

Shakib, Taskin to stay with pack

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Bangladesh team management and players will be boosted by all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's decision to stay back with the Tigers despite the fact that a few of his close family members are going through health complications in Bangladesh.

There was doubt regarding Shakib's availability for the third ODI on March 23 and, beyond that, the Test series beginning from March 31. Shakib's mother is admitted in a city hospital while his two of his youngest children are suffering from pneumonia.

"There is a medical emergency since a few of his family members are ill. That's why he has some doubts and has been communicating with his family over going," team director Khaled Mahmud informed in a BCB video message to the media yesterday. "We have been regularly booking tickets for him and even today there was talk of him going. Shakib turned down the offer [to leave] and decided to play. It was true that he was going to leave and even Jalal bhai had confirmed [to media] that he would leave. A while later Shakib decided that he will go after playing. So, he isn't going now, he will play the third ODI before we decide," he added.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) confirmed yesterday that, pacer Taskin Ahmed has been convinced to not make himself available for the cash-rich Indian Premier League (IPL) after franchise Lucknow Super Giants asked about Taskin's availability for the upcoming tournament, slated to begin from March 26. "The management of Lucknow Super Giants have contacted us as they are willing to rope in Taskin for the upcoming season," BCB's cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus told the media yesterday afternoon.

"However, since the national team is engaged in a crucial series in South Africa and there are two important Test matches, we didn't give him the permission or NOC. Let's finish the series first, then we can think what's next."



Comfort zone diffuses away from home

SPORTS REPORTER

The Tigers pace unit, which played a vital role behind the historic Test win over New Zealand in Mount Maunganui earlier this year along with the maiden win in South Africa in the first ODI of the ongoing series, is giving confidence to the Bangladesh team management to win matches overseas consistently.

Bangladesh's pace battery, in recent times, showed great promise with the presence of a group of fast bowlers, the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam, Mustafizur Rahman and Ebadot Hossain, who plays the longest format, have started to apply themselves especially away from home.

Much like the pace bowling unit, the habit of playing in seaming and bouncy tracks is also helping the Tigers batters to cope with tough conditions.

Although Bangladesh batters struggled against the extra bounce and pace by the South African seamers in the second ODI, according to the Tigers team director Khaled Mahmud, the culture of playing in seaming conditions at home has started to improve the mindset of the players.

"Look, we have already started to prepare grassy wickets in domestic circuits, which are giving the courage to our players abroad," Mahmud told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

"We didn't have that added punch in the bowling department in the past but, if you noticed, we have a core group of fast bowlers, both in Tests and limited over formats, who are bowling over 140 kmph consistently."



Khaled Mahmud

"There is a positive vibe in the team, where the head coach and the entire team management knows that we have to be mentally tough to overcome the hurdles.

"It is also about the execution on the field and the boys are doing it really well. Although we lost the second ODI where the pitch, if you noticed, provided some extra bounce. But the message is clear to all the players that this is our standard and we should maintain this no matter what happens," he added.

The former Bangladesh captain also pointed out: the current Tigers pace bowling unit provides the strength to put up a fight with the ball, an aspect that

had remained missing in the past.

"We didn't have that added punch in the bowling department in the past but, if you noticed, we have a core group of fast bowlers, both in Tests and limited over formats, who are bowling over 140 kmph consistently.

"Ebadot picked up a five-wicket haul that helped us to win in New Zealand in Tests while Taskin, Mustafiz and Shoriful were crucial behind the victory in the first ODI. I think our bowlers were better than the South African bowlers in terms of execution in the first ODI. Now we have that strength to win matches abroad riding on our pacers," Mahmud said.

Member of the selection panel and former captain Habibul Bashar, on the other hand, informed the Tigers want to diversify when it comes to their approach and game plan in different conditions.

"Obviously we are preparing ourselves to cope in different conditions. But the fact is when we play at home, our strength will always remain the same," said Bashar.

"But at the same time when we play abroad, we know what is waiting for us, and since our pace bowling department has come to a shape, we are confident to beat any team. If we can win the ODI series against South Africa it will be a huge boost for our boys to go forward."

Shamim's ton stands out

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Youngsters shone in the Dhaka Premier League matches yesterday with BKSP venues seeing a flurry of tons.

