

Covid-19 rules Shakib out of first Test

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh suffered a major blow ahead of first Test against Sri Lanka, starting at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram from May 15, as all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was ruled out after testing positive for Covid-19.

Shakib was due to join the Bangladesh squad in Chattogram today. "As part of the Managed Event Environment (MEE) protocols for the series, Shakib underwent a PCR and rapid antigen test as a pre-requisite to joining the team. Both tests returned positive results today (Tuesday). He will now recover in isolation and will be re-tested in due course. He has been ruled out of the first Test," the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) informed in a statement yesterday.

It makes the task of forming a balanced team a more difficult task for Bangladesh team



As the news of Shakib Al Hasan being ruled out of the first Test due to Covid-19 broke yesterday, Bangladesh Test captain Mominul Haque chanced his arm with the ball in the nets. However, the onus during the match will very much be on the Tigers' struggling batter order, including the captain who made only 13 runs in four innings on the recent tour of South Africa.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Rain spoils first day of Lankans' warm-up

SPORTS REPORTER

The scenic and tranquil backdrop of the BKSP did not provide the much-needed time in the middle in Bangladeshi conditions that the Sri Lankans had sought on the first day of their two-day practice match against Bangladesh XI yesterday.

Incessant rain from the afternoon saw nearly the entirety of the first day's play called off, with only 38 minutes of play possible before rain hit. There were precursors ahead of the start of play at 10:00am, but when play started on time, there was hope in the Lankan camp in particular about a full day's play.

Sri Lanka skipper Dimuth Karunaratne had joined Asitha Fernando to open the innings and the visitors faced four overs each from Abu Jayed Rahi and Mukidul Islam Mugdho. Karunaratne did not get much of an opportunity to bat, falling to Mukidul after scoring two before rain hit after 8.3 overs with Sri Lanka at 14 for one. Another delivery was not bowled in the day.

While the umpires took an early lunch to counter the loss of time, the light drizzle soon gave way to heavy rain. Before play was called off, Karunaratne and Angelo Matthews headed to the indoor nets, batting batted against spin, in particular against left-arm spinner



Praveen Jayawickrama, who had been the destroyer-in-chief the last time Bangladesh played Sri Lanka in Tests.

While coach Mizanur Rahman rued the fact that the Bangladesh XI, consisting of some of the country's promising youngsters, did not get an opportunity to display their talents, selectors worried about weather leading up to the first Test in Chattogram.

The weather will be a concern for the time being as Cyclone Asani, named in Sri Lanka, brews over the bay. Heavy rainfall is expected and could play spoilsport for day two of the practice match while showers may hinder the start of the Test in Chattogram as well.

Meanwhile, the disheartening situation back home for Sri Lanka has led to the visitors averting media attention since landing in Bangladesh. Upon requesting

an interview, this reporter was told by coach Chris Silverwood that they 'didn't receive permission to talk to the media yet'.

Later, when the team manager was approached, he informed that they were likely to talk to the media after the first Test. The team management had contacted SLC higher-ups to get a status update on their media responsibilities but had received a 'no-go' signal, adding to the aura that the Lankans wanted a bubble around them. During their practice session at Mirpur a day before, media personnel were requested to stay away from practice facilities.

While many protocols were observed during the pandemic, the upcoming series will not be played in the environment of a bio-bubble. Seemingly, that did not apply to the Lankans as, despite testing negative for Covid-19, the side refrained from talking to journalists in close quarters. "We did test negative but we are in a bubble," a support staff said. Reminded there was no bio-bubble, the support staff replied: "That is for the Bangladesh side, but not us."

Despite shying away from media activities, team management sources informed that the players were in good spirits. That will come in handy, although the cricketers would have liked nothing more than to get some time in the middle.

Paddlers create history

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh clinched a gold medal for the first time in their South Asian Junior and Cadet Table Tennis Championships history as the paddlers in red and green beat their Sri Lankan counterparts 3-2 in the boys' U-19 team final in Male, Maldives yesterday.

The Bangladesh team -- featuring Muhtasin Ahmed Ridoy, Ramhim Lion Bom and Nafis Iqbal -- initially led the five-game match 2-0 but Sri Lanka team, comprising Chanul, Thisara and Hiruna, bounced back to level the margin in the next two matches. In the deciding match, Bangladesh national champion Ridoy held his nerves to steer Bangladesh into a new chapter in its sporting history.

