



Bangladesh opener Mohammad Naim looks at his shattered stumps after the debutant was bowled by New Zealand pacer Tim Southee during the second day of the second Test in Christchurch yesterday. [Inset] New Zealand's elder statesman Ross Taylor, playing his 112th and final Test, received a guard of honour on his way to the middle from the Bangladesh players.

PHOTO: AFP/TWITTER

BPL postponed by two weeks

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has decided to postpone the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) by two weeks but remained unmoved to consider appointing foreign referees to conduct its important matches as the league is scheduled to begin on February 3 at venues outside Dhaka.

"The clubs have requested us to provide full fixtures with venues after giving a good period to the new coach [Javier Cabrera] of the national football team ahead of two friendly matches against Indonesia [on January 24 and 27]," said league management committee chairman and BFF senior vice president Abdus Salam Murshedy after a meeting at the BFF House.

Participating clubs in the Independence Cup and Federation Cup have raised serious questions over the standard of the surface at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium and the quality of refereeing.

"The league matches will not take place at the astro-turf," Murshedy continued.

"We aren't thinking of foreign referees because they won't have an idea about who is a big team or a small team and it will lead to another controversy. Rather, we want to stay in the same sequence by appointing and promoting local referees," Murshedy concluded.

Meanwhile, the league committee allowed three more teams – Azampur FC Uttara, Gopalganj SC and BFF Elite Football Academy – to play the I2 team second-tier football league titled Bangladesh Championship League, set to begin on Feb 20.

Tamim returns to action

SPORTS REPORTER

After over three months of injury rehabilitation, Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim Iqbal is all set to return to competitive cricket today through the ongoing Independence Cup.

The dashing lefty batter will feature for Islami Bank East Zone against BCB South Zone in Sylhet in the fifty-over tournament.

Tamim, since injuring his left thumb during the Everest Premier League in Nepal back in October last year, had to miss out on the two Test series, first against Pakistan at home before the ongoing one in New Zealand.

Tamim's East Zone lost their first game by 22 runs against Shakib Al Hasan's Walton Central Zone.

Central Zone will play their second game by taking on North Zone, who won their first game in another low-scoring affair against South Zone, registering a comfortable eight-wicket win by chasing 163 runs.

'PITCHES AT HOME don't help us learn these trades'

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The pitch at the Hagley Oval threw specific challenges at Bangladesh which the Tigers are not yet close to unraveling after day two of the Christchurch Test.

The pitch looked green as a viper but that perhaps deceived the Bangladesh bowlers, who did not bowl optimum length to get that minimum movement. Bangladesh pacers struggled to use the favourable conditions but following a process can help them learn the trade of bowling on such surfaces. More importantly, it is the country's cricket structure that has to focus on pitches back home where bowlers can learn the trade.

The last time Bangladesh produced exciting wickets, which had everything for bowlers and batters, was during the 1998 ICC KnockOut Trophy, also known as the mini World Cup. The curator for those pitches was none other than Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a mentor to national team stars and also involved as national game development manager. If anyone can talk about surfaces, it is him.

What is a half volley on other surfaces becomes the most potent delivery at the Hagley Oval.

"It's the half volley length that troubles batters, provided you swing the ball. Our bowlers expected the swing from looking at the pitch, but it came as a shock when it didn't," Fahim dictated.

"Their bowlers managed to get the swing.

It's all about the length here, of us getting them on the front foot and encouraging them to drive down the ground ... pitching the ball up and hopefully we can get 10 (wickets) pretty quickly again.

TRENT BOULT

You don't have to be a Kiwi to swing the ball. Only the seam control gets you that swing, a wobbly seam is not going to do it. The seam has to be vertical so it swings in the air before pitching and the ball itself has to stay in air long enough for the swing to occur. Our bowlers didn't have that seam position which is the primary condition for swing and thus pitching further up may not have produced the movement needed," he added.

However, a pace unit lacking in experience cannot be expected to get it right on first opportunity.

"Particular pitches have different challenges and bowlers also have their natural lengths which are not easy to adjust. You need the experience and the knowledge to create artificial circumstances [at home]

that bowlers can work with.

"Right now our home pitches don't have such conditions to learn those trades because here the batsmen can't provide the same challenge," Fahim dictated, pointing to the true bounce at the Hagley Oval which makes stroke playing easier than surfaces at home.

