

Chandika absorbs proceedings on first day back

SPORTS REPORTER

Head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, who returned for his second stint with the Bangladesh national side, appeared to have great rapport with old and many new faces on his first day at his old stomping ground at Mirpur's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

He met the players as he walked out onto the Mirpur turf, sharing a few light moments as players did their rounds during the optional practice session before coming in to form a circle around arguably Bangladesh's most successful coach. The Sri Lankan also met the coaching panel, including the likes of Allan Donald, Rangana Herath and Jamie Siddons.

Having caught up with ODI captain Tamim Iqbal, Chandika soon was spotted in discussion with compatriot Gamini de Silva near the pitch area, perhaps getting an idea of the conditions at play for the upcoming series against England.

While most of the players have started work at Mirpur, some seniors such as Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad are yet to join the side, as are Liton Das and Mehedi Hasan Miraz. The handling of such dressing room seniors will be key to success with the World Cup looming in the distance. In the past, such relationships had often been tricky, but for now the initial rapport with those available yesterday was positive.

There were many changes to the team while Hathurusingha was gone but a salute to Ebadot Hossain showed that the Sri Lankan was aware of proceedings and had done a bit of homework.

"It has been a positive vibe, he has just come so it was about meeting with the players and coaches here," a BCB source informed.

Nurul Hasan Sohan said of his experience meeting the coach: "I think technically he is very good with plans and I feel that he did his homework before arriving."

"It was nothing specific. Since we met after a long time, it was mostly greetings. He talked to us on the field, not the dressing room. He told us that he has a plan and that's how things will move forward," he added.

Beneath the meet-and-greet on the field, plans were being transmitted. The coach held a meeting with former team director Khaled Mahmud and ODI captain Tamim inside the dressing room as Hathurusingha looks to exceed his past achievements.



On his first day back at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Chandika Hathurusingha was welcomed in a hearty manner by Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal and others present during the Tigers' training session yesterday. It was a sort of a happy reunion for the Sri Lankan, who had accepted the role of the national team's head coach for the second time after having left the post back in 2017.

PHOTO: STAR

'Important to adapt and adjust'

Despite picking up a hattrick on ODI debut, Taijul Islam is yet to establish himself in the white-ball formats for Bangladesh. However, Bangladesh's second-leading wicket-taker will be looking to make an impact when he makes a comeback to the ODI side in the upcoming series against England. The 31-year-old opened up about his comeback, his plans for the England series and a few other topics during an exclusive interview with **The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin**.

The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): You have been in-and-out of the ODI side despite decent performances. After missing the last home series against India in December, you are making a comeback for the series against England. How do you feel about that?

Taijul Islam (TI): Regardless of what happened in the past, I think this is a very big opportunity for me since we have the ODI World Cup this year in the subcontinent. At the same time, I want to do well for my country in all the formats.

DS: Did you receive any instructions from the team management about your role in the 50-over format?

TI: No, not really. I have not received such instructions from the team management. But at the end of the day, performance is everything. So, I am looking forward to doing well for my team.

DS: Since you will be playing against the World Champions at home, what are the areas you want to exploit as a bowler?

TI: Some English players like Moeen Ali have just played in the BPL here and there are few others who are well aware of Bangladeshi pitches and conditions these days. I think they will make their preparations and it will be a big challenge for us. It won't be easy at all.

DS: Knowing that England play attacking cricket in white-ball formats, what should



your strategy as a left-arm spinner be?

TI: Since there are three formats, you also need to adapt and adjust as a bowler. Not just with the white-ball, England play attacking cricket even in Tests nowadays. It will be important to observe their batters and plan according to the situation.

DS: Since spinners are expected to play vital roles against England, tell us about your bowling partnership with Shakib Al Hasan and Mehedi Hasan Miraz.

TI: Despite the fact that we will be playing at home, it is not a certainty that pitches will favour spinners. But regardless of the

pitch, bowling partnerships are crucial to gaining the momentum. At times, my role is to contain runs and bowl dot balls while there are other times when I have the wicket-taking role. It all depends on the situation.

DS: Do you think your experience in the Test format will help you adapt to the shorter formats?

TI: Experience will certainly be a factor. But to be honest, I have played just 12 ODIs and picked up twenty wickets at a fairly good economy. There is no shortage of confidence. I am hopeful of performing for my country.

DS: How is it working with spin-bowling coach Rangana Herath?

TI: He was a champion left-arm spinner in world cricket and shares his vast knowledge and experiences with us all the time. Herath allows you to think about the game and helps you improve whichever area you are willing to work on with him. It's great to have someone like him around and it certainly motivates me a lot.

