

## Donald demands aggression from his quicks

SPORTS REPORTER

Although the pitch at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium is historically known to favour spinners, the Bangladesh fast-bowling coach Allan Donald reckons there is still some room for the hosts' quicks to make an impact in the second and final Test against India, starting from today.

There is a growing belief among the Bangladeshi pacers since Ebadot Hossain led the Tigers to a historic win against New Zealand at Mount Maunganui to begin the year before the inclusion of Donald in the coaching panel in March has added that extra punch.

The 'White Lightning' referred to how the English seamers performed in Pakistan to help clinch the series 3-0 for the visitors. He remained optimistic of Bangladesh pacers to bring in such aggression alongside the spinners and make an impact



Bangladesh batter Zakir Hasan looks to follow up his good work from Chattogram after making a debut hundred, while [Below] Indian batting stalwart Virat Kohli will try to return among big runs, as the second and final Test kicks off today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Focus on 'cashing in' early in Dhaka Test

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head into the second Test against India today, 1-0 down in the series, having never won a Test match against the Asian Powerhouse in the toughest format of the game.

Having beaten sides like England and Australia at home, Bangladesh will hope to surprise the visitors in a surface where run-scoring is slow but picking wickets is also a challenge as bowling sides had found out.

Despite good batting conditions, Bangladesh struggled against India in the first innings in Chattogram and the focus here is to keep themselves in the game and cash in on a good start.

Having started the year with a historic win at Mount Maunganui against defending champions New Zealand, the Tigers lost seven of the eight Tests this year, managing one draw. Pace-bowling coach Allan Donald was bold enough to say that they wanted to finish the year with a win.

"We want to win. It doesn't matter where you play India, you put that in your highest order of achievements," Donald said in a press conference yesterday.

"We know 150 didn't cut it for us. We have spoken about the values of our partnership. We need to be much more resilient, which we showed in the second innings. We are desperate to win. A lot of people including me want to go home for a delayed Christmas with a win under



our belt.

"The second innings batting is a blueprint for us. The young man [Zakir Hasan] has surprised many. It is the first time I have seen Zakir. I love his attitude, boldness and attacking mindset. He has come to play. He showed that he can take on the very best bowlers," he added.

It will be interesting to see whether Nurul Hasan continues behind the stumps as Liton Das was seen going through the gears ahead of the Dhaka Test. Donald said he was not certain but 'everyone wants to keep sharp in case he has to keep.' The top-order performances may see Mominul Haque

return with no Anamul Haque in the squad and Yasir Ali's not finding runs at number three.

The biggest news for the Tigers was that ace all-rounder and skipper Shakib Al Hasan was fit to play and bowl in the Dhaka Test, having been rendered unable to bowl in the second innings at Chattogram due to rib injury. Thus, Tigers will have their three-pronged spin attack with Taskin Ahmed replacing injured Ebadot Hossain among the pace options.

The pitch became one of the focal points of both side's press conferences, with the low bounce in Chattogram leaving its mark on the first Test. Turn will be on offer for spinners, with Donald saying Shakib will come into play.

"Pitch looks fairly dry so you have to cash in first innings. It is your only chance to set the Test match up in the first innings. If we bowl, we have also shown that in the first innings when we had India 48 for three," he said about cashing in early with pitch set to deteriorate over the course of the game.

India batting coach Vikram Rathour was confident in his batters' ability to handle spin, adding there was nothing special in terms of tactical preparation. "We are expecting this to have more bounce and more turn, may be. We will see how it goes," he said.

There has been only one drawn Test at Dhaka since 2015. "I am sure this game will be decided," Rathour said as his side aim for a clean sweep.

## Rivals lack batters to copy 'Bazball', says Atherton

REUTERS, London

England's entertaining brand of Test cricket will be difficult to imitate because other teams do not boast of a similar group of swashbuckling batters, believes former captain Mike Atherton.

England's 3-0 series sweep in Pakistan on Tuesday is further validation of their 'Bazball' approach under the dynamic coach-captain duo of Brendon McCullum and Ben Stokes.

Under them, England have now won nine of their 10 Tests playing fearless cricket, especially with the bat.

