

Tigers begin preparations as England beckon

SPORTS REPORTER

The preparations for the upcoming series against England officially kicked into gear yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur with an intra-squad practice game keenly observed by newly-appointed head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and other coaches.

Yasir Ali Rabbi, Hasan Mahmud, Taijul Islam and Ebadot Hossain impressed during the game between Blue Team, led by ODI captain Tamim Iqbal, and Green Team, led by Najmul Hossain Shanto.

Before yesterday's session, Hathurusingha held a team meeting with all the players and coaching staff.

Tamim won the toss and elected to bat on a surface where run-making appeared a little difficult. There were plenty of moments when batters found it difficult to time their shots. Tamim, who skipped the national team's assignments against India due to injury, lasted only eight deliveries, departing to Hasan after nicking one through to the wicketkeeper after scoring two.

Taijul and Hasan held sway with the ball during the Blue Team's innings, with the former bagging Zakir Hasan, who did not anticipate the skid on the ball after scoring eight before Nurul Hasan took a fantastic diving catch to his right off the bowling of Hasan to see off Mushfiqur Rahim.

Liton Das, back for his first session following the BPL, looked good during a 49-ball 36 until Taijul's arm delivery got the better of him.

Between the fall of wickets, Yasir stitched together a 53-run stand with Aminul Islam for the eighth wicket. Jamie Siddons, watching on, encouraged from the dressing room during Yasir's 58-ball 61 before the right-hander, who remained unpicked in the ODI squad, fell trying to clear the off-side boundary. Taijul bagged four for 23 while Hasan finished with three for 20 runs as Blue Team managed 205, bowled out in 42.4 overs.

In reply, Ebadot Hossain rattled Green Team after a fast start, ignited by Shanto's 15-ball 27. Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Mahmudullah Riyad and Sohan failed to get going as Green team went from 46 for 1 to 101 all out. Ebadot bagged four wickets and Mehedi Hasan Miraz bagged three as Blue Team won by 104 runs.

The Tigers will hold further preparations today, engaging in match scenario simulations with all the senior cricketers, bar Shakib Al Hasan, back in the fold.

Meanwhile, England pacer Saqib Mahmood and the team manager arrived in the country yesterday. The rest of the ODI side are slated to arrive in Dhaka today in two separate groups. With the T20 series set to follow the ODI series to begin on March 1, England's cricketers will be coming in for the white-ball series' till March 6.

The 23-member England side will hold their first practice training session at Mirpur on Saturday under Joss Butler's leadership.



Chandika Hathurusingha was apparently working on ace left-arm pacer Mustafizur Ranman's release point during his first official practice session with the Bangladesh players at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Thursday after being reappointed as the head coach of the national side for the second time.

PHOTO: STAR

‘I prioritise keeping a smile on my face’

Najmul Hossain Shanto has managed to navigate troubled waters with perhaps the best tool there is: performance. The 24-year-old was the highest run-getter for Bangladesh in the T20 World Cup and followed that up by becoming the player of the tournament in the recently concluded Bangladesh Premier League. The southpaw caught up with The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin and discussed his return to form and how he brushed off the weight of criticisms. The excerpts are below:

The Daily Star (DS): Did you have a specific goal for the BPL?

Najmul Hossain Shanto (NHS): No, I didn't have any particular goals leading up to the tournament but I wanted to take the team to a good place. It was something that I always had on my mind. My plan was to contribute to the team in any capacity. I was able to do it so it was a good tournament for me.

DS: You were very consistent throughout the tournament. Was that ingrained in your mind?

NHS: I think what played a big part in that was my level-headedness. When I scored runs, I didn't get too happy about it and when I failed to score, I wasn't that upset. The idea was to perform in every game. There was a hunger, which is why I was successful in scoring regularly.

DS: You were solely thought of as a Test batter. But you came back and scored the most runs for Bangladesh in the T20 World Cup. How are you adjusting to all three formats?

NHS: The goal since childhood was to play all three formats for Bangladesh and play well in all formats. Although I am not

happy with my international career so far, the plan and effort in terms of training and preparation is always to take my game to a solid platform. When I train, I practice accordingly with the format, situation and opponent in mind. There is still a lot of room for improvement because we are playing so many games these days, which wasn't the case in the past.

DS: You have always been rated very highly and even as a future captain. Do you feel that now you have made that push to utilise all that potential that people believe there is? Has maturity played a part in that?

NHS: It's difficult to say because other than my performance in the T20 World Cup and a few knocks in Tests, I don't think I have had that many standout performances in the international arena. But, yes, in the domestic circuit, I have done well. I believe that I will be able to take this form to the international arena as well because I feel that I've been able to bat with a lot of thought and with the understanding of different situations.

So far, I have learned that my practice patterns should match those challenges that are there in international cricket.

Though it's very difficult to create that match environment in practice, I still try to create it in training.

DS: There hasn't been much change to your technique, but there definitely has been in your mindset. How did you manage that?

NHS: It's a misconception that we, including myself, have very good technique. People think I have good technique but I have had to work on it a lot. Compared to earlier, I think I have a much wider range of shots in my arsenal now. I can perhaps now hit a boundary at will or rotate the strike easily. These things have improved which is why I've been able to score runs in those two tournaments.