Abahani's Shamim Hossain hit a 68-ball 108 against City Club, paving the way for a 111-run win. The left-hander, a U-19 World Cup winner, played a blistering knock, hitting 13 fours and eight sixes at BKSP's Ground 3. His innovative stroke playing, going across the stumps to find the boundary at fine-leg or making room to go over extra-cover, saw Abahani post a formidable 309 for five before City Club were bowled out for 198, thanks to Arafat Sunny's five-for.

In the other match at BKSP, another U-19 World Cup winner, Shahadat Hossain Dipu, struck an unbeaten 145-ball 131 to help Prime Bank chase down Legends of Rugpanj's 265 for five and win by four wickets. Rugpanj's innings was propelled by Raqibul Hasan's 121 and skipper Naeem Islam's 91.

ULAB hosted its first-ever DPL match yesterday and Gazi Group romped to an 86-run win over Khelaghar Samaj Kallayan Samity following half-centuries from Al Amin jr. and Gurinder Singh, which helped them reach 246 for seven. In reply, Khelaghar were bowled out for 160. The venue, surrounded by greenery and the university, will host five rounds of DPL matches.



Afridi, Naseem put Australia in trouble

REUTERS

Quick bowlers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Naseem Shah picked up two wickets apiece on Monday to lead Pakistan's inspired performance against Australia on the first day of the deciding third and final Test in Lahore.

Afridi, 21, did the early damage, striking twice in his second over to dismiss opener David Warner for seven and No. 3 Marnus Labuschagne before he had scored, to reduce Australia to 8-2 after they won the toss and opted to bat.

Naseem, 19, drafted into the Pakistan side in place of all-rounder Faheem Ashraf, hurt the tourists in the final session, dismissing a well-set Steve Smith for 59 and Travis Head for 26 as Australia reached 232-5 at close.

All-rounder Cameron Green was unbeaten on 20 for Australia with wicketkeeper-batter Alex Carey eight not out.

After their shaky start, it was opener Usman Khawaja who led Australia's fightback with a resilient 91, adding to scores of 97, 160 and 44 not out in his last three innings in his country of birth.

The left-handed Khawaja, who added 136 for the third wicket with Smith, appeared set for his 12th test hundred before Pakistan captain Babar Azam completed a one-handed catch at slip off spinner Sajid Khan.

Booters upbeat over Maldives tie

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh football team coach Javier Cabrera and captain Jamal Bhuiyan are anticipating a good result as they fly for the Maldives today to play a FIFA international friendly against the hosts on March 24.

"We're really convinced that we can do something important and looking forward to facing the Maldives," Cabrera said at a press conference at a hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

Bangladesh did not have a good time against the Maldivians in the past two decades and are yet to win on their soil. However, the men in red and green ended their 18-year winless streak against the island nation with a 2-1 win in their second match of the Mahinda Rajapaksa International Tournament in Colombo last year, a win which will give encouragement to Cabrera's charges.

What will also work in Bangladesh's favour is the absence of Maldives' talisman Ali Ashfaq, the forward too often ripping Bangladesh apart on his own. "Of course, Ali Ashfaq is one of the best players for the Maldives in the last 10 years. But the last match when we played against them in Sri Lanka, he was also

there and we won that match," Jamal said when asked whether the absence of Ashfaq would give Bangladesh an extra edge.

Since the departure of Jamie day, the booters were brought under the guidance of Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon and Portuguese coach Mario Lemos. Jamal hinted at some similarities of Cabrera with the recent Spanish gaffer. Nevertheless, he felt excited to work under Cabrera's unique set of tactical styles. "He has been a very hard worker from the day he arrived. He has seen a lot of club matches in the last three months and studied the players very well. He is clear about his objectives from the first day.

There are some differences from the other coaches we had in the past, you will see that in the match," the skipper said.

The Maldives is a home away from home for Bangladesh as so many Bangladeshi expats work there. Jamal and Co are looking forward to play in front of them while mentioning the recent complication regarding tickets in their SAFF encounter. "As a player you want your fans to support you on the field. So I think this time they should allow the Bengali fans to enter the stadium and support their team, otherwise, someone has to speak with the federation of Maldives," he concluded.



'BARCA IS BACK'

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang celebrates his second goal with teammates during Barcelona's 4-0 thrashing of rivals Real Madrid at Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday. Xavi Hernandez's side gave a football masterclass in a match they dominated from the start and which they arguably deserved to win by even more than four goals. "I'm delighted, it's a night to enjoy. Barca is back. Today we showed that we can fight against a great Real Madrid team that are on a roll and in their stadium. It is a great achievement to encourage us for the future of our project," Xavi told the reporters.

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