"There is no question other teams have taken note, the more interesting question is whether other teams will get sucked into trying to copy England," Atherton told Sky Sports.

"My own view is as a captain; you try to work out what your resources are and the best way to win a game.

"Other teams may not have the kind of gung-ho batsmen England have and may not be able to replicate that kind of approach."

Stokes has said England are just not interested in draws and would not mind an occasional defeat in their single-minded pursuit for victory.

"Whether other teams will get sucked in remains to be seen, but certainly the days of England and others playing really attritional, dead cricket are gone - and people will probably say thank goodness for that," Atherton added.

## Mbappe returns to training

AFP, Paris

France star Kylian Mbappe returned to training with Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday just three days after he ended up on the losing side despite scoring a hat-trick in the World Cup final.

The 24-year-old cast a despondent figure in the aftermath of France's loss to Argentina - led by his PSG team-mate Lionel Messi - in a penalty shootout, despite his goals twice bringing the 2018 champions level.

However, although PSG players have been given 10 days off Mbappe was pictured at the French champions training ground.



against a strong Indian side.

"I have always used the reference of the England fast bowlers' mindset in Pakistan: how they get themselves involved in the contest," said Donald yesterday.

"Despite three spinners, you have a free ride to be a bit more expansive as a quick. You can bowl short and full for longer. You can put everything on the table for four overs. If you saw how Siraj or Umesh bowled, they either went very short or attacked.

"They had people in catching positions. The ball was slightly reversing. You know what you will get with a spinner, so we want to see us being a little more attacking. It is not easy to duck on these pitches. So, if you have a bit of pace, you can be a little more expansive and aggressive," he added.

The 56-year-old also said the Tigers cannot afford to present life to India's batting mainstays, as they did in Chattogram.

"They are the prized wickets (Virat Kohli and KL Rahul). It is like when [Sachin] Tendulkar walks to the crease, you know the value of getting it right is absolutely paramount.

"When the great Kohli steps up and you miss a chance against him, you suffer. They don't give many chances after that. I thought we were very good against Kohli and KL," he said.



The Argentina coaching staff led by Lionel Scaloni masterfully operated throughout their World Cup-winning journey, especially after the shocking Saudi Arabia loss to kick off their campaign. Argentina captain Lionel Messi, who would be the last person to forget that, posed for a photo with the coaches in Buenos Aires on Tuesday.

PHOTO: STAR

## 'MESSI THE BEST even without World Cup'

REUTERS

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has no doubt that Lionel Messi is the greatest player of all time and his opinion would not change even if the forward had not guided Argentina to the World Cup title in Qatar, the Spaniard said on Wednesday.

Messi scored two goals and again in the shootout as he led Argentina to an emotional 4-2 win on penalties over France on Sunday, with the final ending 3-3 after 120 minutes of breathtaking action. Read full story

The 35-year-old, who enjoyed a trophy-laden spell under Guardiola during their time at Barcelona, also won the Golden Ball award for the best player with supporters saying his performance had further elevated his status.

"Everyone has (an) opinion but nobody can doubt that he's there as the greatest of all time," Guardiola told reporters before Thursday's League Cup fourth-round clash against Liverpool.

"For me, he's the best, it's difficult to understand that a player can compete with what he's done.

"The people who have seen Pele, Alfredo Di Stefano or Diego Maradona... the opinions are sentimental, but the other side, if he (Messi) wouldn't have won the World Cup, the opinion and my opinion

wouldn't change."

Guardiola said City's 16 players at the tournament would slowly return for club duty.

"Today, six players came back. They had an incredible, unique experience. Hopefully they come back and work well and in four years they can have another experience in Canada, Mexico and the United States," Guardiola said.

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Pep Guardiola

"The players who were at the World Cup are in better condition than the players who were here. Sergio (Gomez), Erling (Haaland), Riyad (Mahrez) and Cole (Palmer), they're missing the rhythm a bit compared to Rodri or Manuel Akanji.

"I'm not concerned about March or April. Now every player has had different managers, a different competition... we have an important game tomorrow, then (in the Premier League) against Leeds (United). The January schedule is demanding so we want them back as soon as possible."