DS: How was the first day of the training camp under Chandika Hathurusingha?

TI: We had a meet and greet today (Tuesday), but we did not have a long discussion yet. Since we met after a while, we spoke about our families and other things.

Laporta hits back at "obsessed" Tebas

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona president Joan Laporta hit back at La Liga chief Javier Tebas on Tuesday amid the controversy over his club's payments to a refereeing executive.

Tebas claimed Monday Laporta should resign if he could not explain Barcelona's reported seven million euros (\$7.46 million) in outgoings between 2001 and 2018 to a company belonging to former refereeing technical committee (CTA) vice-president Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira.

Barcelona initially said Negreira was being paid for reports and advice on referees, which are now compiled internally.

Laporta confirmed that before criticising Tebas. "Some had already warned us that it seemed Tebas was pushing a reputational campaign against Barça and against me," Laporta told reporters at Camp Nou.

"The mask has come off, he continues with his obsession with Barça, with his fear of our club."

Laporta recalled Tebas, when legal adviser to Alaves in 2005, tried to report former Barcelona forward Lionel Messi for playing without the correct documentation.

The Barcelona president also said his club's unwillingness to sign La Liga's deal with CVC and determination to found a European Super League also played a role in his "obsession" with the Catalan club.

Djokovic lauded with yet another record in sight

REUTERS

Novak Djokovic has shown that age is not a barrier and the 35-year-old will continue to break records, his younger rivals on the ATP tour said as the Serbian star looks to overtake Steffi Graf as the player with the most weeks at world number one.

Djokovic won a record-extending 10th Australian Open title last month to draw level with his great rival Rafa Nadal on 22 Grand Slam victories and leapfrog Carlos Alcaraz into top spot in the ATP rankings.

He already holds the record for the most weeks as the men's number one after surpassing Roger Federer's mark of 310 weeks in March 2021 and began his 377th week at the top on Monday to go level with 22-times major champion Graf.

Russian world number five Andrey Rublev said Djokovic had shown that anything is possible.

"And at the age of 35, he still can be the best player in the world and break records," Rublev, 25, who lost to Djokovic in the Australian Open quarterfinals, told reporters in Doha.

"If you do the things right, you can perform at the highest level ... age doesn't matter. That's what it means to me."

Former world number two Alexander Zverev said Djokovic had shown how consistent he can be by dominating his rivals in the last decade.

However, Zverev said that watching Graf being overtaken would be bittersweet for him.

"He's surpassing Steffi, so as a German, obviously I always loved her having that record. But credit to Novak, I think that shows how great he is," the 25-year-old Zverev said.

Djokovic returns to action in Dubai later this month.

Inter hoping to turn the tide

AFP, Milan

Simone Inzaghi said Tuesday that he wants Inter Milan to end Italian teams' dreadful record against Porto as he prepares to host the Portuguese outfit in the first leg of their Champions League last 16 tie.

Inter are aiming to reach the quarterfinals of the Champions League for the first time since 2011 but will have to beat a bogey team for Serie A clubs guided by Inzaghi's former Lazio teammate Sergio Conceicao.

Porto have knocked out six Italian clubs in European competition over the last two decades, most recently finishing a point above AC Milan in the Champions League group stage last season and taking the Europa League spot.

Inzaghi and Conceicao won the league and cup double in 2000 with Lazio, as well as the 1999 European Super Cup, and since retiring as players both are enjoying successful managerial careers.

"He's (Conceicao) doing really well right now, his team plays a physical and technical game," Inzaghi told reporters.

"Porto are a really good team, they've won 10 games in a row, conceding only two goals.

"In recent years they have done really well against Italian teams, against Milan last season, Roma, Lazio and Juventus. Let's hope we can turn the tide."

Inter are in the knockout stages after qualifying from a group which contained the current leaders of La Liga and the Bundesliga.

They took four points from Barcelona to make it through in second place behind Bayern Munich who won all of their Group C matches.

"We are coming into this game with a lot of

belief because we got here in an incredible way; on paper Barcelona and Bayern Munich were the teams everyone wanted to avoid," said Inzaghi.

"You can see what Barca are doing now against Real Madrid who have just been crowned world champions and we know what Bayern are about. Now we're here, we wanted it so badly and we're going to give it a go."



Manchester City forward Erling Haaland will be hoping to build on his stellar record against RB Leipzig when they travel to the German city for their Champions League Round of 16 first-leg clash on Wednesday. With six goals in four games, the Norwegian forward scored more goals against Leipzig during his time in Germany than he did against any other opponent.

PHOTO: REUTERS