

23 cricketers join pioneering residential camp

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) hotly-anticipated 'Bangladesh Tigers' programme, which promises to keep top cricketers engaged throughout the year, finally begun at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura yesterday.

A mixture of Test cricketers, national discards and up-and-comers made up the 23 cricketers that initially joined the residential camp, where they are set to undergo intense training until March 3.

The BCB prioritised local coaches for the programme. Mizanur Rahman Babul was named head coach and the likes of Altaf Ahmed and Talha Jubair feature in the coaching panel. Champaka Ramanayake was appointed fast-bowling coach and Umakant Patel has been appointed fielding coach.

"We needed a programme where players outside the national set-up could be alongside players in the national team. We will arrange specialist coaches for specific programs such as death-bowling, power-hitting and even to work with wrist spinners," Bangladesh Tigers chairman and BCB director Kazi Inam Ahmed said yesterday.

Spurs keep top-four hopes alive

AFP, LEEDS

Tottenham hammered Leeds 4-0 on Saturday to put a smile back on the face of Antonio Conte and plunge Marcelo Bielsa's team deeper into trouble towards the foot of the Premier League.

The visitors, who had lost four of their previous five league matches, were 3-0 up at half-time after goals from Matt Doherty, new recruit Dejan Kulusevski and Harry Kane. A late strike from Son Heung-min completed the rout at Elland Road.

The win lifts Tottenham to seventh in the Premier League.



Newly-appointed Bangladesh batting coach Jamie Siddons shadows a lofted drive as the national team head coach Russell Domingo, spin bowling coach Rangana Herath and Rajin Saleh -- the fielding coach for the ongoing Afghanistan series -- watch on during the Tigers' practice session in Chattogram yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'We have potential superstars here'

SPORTS REPORTER FROM CHATTOGRAM

The impact that Jamie Siddons made during his tenure as Bangladesh's head coach between 2007 to 2011 was always recalled by the likes of Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan even years after he left the job.

For those like Tamim and Shakib, the former Australian cricketer's appointment as Bangladesh's batting consultant in December last year -- a role that will see him work with upcoming talents as well as current national players -- was another chance for him to foster a generation.

Although the 57-year-old admitted that there were many jobs on the table, his love for Bangladesh coaxed him into coming back despite some trust issues during his previous tenure.

"I was up for coaching jobs around the world. But I have always stayed in touch with Bangladesh, whether it was through some board members or a lot of the players. The offer came up to become batting consultant and work with the High Performance Team. It encompassed all juniors and players in the national team. I was always going to be working with national team players," Siddons told the media after the Tigers' training session in

Chattogram yesterday.

"Whether that was going to be on a full-time basis or not, I wasn't sure. I didn't really care. I loved Bangladesh last time, but some people don't believe that. I loved my time here for three years. I was looking forward and hoping there would be an

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JAMIE SIDDONS

opportunity to come back. Now I am here."

According to sources, it was ODI skipper Tamim who urged the board to appoint Siddons. After all, Tamim, Shakib and Mushfiqur Rahim benefited hugely under his tutelage in terms of their batting skills.

However, Siddons was not in favour of adding extra pressure on the youngsters. Instead, he is willing to provide ample opportunities as he aims to prepare the

next Shakib or Tamim.

"We have some potential superstars here. We give them time, pick the right ones and nurture them. We should give them opportunities without putting too much pressure on them. I have no doubt that they will be the new Shakibs and Tamims," he said.

Siddons already witnessed the potentials of the new generation in his first assignment as Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Afif Hossain and Liton Das showcased their abilities in the first two ODIs against Afghanistan. But there is still a long way to go, and the Australian said consistent performances overseas was the ultimate goal in his second tenure.

"My job is half done because some of our players have that class. But when we go against South Africa, Australia and India, they have four players of caliber. They also have three quality spinners, so there's no respite. There are no easy runs and that's where we will be challenged. That's where we have to improve and we have to be ready to do that in their conditions. We have a long way to go to get to that point, but we are a really good cricket team. The young players just need to take that extra step so that they perform overseas all the time," said Siddons.

Tigresses face England in first warm-up

SPORTS REPORTER

Nigar Sultana-led Bangladesh women's cricket team will face defending champions England in the first of two official warm-up matches at the Lincoln Green cricket ground today, ahead of their maiden appearance in the ODI World Cup, set to begin on March 4 in New Zealand.

