

## Chase for penultimate place

REUTERS, DOHA

Australia and Peru both came through playoffs to qualify for the last World Cup, but only one of them will advance this time round when they meet in their inter-continental playoff in Doha on Monday for a place at this year's finals in Qatar.

Australia qualified for the 2018 finals by beating Honduras over two legs while Peru edged New Zealand for their place in Russia.

This time, however, the two have been drawn to play each other in a single match at the Ahmed bin Ali Stadium at Al Rayyan, one of the venues for the finals in November and December.

Australia have already come through a tense playoff, edging the United Arab Emirates at the same venue on Monday to clinch fifth place in the Asian qualifiers.

That earned them the right to go up against Peru, who came fifth in South America's super group.

Australia snatched success last week through Ajdin Hrustic's winner six



## No. 3 and 4 key to Tigers' batting stability

SPORTS REPORTER

Ahead of Bangladesh's two-Test series against the West Indies, all eyes were on the Tigers' top-order in their three-day warm-up game against CWI President's XI in Antigua that concluded yesterday. However, other than Tamim Iqbal's unbeaten 162, there weren't many highlights for the Tigers in the batting department.

There has long been a concern regarding Bangladesh's opening slot. With young Mahmudul Hasan Joy showing glimpses in his first few outings, the quest to find a stable opening partner for Tamim seemed to have come to an end.

Joy, who is still in the early stages of his career, must keep his tendency to play away from the body in check if the youngster hopes to make his mark in the tough Windies tour.

Even if Joy manages to rein in his penchant for playing away from his body, the major area of concern for the Tigers will be their number three and four position in the batting line-up. In fact, these two spots have been a point of vulnerability for Bangladesh in the longest format of the game for some time now.

The team management has pinned their hopes on young Najmul Hossain Shanto to provide stability at number three and the left-hander did get a few starts before failing in the last home series against Sri Lanka, scoring in single digits in four innings.

He did score a fifty in the practice game. But in order to strengthen the Tigers' fragile top-order, Shanto will need to do much more than that and provide Bangladesh the platform to score big.

More than flaws in his technique, questions have been raised over Shanto's decision-making as the 23-year-old has often dug a hole for himself by not being able to contain his urge to play shots even when the situation demanded a safe approach.

Tigers' batting coach Jamie Siddons, however, backed Shanto before travelling to the Caribbean. The Australian believed in Shanto's potential and mentioned that the team management is likely to give the youngster another chance and play him in the first Test in Antigua, starting from June 16.

On the other hand, Mominul Haque, who stepped down from his role as the Test captain following massive criticism

for his poor run of form, was unable to see any turn of fortune as the left-hander was unable to open his account even in the warm-up game.

Mominul will be under constant scrutiny in the Windies series, especially as the left-hander has only managed to produce single-digit scores in his last seven innings. The absence of the experienced Mushfiqur Rahim also means that Bangladesh would desperately need Mominul to step up.

According to many, with the burden of captaincy non-existent, the 30-year-old will be able to play freely and express himself better in the challenging Caribbean condition where Tigers' batters have always struggled in the past.

Much like the entire Bangladesh team, Mominul would also want to improve his record in the West Indies. The left-hander has only scored 138 runs in eight innings at an average of 17.25 in the Caribbean.

The two-match Test series in the West Indies will be a new beginning for skipper Shakib Al Hasan as well. And whether it will be a successful tour for Bangladesh and Shakib will heavily depend on how batters at number three and four in the line-up fare.

## Windies series broadcast uncertain

SPORTS REPORTER

With less than four days before the first Test of the two-match series between Bangladesh and West Indies, scheduled to take place in Antigua from June 16, it remains uncertain whether the Tigers fans could watch the games live on TV.

Total Sports Marketing holds the broadcast rights of the West Indies Bangladesh series, where Bangladesh are set to play two Tests -- part of the ICC Test Championship -- three T20I and three ODIs but no TV channel has officially acquired the broadcast rights yet.

Normally, T Sports and Gazi TV broadcast the Tigers' games. However, the two local Bangladeshi channels have not yet come up with an agreement to telecast the games.

According to the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) chairman of the media committee, Tanvir Ahmed Titu, the BCB can hardly do anything to resolve the broadcast crisis.

"I hope that our TV channels which generally show live cricket will step up and communicate with the broadcasters to find a resolution," he said.

