



Bangladesh pacer Shoriful Islam (R) leaps in the air to celebrate the dismissal of New Zealand captain Tom Latham early on the first morning of the first Test at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui on Saturday. The left-earner was the pick of the bowlers with two wickets as the hosts ended the day at 258 for five. PHOTO: AFP

No home farewell FOR GAYLE

AFP, ST. JOHNS

Veteran batsman Chris Gayle was a surprise absence from the West Indies squad named on Friday for a one-off T20 against Ireland but captain Kieron Pollard returns from injury for the series which also includes England.

The 42-year-old Gayle had been expected to be given his international farewell in front of his home crowd at Sabina Park in Kingston.

The West Indies host Ireland in the three-match International (ODI) Series and a one-off CG Insurance T20 International (T20I) from January 8 to 16.

The two-time World Champions then travel to Barbados to face England in five T20Is at Kensington Oval from January 22 to 30.

Pollard, 34, returns having missed the tour of Pakistan after failing to recover from a hamstring injury he sustained during the recent T20 World Cup.

"We have tried to maintain the general make-up of the squads from the Pakistan Tour before Christmas, with the captain and some senior players coming back in," said head coach Phil Simmons.

"COVID-19 has also played a part in the final make-up of the squad. The challenges in the next couple months are getting the young players in both squads to not only improve on their skills but maintain the attitude and desire we saw in Pakistan.

"We do need to start the year on a high. And we know both Ireland and England have very good teams, so we expect a very strong challenge as we look improve our chances of automatic qualification for the ICC Cricket World Cup in 2023 and building the T20 team for the ICC T20 World Cup in 2022."

'It's a very special feeling'



AGENCIES

New Zealand batsman Devon Conway's New Year has started a lot better than his 2021 ended. Last year, Conway's final match for the Black Caps ended in agony, breaking his hand when punching his bat in disgust after being dismissed during the semi-final win over England in the ICC T20 World Cup in Abu Dhabi. Conway got just two balls of match practice ahead of the first Test when dismissed for a duck in a warm-up game between the Tigers and a New Zealand XI in Mount Maunganui. The left-hander, however, celebrated his return from injury with a sparkling 122 on Saturday against Bangladesh on the opening day of the first Test.

The 30-year-old looked like he hadn't left the crease as his phenomenal scoring record for his adopted country continued apace. The South African-born batter made a double century on debut against England at Lord's last year and averages more than 50 in all three international formats. "I haven't had a proper hit in the past eight weeks, so it was nice to contribute," Conway said.

"To have Ross Taylor out in the middle when I achieved that milestone, it's a very special feeling," Conway said of the retiring stalwart. "It'll be one of those things that will last in my memory for a very long time."

'PROUD OF HOW THE BOYS KEPT GOING'

SPORTS REPORTER



It came as a breath of fresh air to witness the Bangladesh quicks with the new ball testing the New Zealand batters at their den since skipper Mominul Haque elected to bowl on the first day of the first Test at the Bay Oval in Mount Maunganui today.

In fact, the duo of Shoriful Islam and Taskin Ahmed kept things extremely tight, conceding just one run in the first 7.3 overs. This sort of display is hardly seen from the Bangladeshi bowlers in the past, be it home or away. The disciplined approach had also brought reward as Shoriful dismissed Kiwi skipper Tom Latham in the fourth over of the day, courtesy of a sharp catch by wicket-keeper Liton Das.

And despite the 138-run second-wicket partnership between centurion Devon Conway and Will Young, the Bangladeshi bowlers kept toiling hard, in sharp contrast to how the Tigers tend to lose patience and momentum, as history suggests.

Tigers' pace bowling coach Ottis Gibson was all praise of his bowlers who were able to grind in during the tough periods of the day and showed character.

"Coming from Bangladesh, we don't see much grass, so the grass is a factor in the toss. We felt like we would get some movement upfront with the new ball, which we got. But it was obviously very hot today and the moisture got away from the wicket quite quickly and the wicket became very

flat and very good for batting after that. I'm proud of the way the boys bowled today (Saturday), and the fast bowler kept coming in. Miraz did a great job stopping the game from one end, and the fast bowler coming from the other," said Gibson.

The two late wickets of Conway and Tom Blundell in the final session of the day have certainly kept the visitors in the hunt when they resume the second day's proceedings.