The match is scheduled to be played at 2:00am tonight, the early hours of Monday.

Apart from this being Bangladesh's maiden appearance in the ODI World Cup, it is also the Tigresses' first tour to New Zealand -- a country where conditions have always been challenging for their male compatriots.

However, having reached the country earlier this month with time in hand to adapt to the conditions, the Tigresses' skipper Nigar was

confident of her troops' chances. "We have had a lot of quality practice sessions here; we are trying to assess the wicket and the conditions, I think our girls have done very well," Nigar told ICC in an interview.

Bangladesh will play their second

official warm-up fixture against Pakistan on March 2 before kicking off their campaign against South Africa on March 5.



Russia stripped of major events

REUTERS

As Russian forces moved deeper into Ukraine on Friday, sports bodies moved quickly to strip Russia of events, with St Petersburg losing the Champions League final while the Formula One Grand Prix will not be held in Sochi.

European soccer governing body UEFA decided to relocate the Champions League final -- club soccer's showpiece event -- to the Stade de France in Paris after receiving support from French President Emmanuel Macron.

Formula One, motorsport's governing body FIA and the teams discussed the situation and came to the conclusion that it was "impossible to hold the Russian Grand Prix in the current circumstances".

After Poland, Sweden and the Czech Republic refused to play World Cup qualifiers in Russia, UEFA said home games of Ukrainian and Russian club and national teams competing in UEFA competitions would be played at neutral venues.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) urged international sports federations to either move or cancel sports events currently planned in Russia or Belarus. Read full story

The International Judo Federation (IJF) said it had cancelled its May 20-22 Grand Slam event in Kazan, Russia but in a brief statement IJF President Marius Vizer did not make any reference to Russia or Ukraine.

Five World Cup skiing events that were scheduled to take place in Russia this weekend and next month have been cancelled or moved by the International Ski Federation (FIS) in the interest of safety and integrity of the competition.

Munim gets first taste

SPORTS REPORTER FROM CHATTOGRAM

The Bangladesh T20 squad underwent their first practice at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram ahead of the T20I series against Afghanistan, starting March 3, while most of the ODI squad -- barring Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Ebadat Hossain -- opted to sit out what for them was optional practice. The focus of the session appeared to be on Munim Shahriar, who got a maiden T20 call-up, and Mohammad Naim.

Munim's star rose following his Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) performances with Fortune Barishal. His strike-rate of 152.13 in getting 178 runs across six matches did not go unnoticed by national team hierarchy.

Naim's BPL had been unforgiving, the opposite side of the coin. While Munim was allowed to flow, Naim came in further and further down the order, resulting in a loss of confidence.

The mood in the camp was towards greater aggression in the early overs in T20Is, as batting coach Jamie Siddons dictated before the practice session yesterday.

"I saw some of them play in the BPL. They looked pretty good although one of them didn't get much of an opportunity,

which is a bit disappointing. Hopefully he will star for us here," he said ahead of practice.

"We are looking to get better at our starts, our Powerplays in T20s, and definitely finishing a bit better than we do," Siddons said about the area of focus going forward.

"We know we have a lot of improvement to do from the World Cup, part of that is the first four overs, and sustaining that smart aggression," he said.

Munim's ability in Powerplays would obviously be a tool for anyone looking for that 'smart aggression'. Thus, Siddons watched Munim and Naim bat at the centre wickets against the likes of Ebadat Hossain and Aminul Islam Biplob.

As with any top coach, Siddons perhaps does not like overcoaching.

"It was a good session. He [Siddons] didn't say much, there were just very small talks," Munim informed The Daily Star yesterday. "He is just watching at the moment, there were no particular areas to focus on from my part."

It's still early days for Munim, but having showcased his run-making abilities on Bangladesh wickets, finding runs in the DPL T20s (355 runs in 14 matches) and scoring fast, Siddons will be keen on that hitting ability as the T20Is come along.



(Anticlockwise from R) Protests against Russia's invasion of Ukraine are taking place in sporting venues across the world. While Russian tennis player Andrey Rublev was unequivocal in writing 'No War Please' following a match against Hubert Hurkacz of Poland in Dubai on Friday, football fans in Italy and Germany brought banners to the grounds to expressing their dissent with the current situation.

PHOTO: TWITTER