## Ibrahim concerned about set-piece defending

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh found the back of the opposition net for the first time in five matches when winger Mohammad Ibrahim equalised against Turkmenistan in an Asian Cup Qualifying tie in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday, but the forward is more concerned about the team's habit of letting in goals from set-piece situations.

The men in red and green eventually lost the match 2-1 defeat to the 134th-ranked team, who capitalised on the shaky Bangladesh backline to score the winning goal in the second half.

"You can't blame the defence only for conceding the second goal because defending is the job of the whole team. We have to perform well collectively in defending," Ibrahim told reporters after yesterday's practice session in Malaysia.

"We have to be more focused on set-pieces as we conceded three out of four goals from set-pieces in last two matches despite having good defending organisation," said the Bashundhara Kings winger.

"The goal I scored may encourage me to think about scoring more but that strike has no value as we lost the match. So I'm not getting carried away with scoring the goal," said the lad from Cox's Bazar.

"The coach [Javier Cabrera] is always positive as we are gradually improving. We also need time to adjust with the ideas of the new coach, who is using almost the same formation that Jamie Day used to do," said Ibrahim, who is determined to make it hard for Malaysia in the next match on Tuesday.

## Federer hopes to continue in 2023

AFP, Lausanne

Swiss tennis great Roger Federer said he hopes to recover from his latest knee surgery and get back on the ATP circuit next season.

"How, why and to do what, I don't yet know, but that would be the idea," the 20-time Grand Slam title winner and former world number one told Swiss daily Tagesanzeiger in an interview published on Sunday.

Federer, who will be 41 in August,

has not played since a quarter-final defeat at Wimbledon almost a year ago and his latest knee surgery was his third in 18 months.

"I myself am curious to see what will follow," Federer said. "But I have hope, I have already come a long way. I'm not far. The next three or four months will be extremely important."

Federer told Swiss broadcaster SRF on Saturday

that he is "currently focusing on (his) physical condition, so that there is no overload" and goes to the gym "five to six times a week".

He is aiming for a return to action at the Laver Cup in London from September 23-25 and then his hometown tournament of Basel from October 24-30.

Federer, the winner of 103 trophies over his career, played only 13 matches in 2021 and just six in 2020. He is currently ranked 50th in ATP standings, his lowest in 22 years.



## Pope, Root tons lead England

# FIGHTBACK

AFP, NOTTINGHAM

Ollie Pope hit his highest Test score of 142 not out and Joe Root swaggered to an unbeaten 109 as England raced to 331-2 against New Zealand at tea on the third day of the second Test at Trent Bridge.

Replying to New Zealand's mammoth first innings score of 553, Pope and Root took full advantage of a docile pitch to ease the pressure on England.

Thanks to the pair's commanding displays, England will expect to get close to New Zealand's total in a match that could be destined for a high-scoring draw.

Pope's second Test century, and his first on English soil, came after he was handed a surprise promotion to number three by England captain Ben Stokes at the start of the series.

It was Pope's first Test ton since scoring 135 not out in South Africa in January 2020.

The 24-year-old's England place has been in serious doubt at times in the last few years due to shoulder injuries and a lack of form.

But, batting in a position he had never previously featured in for England or Surrey prior to the first Test, Pope has repaid the faith of Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum.

Freed of the oppressive shackles of the England

captaincy after handing the role to Stokes earlier this year, Root was in vibrant mood himself as he unfurled his full array of strokes in his 27th Test century. Needing only 116 balls to reach his fastest Test ton, Root has picked up where he left off at Lord's with a second successive century.

His match-winning 115 not out led England to a thrilling five-wicket victory over the Test world champions in the opening game of the three-match series. Earlier, Alex Lees compiled his highest Test score of 67 before becoming the only England batsman to perish in Sunday's first two



sessions.

Daryl Mitchell's Test-best 190 and Tom Blundell's 106 on Saturday had put New Zealand in pole position.

But England were able to replicate New Zealand's success in conditions perfectly suited to batting. Lees had resumed on 34, while Pope had made 51 not out overnight, with both having survived a dropped catch by Mitchell on Saturday.

Lees, who had a top score of 31 from his first eight Test innings, reached an assured 50 in 109 balls with a composed clip to the boundary.

But, losing his concentration after the drinks break, Lees needlessly chased a wide ball from Matt Henry and edged it to Mitchell in the slips.