"At home we don't have people who think about pitches. There should be people with know-how regarding where the good grass, good fertilisers and the best soil are present. They can seek help from the agriculture department," Fahim said, but till date such a body with expertise on the matter has not been sought.

Bangladesh batting crumbled too on day two, slumping to 126 all out. Yasir Ali, who stayed the most still and played late, was able to show the most application. Tushar Imran, a veteran in the domestic circuit, believed lack of experience of such surfaces was showing.

"I think our batters are not accustomed to bat in such pitches and it will be harsh to blame them. The more our batters play on similar pitches at domestic competitions, it will help them to adjust whenever they go abroad," Tushar opined while he remained hopeful of gaining something for the future.

"It's not the end of the world and if we can display a better performance in the second innings, it will help us to gain confidence for the coming days."

RAJIB seals chess title

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Enamul Hossain Rajib became champion in the Golden Jubilee of Independence 46th National Premier Chess Championship by beating FM Subrota Biswas in the 13th and final round in Dhaka yesterday.

Rajib had to wait for day's outcome between GM Niaz Murshed and IM Minhaz Uddin Ahmed Sagar before celebrating his fifth title of the national championship as Rajib avoided a title deciding play-off match after Niaz lost to Sagar. Had Niaz beaten Sagar, Rajib and Niaz would have been tied on 10 points, prompting a title-deciding play-off.

With the defeat in last match, Niaz finished in third position with nine points while GM Ziaur Rahman, who beat CM Sharif Hossain, finished second with 9.5 points. "This time the championship was very competitive as I had to face challenges from all GMs and IMs while the promising players also gave some tough time to all," Rajib said. "The race was initially confined among Niaz bhai, Zia bhai and me before the race turned into a two-way battle between Niaz bhai and me once Zia bhai lost to Niaz bhai."

Praising the junior players highly, Rajib said that emergence of talented players is a good sign for Bangladesh chess.

"Tahsin Tajwar produced really good results which I did not expect. Some other junior players including Subrota performed well which is a positive sign for Bangladesh chess," said Rajib.

Djokovic drama continues

REUTERS, Melbourne

World tennis number one Novak Djokovic was released from Australian immigration detention on Monday after winning a court challenge to remain in the country, but the government said it was still considering another move to deport him.

Djokovic said he was "pleased and grateful" at the judge's decision to reverse the cancellation of his visa and he still hoped to play in the Australian Open.

"Despite all that has happened, I want to stay and try to compete @AustralianOpen. I remain focused on that," he tweeted.

Judge Anthony Kelly ruled the federal government's decision last week to revoke the Serbian tennis star's visa amid a row over his medical exemption from COVID-19 vaccination requirements was "unreasonable" and ordered his release.

Djokovic, who arrived in Australia last week in pursuit of a record 21st Grand Slam title at the upcoming Australian Open, spent the day at his lawyers' chambers and did not immediately appear in public or make any statement after the ruling.

A spokesman for Immigration Minister Alex Hawke said he was considering

using his personal power to again revoke Djokovic's visa.

"The minister is currently considering the matter and the process remains ongoing," the spokesman said.

The controversy has been closely followed around the world, creating diplomatic tensions between Belgrade and Canberra and sparking heated debate over national vaccination rules.

Serbia's parliamentary speaker, Ivica Dacic, said he was concerned Hawke could still deport Djokovic, a move that would bar the 34-year-old from the country for three years. Spanish rival Rafa Nadal called the drama surrounding the build-up to the tournament, which starts on Jan. 17, a "circus".

"Whether or not I agree with Djokovic on some things, justice has spoken and has said that he has the right to participate in the Australian Open and I think it is the fairest decision to do so," Nadal told Spanish radio Onda Cero.

There has been huge global interest in the case, but the authorities' efforts to let the media and public follow events in court at times descended into farce as pranksters hijacked the internet links to stream loud music and porn.



A supporter of Novak Djokovic holds his photo during a rally in Melbourne. There were chaotic scenes in central Melbourne on Monday night as fans crowded around a car they thought was carrying the Serbian tennis player and chanted "Free Novak! Free Novak!".

PHOTO: REUTERS