worked to his disadvantage as he became one of the more populist choices for being dropped. However, when a management decides to drop a player, there needs to be adequate replacements. Liton's aggression and fluency have previously been hailed, which is why his exclusion appears more as a need of the hour in the face of criticism, making him a scapegoat for a failed World Cup campaign.

Mushfiqur Rahim's case also signifies something similar. Known as one of Bangladesh's most potent batsmen in T20Is, Mushfiqur's form since return in home series against the Kiwis has been below-par. Even then, as one of team's most-experienced batsmen in the middle-order, his potential could have been valued against a strong Pakistan outfit, keeping in mind the absence of other experienced



His average in T20Is this year is just 13 in 16 innings. Since the tour to New Zealand in March this year, his highest knock was a 43-ball 44 in the World Cup match against West Indies. Given the stats, it does not seem unfair to drop him but when considering the kind of pitches he batted on in home series against Australia and New Zealand where batters across all teams generally struggled, there is a chance to look at those stats in a different light.

Liton's strike-rate in the format of over 122 also does not suggest his style or flair is unfit compared to the rest of the Bangladesh batters. If performance



stars such as Shakib Al Hasan.

Selectors reiterated that Mushfiqur needed rest. While quite a few cricketers needed rest following long bio-bubble sessions, Mushfiqur's exclusion on the pretext of rest isn't perhaps the wisest argument as he had rested during the Zimbabwe and Australia T20Is. It remains to be seen whether performance or off-the field issues have led to Mushfiqur's exclusion. The player has, in the past, let emotions get the better of him.

Yet, exclusions of key players such as Liton and Mushfiqur once again points finger at the whole process of selection.

Tamim going to London for treatment

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal is set to travel to London tomorrow for further treatment on the fractured finger which he injured during the Everest Premier League in Nepal in October.

Tamim had begun his rehabilitation since returning to the country and even started batting in the nets as he was expected to return to the national team action in the upcoming two-match Test series against Pakistan.

However, it was learnt that although Tamim's left-hand thumb has started to recover, further x-ray reports revealed that the cricketer has been suffering from another fracture in the index finger of his left hand, causing further delay in his recovery.

"We want to have a second opinion from a specialist hand surgeon in England since Tamim's fracture is yet to heal in five weeks. If things don't improve, he might need to go for surgery, which is why we are contracting with a few hand surgeons in England," Bangladesh Cricket Board's chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

'T20 WC success can be era-defining'

REUTERS, Melbourne



Australia are absolutely "buzzing" after clinching their maiden T20 World Cup title and will bring that confidence into their Ashes series against England, fast bowler Pat Cummins said on Wednesday. Australia beat New Zealand by eight wickets in the T20 decider on Sunday and have six players from the championship-winning outfit in their Ashes squad.

Cummins, who along with fellow quicks Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood shared in the triumph in Dubai, said capturing the elusive title was a huge spur for the home summer.

"Absolutely, I think we'll take confidence from it," vice-captain Cummins told reporters on Wednesday.

"It's a different format but you saw somebody like (batsman) Davey Warner, player of the tournament, that's going to have huge confidence for him going into the summer.



"As an Australian side, I think we all probably felt like we've underperformed a little bit in the last few years, haven't won as many games as we'd probably expect.

"So to get back out and win a title on the world stage ... it can be era-defining for a side. So everyone's just absolutely buzzing, really excited for what's next."

Australia have not played a Test since losing to India at the Gabba in January, which saw the hosts fall to a 2-1 series defeat.

The World Cup players arrived home on Tuesday and have little time to get accustomed to red-ball cricket. Cummins played down concerns that Australia might be underprepared.

"I always feel it's better to be underdone than overdone coming into a big test series," he said.



Mohammedan rout Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER



Foreign Menini and Taswar Abbas found the target alongside Rajib Das as defending champions Mohammedan bounced back in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League with an emphatic 4-0 win over archrivals Abahani at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

A 10th win from 11 outings helped the Black and Whites close gap on leaders Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, who have 33 points from 11 matches while

Mohammedan and Abahani have 30 and 27 points respectively from 11 matches.

The top five teams in the 12-team table -- currently Mariners, Mohammedan, Abahani, Bangladesh SC and Sonali Bank -- will lock horns in a Super Five battle on Friday with all participating teams playing each other once to decide the title.

However, the tie between Abahani and Mohammedan was always bound to draw attention and the inclusion of Dutch and Argentina players alongside Pakistani and Indian recruits drew more eyes to the high-voltage match.

Menini, a member of Argentina's

Rio Olympic gold winning squad, displayed a superb performance and scored a brace in his debut match while Abahani's three Dutchmen found it hard to beat Mohammedan SC's goalkeeper Al Amin, who thwarted five to six penalty corners. Meanwhile, Dutch player Bjorn Kellerman and Rezaul Karim Babu even failed to hit the board in one-on-one situations.

Menini put Mohammad ahead in the fifth minute with a reserve hit before Pakistan's Taswar Abbas doubled the lead from a penalty corner in the 32nd minute. Rajib Das made it 3-0 in the 49th minute before Menini completed the rout with another solo effort in the 52nd minute.

Fans can rejoice as tickets on sale

SPORTS REPORTER

Fans of Bangladesh cricket can finally return to the stadium to cheer for their side during the three-match T20I series against Pakistan as the ticket sales start today.

The last time the fans had the normal experience was back in March 2020 when Bangladesh played against Zimbabwe, after which the global pandemic halted all sporting events. Cricket eventually returned to the country in 2021, however, the Tigers ended up playing four home series without spectators.

So now, after an interval of 618 days, Bangladesh team's 12th man can finally look forward to experiencing the action up close. However, the number of tickets on sale is only 50% of the stadium's capacity and will only be applicable for Covid-19 vaccination certificate holders.

The tickets will not be sold online and have to be bought from the designated booths at the Shaheed Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur from 9 am to 6 pm.

The ticket price ranges from 100 to 1000 takas. Grand stand and VIP stand tickets are priced at 1000 and 500 takas, respectively, while Shaheed Mushtaq and Shaheed Jewel stand tickets cost 300 takas. Northern and Southern end tickets are available for 150 takas while Eastern stand tickets are up for grabs for 100 takas only.