It was Ridoy who put Bangladesh on the front foot by winning 11-9, 13-11, 9-11 and 11-6 before Ramhim capitalised on the momentum despite losing the first set 12-10 as he won the next three sets 13-11, 11-8 and 11-6.

Sri Lanka found steam from then on as Nafis lost in straight sets in game three with scores of 11-9, 12-10 and 11-3. The fourth set saw Ramhim go down 13-11, 9-11, 11-9 and 11-4 without much fight. In the end, Ridoy was there to pull off the rescue act and even though the national champion lost the first set 11-8, he trumped the next three in identical score-lines of 11-9.



Hockey captain not content yet

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national hockey team captain Rezaul Karim Babu said that their mission has not been completed yet with the Asian Games berth following a 3-1 win over Sri Lanka in their qualifying campaign in Bangkok yesterday.

"We feel really good as we confirmed the Asian Games berth but our mission has not been completed yet. We have just successfully completed the first step of our mission but our mission will be completed if we win the tournament," Babu told The Daily Star over phone. "We could not play according to our plan because of player-shortage due to card problems during the match. We had to play with 10 or nine players for 19 minutes. The weather and bumpy pitch were other reasons for not performing well," he added. The second successive win took the men in red and green to the semifinals of the nine-team qualifiers with a match in hand against Singapore, which will be played on May 12.

The charges of Iman Gobinathan Krishnamurthy initially some challenge from an ever-improving Sri Lanka team before Bangladesh took the lead in the 18th minute through Ashraf Islam's penalty corner and they doubled the margin in the 23rd minute, with Khorsheer Rahman converting a penalty stroke.

Sri Lanka pulled back a goal in the 44th minute to bring some excitement into the match before Bangladesh took the match away with Roman Sarkar scoring the team's third goals in the 53rd minute, keeping Bangladesh's nine-year winning run over the island nation intact.



City confirm Haaland deal

AGENCIES, Manchester

Manchester City have reached an agreement to sign striker Erling Haaland from Borussia Dortmund yesterday, the Premier League club said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The transfer remains subject to the Club finalising terms with the player," City said.

City did not provide financial details of the deal but German media reported that the total cost of buying Haaland in a multi-year deal could exceed 300 million euros, including his salary, agent fees and bonuses. It was widely reported that City will pay just €60 million to activate the striker's release clause at Borussia Dortmund.

The relatively low fee also means the Norwegian may find a place among City's top earners, alongside De Bruyne, who makes about £400,000 a week.

The 21-year-old Norway striker's value has skyrocketed thanks to his prolific form at Dortmund after joining them from Austrian side Salzburg two years ago. Halaand scored 41 goals in as many games in all competitions last season.

The son of former Nottingham Forest, Leeds United and City midfielder Alf Inge Haaland, Haaland began his career at Bryne and Molde in Norway, then spent a year with Austria's Red Bull Salzburg before joining Dortmund in January



2020.

He has scored 85 goals in 88 appearances there, and despite interest from the likes of Real Madrid, Barcelona, Bayern Munich and Paris Saint-Germain, the reigning English champions and current leaders find themselves on the brink of sealing a sensational move.

The move will be a setback for Borussia Dortmund, but while club CEO Hans-Joachim Watzke launched a tirade against state-backed clubs, he also had a message of hope for supporters.

"We have played football for 113 years, and for 111 years, we played without Erling Haaland. We had Robert Lewandowski and then he left us in 2014, but we played football in '15, '16, '17 until now," Watzke said on Monday. "Then next came Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang and then Erling Haaland and you can be sure if Erling decides to leave us, we will find the next [player] 100 per cent."

"When a player performs really well, we have to fight against the big, big clubs with the oligarchs and the Arab states at their back. And this fight we cannot win, but we can win a fight over an 18-year-old player, like Jude Bellingham, because this player loves to play at Borussia Dortmund because we have always 80,000 spectators, it's a very good atmosphere and the club knows how to manage young players."



Lionel Messi arrived in Jeddah on Monday after the Saudi Tourism Authority announced that the Paris Saint-Germain and Argentina footballer is its new official brand ambassador. Messi arrived at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah, accompanied by a group of friends including his PSG teammate Leandro Paredes. Later the Argentine star posted pictures of himself enjoying sights and sounds of Saudi Arabia.

PHOTO: TWITTER