

Bangladesh cricket team's pace bowling coach Allan Donald gets off the team bus at the hotel with golf kits in his hand following a golfing session with the rest of the foreign coaching staff at the Bhatia Golf and Country Club in Chattogram yesterday. The team had no training session yesterday as inclement weather continued across the country ahead of the first Test between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, starting on May 15.

PHOTO:
FIROZ AHMED



Shakib's absence brightens spotlight on Test approach

SPORTS REPORTER

It was Bangladesh Test skipper Mominul Haque who had said during an interview with this reporter that his side had adopted a different strategy in the Mount Maunganui Test in the absence of experienced batters in the line-up, barring him and Mushfiqur Rahim.

That reality has concocted itself once more as ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was ruled out of the first Test against Sri Lanka from May 15 after having tested positive for Covid-19. The all-rounder will likely join the side after testing negative.

Tamim Iqbal, who also missed that tour of New Zealand, is available to bolster the squad. But will Mominul and Co. look to adopt a similar strategy without key players like Shakib and Mehedi Hasan Miraz?

The different strategy in question was more in line with a proper Test approach, which was on display at Mount Maunganui. So, although Shakib's absence will be of concern to the team management, they must find ways to overcome that experience and in that regard the last few Tests are good representatives of the idea of life without Shakib.

Last year, Shakib was injured during

the first Test against West Indies in Chattogram and missed the latter stages of the match where Kyle Myers wreaked havoc to seal a memorable win for the visitors. He then missed the second Test at Mirpur which Bangladesh lost by 17 runs.

When the IPL kept Shakib from playing the two-Test series away to Sri Lanka in April-May last year, the Tigers lost 1-0. Shakib then played the lone Test in Zimbabwe in July before missing the first Test against Pakistan in Chattogram in November. He made it back in time for the second Test, which Bangladesh lost by an innings and eight runs despite Shakib's contribution with the bat.

The premier all-rounder has missed all four Tests this year. He did not travel to New Zealand and had to return from South Africa due to personal reasons ahead of the Test series.

After Shakib was ruled out of the upcoming first Test against Sri Lanka, it led to Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan ruling their 'bad luck' yesterday.

"It's bad luck that we will not get him for the first Test [against Sri Lanka]. We miss his services whenever we need him. We can now only wish for his recovery," Nazmul said.

However, Bangladesh have lost



with Shakib in the team as well. Many involved in the country's cricket realise that Bangladesh are not a good Test side despite their epic win in Mount Maunganui.

The BCB boss himself has said over several media appearances lately that seniors in the side have to prepare themselves and choose which formats they may need to opt out of with workload management and team-building on the agenda.

Reading between the lines, is it time for the team management to take a hint from their own cues?

Many cricketers have been left disappointed at the attention Shakib's absence garners at times when the other

eleven players needed to mentally prepare for a key series. With the confidence of the Mount Maunganui win, the team has found some fresh talent to mould and bank on.

There was concern and discussion among the players in Chattogram after they separately heard that Shakib had been ruled out. For the team management too, going in without Shakib makes a huge difference tactically since the left-armers opens the door for five bowlers in the side.

The cricketers had a rest day yesterday with no training. Team director Khaled Mahmud left for Dhaka yesterday morning but was expected to return in the evening. It was learned that the team management would have a discussion with the players regarding their strategy to cope with Shakib's absence.

"We haven't discussed his absence as a side yet but we knew individually. Everyone is ready [to fill the gap]," pacer Rejaur Rahman Raja said yesterday.

The players will be keen to deliver and stake their places and in Shakib's absence could also appear to the team management as an opportunity to solidify their Test approach and ready the team to go forward when the experienced players are missing.

Kohli's volley at criticism

AFP, New Delhi

Out-of-form Virat Kohli says that he has a sure-fire way of drowning out his growing number of critics – he just mutes the television.

The 33-year-old former India skipper has endured an extended batting slump for Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League and fell for his third golden duck of the season on Sunday.

Commentators have said that the usually prolific batsman looks "overcooked" and needs a break, but in a mostly light-hearted video on Bangalore's website Kohli said that he has learnt to drown out those who criticise him.

"They can't be in my shoes, they can't feel what I feel, they can't live my life, they can't live those moments," Kohli said of analysts attempting to write him off. "How do you cut out the noise?"

You either mute the TV or don't listen to or pay attention to what people are saying. I do both of these things."