DS: You have received more than a fair share of criticism online and on social media platforms. How did you overcome this and perform?

NHS: In all honesty, I focused on my game. I believed that if I could perform then these things wouldn't be there. Another thing I realised was that it is nothing new. It happened to all cricketers, some more and some less. I may not score runs at times but I prioritise keeping a smile on my face and enjoying my cricket. We play cricket because we have loved the game since childhood. So when I think along those lines, thoughts (of criticism) don't really bother me.



‘Shred fat, gain muscle’: CR7 impact at Al-Nassr

AGENCIES

Cristiano Ronaldo is having a significant influence behind the scenes at Al-Nassr as his arrival in the Saudi club has inspired the rest of the team to shred fat and gain muscle.

The 38-year-old superstar arrived in Saudi Arabia last month on a staggering £175m a-year deal, and his impact is being felt on and off the pitch.

According to Al-Nassr club nutritionist Jose Blesa, Ronaldo's new teammates have been copying the 38-year-old's diet and training regime, leading to impressive results in fitness of the club's players.

Speaking to Ideal about Ronaldo, Blesa said: "He is the best footballer in history, or one of the two best. I was uncertain, like everyone else, about what it was going to be like to work with him and if the club was going to change a lot, but I haven't found a more professional footballer than him."

"Since he has been here, all the players have trained more intensely and followed a stricter diet. I have not seen a club like this in which the players improve practically 90% in their body composition every time I see them: they have less fat, more muscle and they do all the exercises at their fingertips. It is a luxury to work there."

Blesa also informed that even he learns from Ronaldo.

"Every conversation with him is a learning curve.



We met and talked about his diet, about how he understands the importance of this and rest for performance. He wears two rest meters: the ring and the bracelet. He is the first to arrive at training and the last to leave. Dealing with him is wonderful.

"Cristiano helps me a lot, because we can no longer teach him anything, but he creates a school around him. The rest of the players do what he does because everything he does is wonderful to improve his performance."



PHOTO: COLLECTED

The torch relay of Sheikh Kamal 2nd Bangladesh Youth Games, organised by the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA), was held on Thursday. Some 14 current and former athletes, split into seven groups, carried the games' torch after the BOA president and Chief of Army Staff, General SM Shafiuddin Ahmed, handed it over to hockey star Rasel Mahmud Jimmy and shooter Kamrunnahar Koly at the Bangabandhu Mausoleum Complex in Tungipara. Sprinter Imranur Rahman and SA Games gold winner karateka Marzan Akhter Priya will inaugurate the event by lighting up the torch on the opening day at the Army Stadium in Banani next Sunday.

No more breakaway leagues for English clubs?

AFP, London

England announced plans for an independent football regulator to oversee the financial sustainability of the men's game in the country, with powers to prevent clubs from joining breakaway leagues.

The regulator would license clubs, requiring them to demonstrate sound financial business models, run robust owners' and directors' tests and give fans a greater say in the running of clubs.

It would also have the power to block clubs joining breakaway leagues, appearing to prevent a repeat of any attempt to form a Super League such as the one that proved so unpopular with supporters in 2021.

Six English clubs – Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham – were among a dozen from across the continent that announced plans to form a European Super League in a shock move in April 2021 before abandoning plans after a fans' backlash.

"Despite the success of the sport both at home and abroad, we know that there are real challenges which threaten the stability of clubs both big and small," said British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

"These bold new plans will put fans back at the heart of football, protect the rich heritage and traditions of our much-loved clubs and safeguard the beautiful game for future generations."

Football Association CEO Mark Bullingham said the FA welcomed the plans, set out in a government white paper – a policy document setting out proposals for future legislation – to be published on Thursday.

"Our response will highlight a critical point

made repeatedly by the fan-led review, which recommended that the professional game increases funding of the grassroots game," he said.

The Football Supporters' Association also welcomed the proposals.

"The football governance white paper clearly addresses our key concerns around ownership, rogue competitions and sustainability and of course we support any proposals that offer fans a greater voice in the running of their clubs," said FSA chief executive Kevin Miles.

But the Premier League warned it was vital that regulation did not damage the game.

"We will now work constructively with stakeholders to ensure that the proposed government regulator does not lead to any unintended consequences that could affect the Premier League's position as the most-watched football league in the world, reduce its competitiveness or put the unrivalled levels of funding we provide at risk," it said in a statement.

West Ham owner David Sullivan echoed concerns expressed by some owners of Premier League clubs, describing the plans for greater regulation as a "terrible idea".

"The regulator will have a huge staff that football will have to pay for," he told Sky Sports News. "It will be a total waste of money. I bet it grows in size and cost every year."

"The Premier League is the best run and most successful league in the world. It gives more to the lower leagues and the PFA (Professional Footballers' Association) and the grassroots than any other top league in the world. It's a fantastic export."



Former India captain Sourav Ganguly graced the grand inauguration programme of the DNCC Mayor Cup 2023, set to begin next month, as the chief guest on Thursday. Overwhelmed by the reception, the former BCCI president said: "The thing is that whenever I come to Bangladesh, I get the love of so many people that I don't know whether I am in India or Bangladesh."

PHOTO: COLLECTED