

'Right time to end my Test career'

SPORTS REPORTER

After more than four months since Mahmudullah Riyad's shocking decision to retire from Test cricket made during the middle of the Zimbabwe Test back in July this year, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) finally issued an official press release confirming his retirement from the longest format of the game yesterday, a day before the Tigers face Pakistan in the first of the two-match Test series.

The 35-year-old played his 50th and last Test against Zimbabwe where Bangladesh recorded a 220-run victory. In his final innings, the right-hander made an unbeaten 150, his fifth hundred in Tests, and was also adjudged as the player of the match. Mahmudullah scored 2914 runs at an average of 33.49 and took 43 wickets while also having captained Bangladesh in six Tests.

"Leaving a format which I have been a part of for such a long time is not easy. I had always thought of going on a high and I believe this is the right time to end my Test career. I want to extend my gratitude to the BCB President for supporting me when I returned to the Test team.

"I thank my teammates and the support staff for always encouraging me and believing in my ability. It has been an absolute honour and privilege to play Test cricket for Bangladesh and I will cherish those many memories," Mahmudullah quoted in the BCB press release.

After the third day of the Test match in Harare, the members of the Bangladesh team even gave Mahmudullah the Guard of Honour, the traditional way of paying tribute to a player for his services to the game, when he took the field the next day. However, the BCB surprisingly had barred him from making the announcement publicly

TEST CAREER IN NUMBERS

Test debut:

Against West Indies in Kingstown in 2009

Last Test:

Against Zimbabwe in Harare in 2021

Total matches:

50

Runs:

2914

HS:

150*

100s:

5

50s:

16

Avg:

33.49

Wickets:

43

in the press and the player had obliged. But that did not stop the fans from witnessing a flurry of tributes for Mahmudullah on social media from the likes of ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal alongside other cricketers of the country.

The whole Mahmudullah issue, like every other affair of Bangladesh cricket and its management, has been murky from the very beginning. In Mahmudullah's case, it all began back in February 2020 when the cricketer was dropped from the Test side after Bangladesh was hammered by Pakistan in the Rawalpindi Test.

While it was understandable that he was dropped from the Test squad owing to a series of poor performances prior to the Rawalpindi Test, Mahmudullah's total expulsion from the Test side and from its future plans were never justified, given his calibre.

Famously known as 'Silent Killer' for his calm and composed character both on and off the field, it was unfortunate that Mahmudullah retired from the longest format with hardly any noise from the field.

However, Mahmudullah intends to continue playing the ODI and T20I format for the Tigers. "Although I am retiring from Tests, I will still be playing ODIs and T20 internationals and really looking forward to continuing giving my best for my country in white-ball cricket," he said.

Burden of leadership lies on Mushfiqur

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His determination and dedication towards the game was never in doubt even though Mushfiqur Rahim remained in the headlines for all the wrong reasons in recent times since the ICC T20 World Cup.

Following Bangladesh's dismal show in the mega event, the controversy over Mushfiqur's exclusion from the squad for the T20I series against Pakistan once again made the news after the 34-year-old expressed his frustrations over the reason the selectors provided to justify his exclusion.

Off-field issues aside, all eyes will be on Mushfiqur for the upcoming two-match Test series against Pakistan, starting from tomorrow, where the experienced campaigner is expected to perform a masterclass with the bat.

Bangladesh started training at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram from 1.30 pm ahead of the first Test yesterday and Mushfiqur was characteristically present at the ground earlier than everyone else. However, this time he arrived almost two hours before the scheduled practice time.

Mushfiqur reached the port city a couple of days before the selectors announced the Test squad and it



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

seems that his appetite towards the game only increased.

As one of the most consistent Bangladesh batters over the years, Mushfiqur has been in fine form in the longest format of the game, scoring two fifties and two forty run knocks in his last six innings.

And certainly the Test series against Pakistan will be a huge challenge since the onus is on Mushfiqur to share the burden of

responsibility in the batting line-up alongside skipper Mominul Haque to fill the void of experience left by the injuries to the likes of Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal.

Bangladesh will also lack the experience of Mahmudullah Riyad, who had announced a sudden retirement from red-ball cricket in the middle of the Zimbabwe Test, earlier this year.

Going back to Chattogram, the

Dhaka champions for sixth time

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All-rounder Shuvagata Hom's second first-class 10-wicket haul helped Dhaka Division clinch the National Cricket League (NCL) title after seven years as they romped to a 179-run victory against defenders Khulna Division on the fourth day of the final round of the competition at BKSP 3 yesterday. This was Dhaka's sixth NCL title and first since 2014. Only Khulna, the seven-time champions of the competition, precede Dhaka in this auspicious list.

Going into the final round, both Dhaka and Rangpur Division were in contention for the title as Rangpur began the round being 3.49 points ahead of Dhaka in the Tier-1 table. However, with Rangpur's game against Sylhet Division headed towards an expected draw, Dhaka's long wait for the title finally ended.

Having resumed the day on seven

for no loss, Khulna needed 372 runs more to win on the final day. For Dhaka, spinners dictated terms yesterday as left-arm spinners Taibur Rahman, Nazmul Islam and off-spinner Hom shared nine wickets between them to bundle out Khulna for 199 in 98.1 overs.

