

To be honest, I am not interested in players that are not part of the national squad. Like I said, noise from outside – what people say or write – not that important in my life. My focus is on my team, my family and my job. Not too much else.

Russell Domingo responded when asked a question regarding former captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.



Can Tigers find the right balance?

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Bangladesh may have managed to chase down 216 and win the first ODI against Afghanistan, courtesy of a record-breaking unbeaten 174-run partnership between Afif Hossain and Mehedi Hasan Miraz for the seventh wicket, but there will be plenty to improve on, especially in the batting department, in the second ODI in Chattogram today.

Individual heroics from Afif and Miraz helped Bangladesh rise from the ashes after they were reduced to 45 for six in the first game and the duo were unbeaten as Bangladesh got across the line with four wickets to spare.

But despite bowling well, bundling Afghanistan out for 215 and finishing on the winning side, the hosts will be wary that individual performances cannot be relied upon on a regular basis. Instead, the Tigers will want a concerted team effort and minimise mistakes.

"We have to play better. I think we bowled 13 wides, we dropped a catch, we were at 45 for six. So we need massive improvements in every department. We had one fantastic partnership but we need to play better cricket than we did yesterday," head coach Russell Domingo said yesterday.

It would be too harsh to point fingers at senior members for being unable to perform in the first game but the importance of having experienced players to guide the youngsters in pressure situations cannot be understated.

There were plans for the Afghan spin trio of Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi but Fazalhaq Farooqi emerged as a surprise package and destroyed Bangladesh's batting line-up by picking up four wickets.

With ICC Men's World Cup Super League points up for grab and a series win in sight, it will be tricky for Tamim Iqbal and his troops to maintain the right balance and move forward, especially while also keeping the long-term goal of preparing youngsters in mind.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Coaches catch the eye in low-key session

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Most of the Bangladesh players that played in the first ODI against Afghanistan on Tuesday did not turn up for an optional practice session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

There was an air that there was no need to overcomplicate the top-order's failure in the first game because the team had managed to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat through Afif Hossain and Mehedi Miraz's astonishing knocks.

Of those that played the first ODI, only skipper Tamim Iqbal, wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim and batter Yasir Ali attended. Their idea was to work on individual issues or prepare for match scenarios. Having attained a fairly unlikely victory in the first ODI, top-order batting became a curious issue to deal with.

Mushfiqur was seen discussing technical aspects with Russell Domingo on the sidelines even before start of practice, having gotten out to a Fazalhaq Farooqi in-swing after failing to get his bat in front of the pads on time. Domingo then moved on for a discussion on batting issues with newly-appointed batting coach Jamie Siddons.

Later, Tamim and Mushfiqur came in for their net sessions, with Siddons talking to Tamim about getting in the line of the deliveries more comfortably without doing anything that felt unnatural. The former

head coach seemed satisfied with Tamim's work at the end of the session.

Meanwhile, Domingo continued his work with Mushfiqur and it appeared the duo wanted to see how many options could be opened up with little adjustments.

Domingo, having lost most of his coaching staff, has found new partners in Siddons and

He was on the front foot to most questions in the press conference following practice yesterday, especially in regards to media criticism, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and the coaching roles.

Domingo also seemed happy to share duties and micro-manage. It will be important for him to build rapport with the current staff in order to continue his tenure. There had been doubt in the previous few weeks when Siddons's role was not clarified by the BCB initially.

"He is an experienced coach who has worked all around the world. He knows the system. He probably knows these players better than I do. He has been here before. It is good to have him on board. He will bring a lot of experience to our coaching staff," Domingo said about Siddons.

That he was going to keep in the same vein as yesterday was also made apparent. "I have enough on my plate. Talking to directors about what the line-up is going to be, what the toss is going to do... I don't want to be focusing on that. It's great to have Chacha [Mahmud] here. He can feed all that information and take the stress away from me."

A training exercise for Ebadat Hossain meant the team were still cautious. Herath asked Shanto to explain a match scenario where Miraz had gotten out in the first ODI with 20 runs needed. The tail-ender had his work cut out to spinners as the instruction was 'don't get out even if you can't find runs'.



Mahmud. Appearing more comfortable with the hands-on approach since returning for this series, he seemed confident and content. However, it is curious how the team currently functions, with Domingo in the presence of former head coach Siddons and Mahmud, who has had various roles with the team over the years and has an important role as team director.

'Great opportunity' for Cabrera and Co

SPORTS REPORTER

Head coach Javier Cabrera will get to oversee his charges in two FIFA friendlies before guiding the Bangladesh national team in the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers, where Bangladesh were placed in Group E, alongside Bahrain, Turkmenistan and hosts Malaysia, in a draw held yesterday.

Bangladesh will aim to, at least, secure the second position from the group to advance into the 24-team final round, where 13 teams already qualified.

