

Fit or unfit, Shakib gets a say

SPORTS REPORTER

News arrived yesterday morning that Shakib Al Hasan had tested negative for Covid-19 and immediately there were murmurs that the all-rounder would be available for the first Test against Sri Lanka at Chattogram, starting tomorrow. On Tuesday, Shakib had tested positive for the virus, which all but ruled him out of the first Test at Chattogram following his return from USA.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan had dropped by at the team hotel yesterday morning and there he informed that Shakib had undergone an antigen test and PCR test the previous night, confirming he had tested negative on both.

“He called me at 1:30am to say that he tested negative and I told him that he would have to test negative in a BCB-approved testing facility. I heard he tested negative again this morning,” Nazmul told the media yesterday.

“It’s difficult to say whether he will play. It depends on him, the team and his physical fitness.



There is nothing to be emotional about,” Nazmul said of the situation.

Shakib will undergo a medical check-up to get an update on whether he is fit enough to play the first Test. As things stand, he will get one practice session before the match.

“If he wants to play, he definitely will,” Nazmul had said in the morning. Drawing a clear picture of the situation, Nazmul added ‘the team is going on with the scenario that Shakib is not there, if he is, it’s a plus point’.

There are decisions to be made, but it can be ascertained that all will be done to make Shakib available. The difficulty of this topsy-turvy situation on the team management could be found in head coach Russell Domingo’s remark: “Anybody would want a fully fit Shakib in your best XI. It is very difficult to play if he is 50-60 per cent fit.”



Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo seems relaxed as he is having a chat with the Tigers’ Test skipper Mominul Haque during a practice session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. After recent batting debacles, the Tigers’ team management will have to come up with a different approach for their two-match Test series against Sri Lanka.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Plan to ‘stop the rot’

SPORTS REPORTER FROM CHATTOGRAM

“When we have a bad session, we have a really bad session. If we lose one or two wickets, that can’t turn into losing five. It is something we are trying to address all the time. We are trying to stay calm in the dressing room so that the batsmen stop the rot,” Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo said about his side’s batting debacles in their past few Tests.

Despite being in advantageous positions, Bangladesh lost wickets in a hurry against Pakistan in Chattogram and then again in Dhaka. They struggled in South Africa against spin, losing wickets towards the close of play or in clusters during certain sessions. When one or two wickets go, it usually paves the way for more to follow and Domingo said they were working on a game plan to unsettle the opposition bowlers.

A few scoring shots from Mahmudul Hasan Joy were cheered on by players during a practice session yesterday and the governing idea may have been to dictate terms against spinners by using their feet more prominently. Instead of boundary balls, the team had about waiting with a more positive approach.

“It is all about sticking to a game plan,” Domingo said before the practice session. “I think the important thing is to try to get singles to get off strike. Whether that means we are using the paddle, using our feet or going deep in the crease. Maybe we are just blocking and looking for the four-ball a bit much.

“Against Pakistan we were 200 ahead and then we lost wickets. Against the West Indies, we probably should have won the [Chattogram] Test when they chased down 395. We won the Test in New Zealand. We played really well in the first four days in the Durban Test. The challenge is to sustain that in the second Test. I definitely think we have the ability to beat any side if we play really well for the full five days. Not for four days.

RUSSELL DOMINGO

Domingo felt positively about the wicket at Chattogram and also pointed out that the bounce that spinners get on Bangladeshi surfaces would not be a headache.

“I think they don’t struggle against left-arm spin because the wickets don’t bounce as much in Bangladesh, but they struggle

against bounce that spinners get away from Bangladesh. Generally, wickets stay low in Bangladesh, so they get leg before and bowled. In foreign conditions, the ball spins and you might get one from the bat to the pad and caught in the slips.”

Even batters such as Yasir Ali put in a session with the ball yesterday. Bangladesh’s main dilemma hinges on whether Shakib Al Hasan will be available after returning a negative test for Covid-19 yesterday, opening the door for five bowlers.

“I think we need to consider someone who can bowl. Yasir has played some really good innings for us, but we need to find someone who can bowl 10-15 overs. I am not sure if [Test captain] Mominul [Haque] is confident of bowling 10-15 overs. Nazmul Hossain Shanto is not quite there to bowl 6-7 overs a day. Teams that have got that guy who can bat at number six or seven and bowl 10-15 overs a day are more balanced. We need to find that person when Shakib is not there. When he is there, easy. But he has not been there much,” Domingo added.

Shakib’s absence could definitely open the door for Mosaddek Hossain’s inclusion since it gives the side added depth with the bat, especially with the other spinning all-rounder Mehedi Miraz unavailable for the first Test.

“He [Mosaddek] is definitely in consideration to play if Shakib is not playing,” Domingo said as Tigers look for a solution in case Shakib does not make the playing eleven.

‘Expect our batters to do the job’

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne expects his batters to do the job in the first of the two-match Test series against Bangladesh, starting from tomorrow at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram.

There has been a lot of speculation over the Chattogram surface. But Karunaratne stated that they do not expect a lot of assistance for spinners in the first Test.