Taibur finished with figures of five for 40 in 17.1 overs, the 30-year-old's first first-class fiver, while Hom scalped three for 66 as he ended with a total of 10 wickets after a seven-wicket haul in the first innings.

Khulna batters were unable to put up much resistance as Nahidul Islam top-scored for the side with his 109-ball 40 before falling prey to player-of-the-match Hom. Yesterday's crushing defeat also saw Khulna, who won four times in the previous five editions, get relegated to Tier-2.

While Dhaka celebrated their triumph, Rangpur had to stay content being runners-up as their encounter against Sylhet ended in an eventual stalemate. Resuming the day with 455 for five, Sylhet amassed 540 all

out in their first innings, taking a 147-run lead. In reply, an unbeaten 75 by national discard Nasir Hossain and a fifty from skipper Ariful Haque saw Rangpur score 196 for five before stumps. Meanwhile, in Sylhet, Chattogram Division got promoted to Tier-1 as they finished top of the Tier-2 with 31.60 points despite a draw with Dhaka Metro, who finished bottom of the table. Youngster Shahadat Hossain, who started the day unbeaten on 97, got to his second first-class ton as his 159-run knock helped Chattogram score 360 all out in their second innings, setting a 326-run target for Dhaka Metropolis.

In reply, Dhaka Metro scored 82 for four as the match ended in a draw.

The other game in Sylhet between Barishal Division and Rajshahi Division also endured the same fate. Barishal, who resumed the day being 88 runs behind in their second innings, scored 286 for four before stumps with Mohammad Ashraf, Fazle Mahmud and Abu Sayem smashing fifties for their side.



Sri Lanka close in on victory

AFP, Galle

Sri Lanka need just four wickets to win the first ICC Test against West Indies in Galle after setting the all-but-impossible target of 348 on Wednesday's penultimate day of play.

West Indies had made just 52 before bad light forced an early end after the hosts' spin trio made quick work of the top order.

The sensational collapse saw the tourists lose four wickets in 15 balls for just four runs.

Ramesh Mendis was the pick of the bowlers finishing with four for 17. The off-spinner had the makings of a hat-trick as he trapped Kyle Mayers leg before.

Jason Holder was expecting the ball to turn into him on the next delivery but a straight path smashed his off-stump.

Joshua da Silva walked in to face the hat-trick ball but it was wayward from Mendis, who bowled down the leg-side.

Lasith Embuldeniya accounted for Jermaine Blackwood and Roston Chase.

There was little hope for West Indies at 18 for six and all signs were that the game was going to end on the fourth day.

Then Nkrumah Bonner (18) and da Silva (15) batted for just over 45 minutes to hang in before the umpires called bad light. West Indies' lowest total against Sri Lanka is 93 all out in Barbados in 2018.

Sri Lanka declared their second innings on 191 for four after a 123-run stand by Angelo Mathews and Dimuth Karunaratne in just 150 deliveries.

Skipper Karunaratne, who had posted 147 in the first innings, narrowly missed twin centuries with 83, including nine fours.

He finally stumbled after attempting to cut Rahkeem Cornwall, a top edge knocking the ball off the wicketkeeper's gloves and into the hands of first slip.

Karunaratne has been prolific this year with over 850 runs now at an average of 77. He is the world's third-highest run getter in Test cricket for 2021.

India pursue Test revenge against NZ



Ajinkya Rahane will be captaining the India side in absence of regular skipper Virat Kohli.

PHOTO: AFP

AFP, New Delhi

Buoyed by their T20 clean sweep, India will look to avenge their defeat in the World Test Championship final when they host a weary New Zealand in the first Test in Kanpur from Thursday.

The Indians have been hurting since the eight-wicket hammering by Kane Williamson's Black Caps at the inaugural World Test Championship final in Southampton in June.

But they routed the tourists, runners-up in the T20 World Cup earlier this month, in the recent three-game series, giving them confidence that they can start the new World Championship cycle in winning style.

However India -- under new coach Rahul Dravid and second in the Test rankings behind New Zealand -- will be without their in-form opener Rohit Sharma, who has opted out of the two-Test series, and skipper Virat Kohli as

well as opener KL Rahul, who was ruled out due to injury.

Kohli will return for the second Test in Mumbai in early December while Ajinkya Rahane will lead the side in his absence in Kanpur.

New Zealand will be boosted by the return of captain Williamson,

who was rested from the T20 games following a gruelling schedule that saw his side travel to India just the day after losing the World Cup final in Dubai.

Dravid was quick to offer a reality check. "To be honest, we have to keep our feet on the



ground and be a bit realistic about this win," said Dravid, after India won Sunday's final game by 73 runs to wrap up the series 3-0.

"(It's) not easy for New Zealand to play a World Cup final and then to turn up three days later and play three games in six days."

Veteran Black Caps batsman Ross Taylor, returning to international action for the first time since the Test final five months ago, admitted retaining the crown would be a tall order.

"We've gone so many years as underdogs. But now coming in as champions, I guess the element of surprise is gone," Taylor said during a virtual press meet on Sunday.

Like for the T20 series, spectators will be allowed for the game in Kanpur -- where there has been heavy pollution -- but the players will continue to stay in strict bubbles because of the coronavirus.