"I think the fast bowlers bowled well in difficult conditions. I thought we were brilliant with the new ball. We pitched the ball up, swung it, and beat the bat on several occasions. We could have had a few more wickets.

"There was a close lbw shout against Conway. On another day, it's given out. Those are the small margins in international cricket. I'm quite proud of how the boys battled and kept going all day," Gibson told media yesterday.

Shoriful may have scalped two wickets but Taskin's effort, in spite of remaining wicketless from his 20 overs, would not go overlooked. The duo complimented each other in a manner Bangladesh has missed for a long time.

Before the series began, team director Khaled Mahmud pressed the issue of doing the process right in training to carry it to the game.

As a matter of fact, Bangladesh are up against the number one ranked side in the world who can still change the complexion of the game in their favour at any time. However, if the Tigers can continue to deliver what Mahmud mentioned, there is certainly a ray of hope for a better outcome in the coming days.



Central take on dominant South

SPORTS REPORTER

While the national team are busy on their second cycle of the World Test Championship in New Zealand, Soumya Sarkar will continue his surge to make a comeback to the Test team when he appears for Walton Central Zone in the final of the Bangladesh Cricket League against South Zone today.

Interestingly, Soumya was among the few batters who scored a ton against New Zealand during the Tigers' last away tour there, back in 2019. And after a string of dismal performances with the red ball, Soumyo found himself out of the Tigers' Test side since February last year.

However, the left-hander has been in superb form in the ongoing first class tournament for Central Zone, having struck two centuries and a fifty in three matches so far.

Central Zone occupied the second position of points table to reach the final and will face the defending champions South Zone, who remained clinical throughout the group stage.

The last group stage game between the two sides ended in a high-scoring draw where Amit Hasan, Towhid Hridoy, and Zakir Hasan scored centuries for South and posted 494 runs in reply to Central's 481 in the first innings.

Lively Fed Cup QFs in store

SPORTS REPORTER



The Federation Cup may have lost a good chunk of its glitz with holders Bashundhara Kings missing in action. However, today's two quarterfinals at the Birshrestha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium will provide no shortage of competitive intensity.

Mohammedan Sporting Club, despite having struggled in the recent past with their last Fed Cup final appearance going as far back as 2009, the 11-time champions are in fine conditions to tackle their tough upcoming encounter against 2017 runners-up Chattogram Abahani.

"We had a good rest after our last game. We are ready to play the quarterfinal," informed Mohammedan's Australian coach Sean Lane.

"Every year Chattogram Abahani are a good team and I expect this year to be

no different. I expect this game to be a tough one," Lane opined.

Chattogram Abahani coach Maruful Haque is no less optimistic about his side's chances of progressing to the last four, like they did in the previous edition.

"A game against Mohammedan is always tough but the positive thing is that we are playing the way we want to. If we can play accordingly, we can hope to qualify for the semifinals," Maruful added.

The Black and Whites will get full services from their four foreign recruits while the port city side face injury concerns and will have to wait till this morning to know whether their Nigerian forward Ebimobowe Thankgod and Afghan midfielder Omid Popalzay can play.

Ahead of the second quarterfinal, last edition's runners-up Saif Sporting Club are favourites to make it to the semis by overcoming newcomers Swadhinata Krira Sangha.

However, if recent head-to-head results are taken into account, the tie is likely to be fought on level terms.

Saif had to wait till the stoppage time to beat Swadhinata in the quarterfinal of the recently-concluded Independence Cup. Also, the two sides played out a 3-3 draw in a practice match before the start of the Federation Cup.

"We have big expectations as we have experience of playing against Saif SC. But they are ahead of us in having national players, quality foreigners and the BPL players," Swadhinata coach Jahangir Alam said.

"We are a young side. Our big strength is the team combination with the attacking lineup comprising Bosnian striker Nedo Turkovic and Uzbek Nodirbek Mavlonov," Jahangir asserted.

Swadhinata are likely to miss their Iranian defender Siamak Kouroshi, who is suffering from fever, while Saif will bank on all four of their foreign recruits.



Manchester City midfielder Rodri (R) takes off his shirt to celebrate a stoppage-time winner against Arsenal during their 2-1 win in a premier league fixture at the Emirates Stadium on Saturday. The win took the league leaders to 53 points from 21 games while Arsenal remained in fifth position with 35 points from 20 games. PHOTO: REUTERS