After his latest golden duck, when he flicked the opening delivery of the match to Sunrisers Hyderabad skipper Kane Williamson, Kohli walked off with a wry smile. The host of the video joked that Kohli has two ducks, a reference to how the batsman got out twice in a row to first balls earlier this season. "It hasn't happened to me ever in my career, I think. I have seen everything now. It's been so long, I have seen everything in this game," Kohli said with a grin.



'Angry' Gundogan won't watch CL final

AGENCIES

Ilkay Gundogan will find other ways to keep himself occupied when Liverpool face Real Madrid in the Champions League final as he is still "angry" at Manchester City's exit.

City were eliminated at the semifinal stage last week with a remarkable 6-5 aggregate defeat to Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Last season's beaten finalists, who have yet to win UEFA's showpiece competition, were ahead 5-3 in the tie with less than a minute of normal time remaining in the Spanish capital before Rodrygo scored twice and Karim Benzema netted an extra-time penalty. And while he openly admits to being obsessed with all things football,

Gundogan has no intention of tuning in to watch City's conquerors Madrid take on Liverpool in Paris.

"If I think about the final in Paris then I get very angry," he told the Daily Mail. "Frustrated, disappointed. I'm definitely not going to watch it."

"I will definitely try to do something else that day. Nothing is going to really help; the only thing that will is time."

"It's becoming a little bit easier, even though you know – yet again – you've missed a big chance to lift a possible trophy."

He added: "Maybe there's not much we can tell ourselves that we did wrong but at the end of the day, we conceded two goals in two minutes."

"We were not there when it was necessary and we were not focused enough. It was not enough. That is the blame we give ourselves."



Eighty-five make memories worth a lifetime

SPORTS REPORTER

The Youth and Sports Ministry yesterday recognised 85 individuals for their contributions to Bangladesh sport between 2013 and 2022, awarding them National Sports Awards at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the presence of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who attended virtually.

Each awardee received an 18-carat gold medal, one lakh taka and a certificate, handed over to veterans and youngsters alike by State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel on behalf of the Prime Minister.

The auditorium was teeming with former stars and dedicated organisers, leading to many mingling ahead of the start of the programme. There were also plenty of photos taken to preserve the memories of receiving the highest sporting recognition from the state.

"I feel deeply lucky to be meeting my nearest and dearest, especially the Abahani footballers, cricketers and hockey players, after such a long gap. I am really happy to see them again," Swadhin Bangla Football Team manager Tanvir Mazhar Islam Tanna, one of the recipients of the award, said after the programme.

"As a freedom fighter, I'm happy to get this prestigious award. I want to dedicate



this award to the Swadhin Bangla Football team, whose members risked their lives to cross borders and represent the nation during the liberation war," added Tanna, who also played an important role in cricket.

Another recipient, former Bangladesh Cricket Board secretary Moazzafar Ahmed Poltu, said: "Any recognition is always a pleasure. Despite getting the award after



PHOTO: BSS

such a delay, I am happy because late is better than never.

"Bangabandhu made me the secretary of the Bangladesh Cricket Board and, under his leadership, I tried to lift cricket from a poor state and keep the game alive. Many wanted to stop cricket, opining that it was a luxurious and time-consuming game for lords."

Seven-time fastest woman Sultana

Parveen Lovely, another awardee, said: "I think I should have received this award before because I was more successful as a sprinter at the domestic and international levels than some athletes who received this award before me."

Meanwhile, athletics coach Rafiq Ullah Akhtar Milon was ecstatic to get recognition.

"Schools are the breeding grounds

of sport and local coaches like me have been working hard to groom players and push them to the district, divisional and national level gradually. We have also been working to accommodate athletes in different services teams. But grassroots coaches are often ignored. I am happy that I have been recognised. I would urge authorities to consider grassroots organisers more when it comes to awards. Then, the wheel of sports will turn smoothly."

Former FIFA referee Tayeb Hasan Shamsuddin expressed his desire to disburse his prize money to benefit the children suffering from malnutrition in Shatkira's coastal areas.

As an eight-year span was considered, some awardees were recognised posthumously. Nadia Rahmatullah accepted an award on behalf of her husband, national hockey player Khaza Rahmatullah.

"Receiving this award is a pleasure for me, but it's also painful. I would not have received this award if it was given timely. Rahmatullah got this award in 2015, but he left us in 2016. No one would have been happier than me if he could have received this award himself," said Nadia, who also appreciated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's instructions to hold the national awards each year.