A superior Bahrain side will first stand in the way of the men in red and green on June 8, after which Bangladesh take on Turkmenistan and hosts Malaysia on June 11 and 14, respectively.

Cabrera is taking the upcoming Qualifiers as an opportunity on all fronts.

"I think it's a great opportunity for me and Bangladesh to go to Malaysia and play against those four teams which I look forward to," Cabrera told the reporters yesterday.

Since arriving in Bangladesh in January, Cabrera has been busy observing the local clubs and players approach the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League.

"I've been to different clubs and seen the league matches. I'll say there are many local players who have what it takes to do great at the national level.

And as soon as I get the opportunity to directly work with the national team, I will work with them," informed Cabrera, who will have the opportunity before the two international friendlies against Maldives and Mongolia on March 24 and 29, respectively.



Thankgod hat-trick rescues Ctg Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Ebimobowei Thankgod slammed the second hat-trick of the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League to salvage a point for his side as Chittagong Abahani equalised thrice to frustrate Saif Sporting Club with a 3-3 draw at the Bishreshtha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

Abahani are now in fourth position while Saif occupy sixth position.

Meanwhile, in the day's other match at the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj, two second-half strikes from Faisal Ahmed Shitol and Afghan striker Amiruddin Sharifi meant the visiting Bangladesh Police tasted their first victory in the league with a comfortable 2-0 win over hosts Uttar Baridhara.

Back to Munshiganj, Saif came into the match on the back of two successive defeats and took the initiative early as Sajjad Hossain struck in the fifth minute with a left-footed shot. Abahani hit back at the stroke of half-time with Thankgod converting a questionable penalty, awarded by referee Mizanur Rahman.

Following the interval, Emeka Ogbough restored Saif's lead by converting a penalty but Thankgod equalising in the 67th minute.

13 minutes later, Emeka turned scorline 3-2 in Saif's favour. The game headed to the nervous extra-time and two minutes into it, Thankgod managed to sneak the ball home from a goal-mouth melee.

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS & GTV
Bangladesh vs Afghanistan
2nd ODI
Live from 11:00 am

'Show results, not once, but day after day'

Bangladesh achieved a historic away Test win against New Zealand earlier this year with a relatively inexperienced squad under Mominul Haque's leadership. And after an astounding win against Afghanistan in the first ODI, scripted by young guns Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Afif Hossain, many wondered: Is this the dawn of a new era for Bangladesh cricket? Test skipper Mominul shed some light on his thoughts about that as well as providing some insight into the upcoming South Africa tour in an interview with *The Daily Star's* Ekush Tapader.

ON THE EPIC VICTORY AGAINST AFGHANISTAN:

When [Mahmudullah] Riyad bhai and Shakib [Al Hasan] bhai were at the crease, I thought they could carry the team like they have done countless times in the past. After they departed and I saw [Mehedi Hasan] Miraz and [Hossain] Afif coming in, my line of thinking was that the wicket in Chattogram would get better with time. So if they could bat till the 50th over, we could win the game. Both Miraz and Afif played in a very calculated manner. They didn't attack Afghanistan's main bowlers [Mohammad] Nabi or Rashid [Khan]. They didn't strike much either. They played the ball low and kept the scoreboard ticking over. I didn't play much with Afif but I know Miraz well. He is always confident regardless of his successes or failures. I was worried that he might go with the flow and play an awkward shot, but he didn't. Miraz is more mature now. This is a very positive sign for Bangladesh cricket. If younger players can play like this, seniors will be more assured as well. Even the fans will be assured, but only when it happens consistently.



ON HOW A NEW ERA MAY BE USHERED IN:

I think there are signals telling seniors when it is time to pack up their gear. The juniors give those signals by rising to the occasion. But only signals won't work. People will believe you only when they see results. So you have to show them. Not once, but day after day.

When Miraz and Afif will bat again, they will know that they can do it again. But the challenge is to do it regularly.

ON YOUNGSTERS TAKING RESPONSIBILITY:

If you talk about younger players taking responsibility, that may increase pressure. Responsibility raises expectations and

expectations increase pressure. Pressure can take anyone down. When we can play as a team, we get success. Instead of taking responsibility, I want to tell them to enjoy and play as a team.

ON PREPARATIONS FOR THE TEST SERIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: We are going to prepare in Bogura because the wicket there is quite

sporting. Our main preparation will be once we go to South Africa and train in their conditions. We cannot say that we will win just because of our success in New Zealand, but we will follow the process.

ON TEST CHAMPIONSHIP TARGET:

Our only target is to do better in the two-match Test series in South Africa. If expectations have increased, we need to match them. There's no point thinking too big. We can't say that we will rank at number five or six by the end of the cycle. You can say that in ODIs because we are really good in the 50-over format. The ODI team may play in the World Cup semifinals after one or four years, but the Test team is far behind. We need two or three more years to be a good Test side.

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