“I think we have a good batting line-up. We’ve shown that in the previous series. In the last series, we played against Bangladesh in Sri Lanka and we performed very well. In Chittagong, we expect it to be a batting-friendly wicket without much turn,” said Karunaratne to the media yesterday.

“About a 1100 runs were scored the last time we played here. And from what we gather, we don’t expect much help for the spinners. If you compare both the sides, I think we have a good batting line-up, and I expect our batters to do the job,” added Karunaratne.

The two-match Test series against Bangladesh will be Chris Silverwood’s first assignment as the head coach since the Sri Lankan cricket board made drastic changes in the coaching panel recently.



Once again there were questions whether the players were concerned over the current turmoil in Sri Lanka.

“Everyone knows what’s happening there. But we’re here to play cricket, and we’re focused on that. The only thing we can do is give the people back home a good result. That’s our only concern at the moment,” he said.

Ctg Abahani get back to winning ways

SPORTS REPORTER

Chittagong Abahani bounced back to winning ways in the Bangladesh Premier League as they beat bottom-placed Swadhinata KS 3-2 at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

Chittagong Abahani, who started the second leg of the league being in the third position with 21 points, have rebounded from two draws and one defeat as they edged a thrilling contest that produced five goals in the final 16 minutes.

After a goalless first half, Nigerian forward Candy Augustine Agbane gave Abahani a lead in the 73rd minute. It was, however, canceled out by a Sabbir Hossain strike in the 76th minute.

But Abahani found a way back as Ebimbowei Thankgod, the league’s top scorer, struck a brace in space of three minutes to give the port city side a 3-1 lead. Bishal Das reduced the margin for Swadhinata KS in the 90th minute but could not avert their 11th loss in 15 outings.

Ctg Abahani are now in the fifth position with 26 points while Swadhinata linger at the bottom with six points.

Meanwhile, Muktijoddha Sangsad and Uttar Baridhara Club played out a 1-1 draw at the Sheikh Fazul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj. Soma Otanj gave the freedom fighters’ side a 27-minute lead before Youssouf Bamba levelled the margin in the 68th minute.

Can Shanto realise value of the No. 3?

BISHWAJIT ROY

How good is Najmul Hossain Shanto as the number three batter, a position that consistently demands the widest range of skills?

“He is equally good against spin and pace. At this moment, he is our best option at this vital batting position,” said former national captain turned selector Habibul Bashar, who holds the record of playing the most matches for Bangladesh (43) at the number three slot.

Veteran coach and trusted confidant to many of the country’s cricketers, Nazmul Abedin Fahim, opined: “He is not the ideal option when you take his batting philosophy into consideration, but I suppose there is no better option for the team at the moment.”

There has been plenty of discussion about the need to find a settled opening pair, but there are hardly any discussions regarding this very difficult position.

Mominul has played second highest number of matches (28) at No. 3 after Bashar while Najmul has so far played 13 matches. Overall, Bangladesh have tested

out 23 batters at the position across 130 matches, including four nightwatchmen, since gaining Test status.

The think-tank has not had much of a vision to groom someone for this position but the overall stats suggest the current team management is ready to put money on Shanto.

Having played 24 innings in 13 matches, how much confidence does Shanto provide to selectors and pundits? Could he be the answer for a position that requires him to be the most adaptable player in the side?

“Number three is a very important position and a settled batter here can change the

scenario of the whole team. Unfortunately, nobody has been able to settle. We have been trying out Shanto and he has shown glimpses, but I’m sorry to say he is still not the answer,” Bashar elaborated.

“A number three batter needs to face every situation. He may need to carry on after a good start or repair an innings after an early setback. In all aspects, a long innings is required the most from a number three batter and so he has to be good technically proficient. Shanto is a very good batter, against both pace and spin, but he is yet to be consistent enough despite a few good knocks. He looked good because of his



stroke-play, but there is no point if you are not effective here.”

However, Nazmul had a different outlook on Shanto’s credential as a number three.

“You must be a most compact batter if you want to be successful in this very demanding position. The question is: how compact is Shanto as a batter? He is a very good batter, no doubt, but he is basically a stroke-maker. You need deeper insight, but I am not sure

pointed out that number three batters were undervalued in the domestic circuit due to a lack of understanding their importance, stressing they would need greater focus at that level to develop the proper mentality for a number three.

“Yes, there is a dearth of intellectual input in the domestic circuit about the value and importance of a number three batter, which hinders the development of the characteristics of a number three batter. But an individual player can also develop by developing their mental skills. Admittedly, Shanto has some deficiencies now, but he can make the most of the opportunity. He just needs to change his attitude and become more analytical,” Nazmul added.

During an interview with this newspaper, Shanto also gave the impression that he was very much aware about the value and challenge that this batting position brings. Can the left-hander add some value to the order and establish himself as the ‘answer’ during the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka at home?

- Bangladesh have so far played 23 players in the number three position in Tests, with four of them being sent down as nightwatchman.
- Former skipper Habibul Bashar has been the most successful in the number three position, scoring 2523 runs at 31.93 average.
- Apart from those performing the nightwatchman role, Bangladesh played nine players in the crucial position for just one game.
- **Najmul Hossain Shanto, the current number three batter for the Tigers, has batted in that position 13 times and scored at an average of 32.69.