

Observation period over for Hathurusingha?

NABID YEASIN

Chandika Hathurusingha's reappointment as Bangladesh's coach for a second stint could not have come at a more agreeable time.

The Sri Lankan took over Bangladesh as they were about to host England for a white-ball tour, beginning with an ODI series -- the Tigers' favoured format. Although facing the versatile English side poses a threat in any condition and any format for any side, the thing that boded well for Bangladesh was that they were on a hot streak of seven consecutive home series wins dating back to October 2016, with the latest being a 2-1 win over India in December last year.

Another factor that might have boosted Hathurusingha's confidence was that the first two matches of the series were to be played at the Tigers' favourite hunting ground: the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

However, within just over a fortnight of his arrival in the country, the 54-year-old can see that things are not as upbeat as they may have appeared in the beginning. Bangladesh's hot streak has been dented by England, who were also the last team to have won an ODI series in Bangladesh.

For Hathurusingha, what seems more concerning than avoiding the humiliation of an ODI series whitewash at home for the first time since being swept in February 2014 by Sri Lanka are the flaws that were exposed during those defeats in the first two ODIs.



PHOTO:RAJIB RAIHAN

Even after setting a modest 210-run target, the Tigers almost clawed their way back into the first ODI before giving in to the patience and skills of a determined Dawid Malan, who saw his side home from a precarious situation with an unbeaten century.

But that closely-fought battle ultimately only served as a warning regarding the discernible lack in the Tigers' batting department, from which the Tamim Iqbal-led side failed to learn. They ended up paying a costly price in the following game, ending up on the wrong end of a 132-run hammering just a day later.

In the first ODI, all batters bar Najmul Hossain Shanto seemed to be far outside their element, a fact that was reflected in their scores. Shanto made 58, his maiden ODI fifty, but needed much more support than the scores of 23, 31, and 16 from Tamim, Mahmudullah Riyad, and Mushfiqur Rahim respectively had been able to provide.

The toss not going their way combined with below-average displays in the bowling and fielding departments exacerbated things for the Tigers in the second ODI as the destructive English batters piled up a 300-plus score. In reply, Bangladesh were bundled out for 194 in 44.4 overs, never looking like they had the right process for such a demanding chase.

Hathurusingha had said in his first official press conference that he would observe how things went in the first two ODIs before making any adjustments. Given how he had previously conformed to an authoritative style of leadership in his first stint, it would not be surprising if the final ODI at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram tomorrow sees more than just a few obvious changes in the line-up or even in the style of play.



Naim Sheikh of Khulna and Irene Akter of Rangpur stand on the podium, celebrating their victories in 100m sprint in boys' and girls' events respectively on the concluding day of the Sheikh Kamal 2nd Bangladesh Youth Games at the Army Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. Naim clocked 10.80 seconds while Irene took 12.20 seconds to finish the race. The week-long sporting extravaganza came to a conclusion with Chattogram Division topping the medals tally with 49 gold, 40 silver and 57 bronze medals. Dhaka Division finished second with 46 gold, 39 silver and 61 bronze medals.

PHOTO: BOA

‘Fizz stuck in T20 mindset in ODIs’

MAZHAR UDDIN

Despite being among the most experienced pacers in Bangladesh's bowling unit, Mustafizur Rahman's listless performances in the 50-over format have quickly become one of the biggest concerns for the Tigers in recent times.

The left-arm seamer has been struggling to live up to the expectations that were placed on his shoulders after his heroic entry to international cricket eight years ago, when the 'Fizz' became an overnight sensation in 2015.

His mysterious cutters and unpredictability impressed on the international stage against the likes of Pakistan, India and South Africa. But over the years, it seems that his arsenal has become stale and far too predictable. The 27-year-old was ordinary in the two ODIs against England and went wicketless but, more importantly, Mustafizur's lack of venom has made it difficult for the captain to exploit his expertise.

Mustafizur also struggled to contain runs and create pressure on the English batters, an aspect of bowling that was considered his forte when he emerged.

Despite pacer Taskin Ahmed bowling brilliantly from one end during the two ODIs against England, Mustafizur was unable to complement that partnership, leaking runs frequently. So far,

he has conceded 105 runs from 18 overs in the two ODIs against England at an economy of 5.83.

According to veteran pace-bowling coach Sarwar Imran, a lack of pace and consistency has made him predictable even in home conditions.

"I think Mustafizur has become too predictable; bowling slower right from the start. His slowness have become predictable because all the teams have done their homework. I think his ability to bowl quick around the off stump and allow the ball to cut away from right-handers has decreased compared to the past. I think his lack of control is also very crucial and I don't see consistency in terms of his line and length. That is important in ODI format," Imran told The Daily Star yesterday.

But this has not developed during the England series. Since 2022, Mustafizur has managed 14 wickets in 16 ODIs at an average of over 35. In that time, his best bowling figures are four for 17 from 5.2 overs in Zimbabwe.

Mustafizur has been labelled a T20 bowler due to his inability to adapt to different formats and it seems the left-arm seamer is unsure of his role in the ODI format.

"I think he probably tried too many things at the same time and that backfired for him. He developed a delivery that comes

into the right-hander, but even that is missing these days. There is a difference between T20s and ODIs, where the captain could use his premier pacer in various situations.

"He needs to develop his stock deliveries since batters won't try to play over the top most of the time in ODIs like they do in T20s. I think Mustafizur's wicket-taking ability has decreased because he is bowling with a 'T20 mindset in the 50-over format," he added.

Questions have already started to be raised about whether the Fizz has become an 'automatic choice' for the team management despite his lack of improvement and consistency. Although skipper Tamim Iqbal defended Mustafizur, many others have used Taskin's transformation based around fitness and mindset compared to the lack thereof from Mustafizur.

Be it a lack of hunger or just as simple case of complacency, Mustafizur must realise that the likes of Hasan Mahmud, Shoriful Islam, Ebadot Hossain and other pacers are hot on his trail.

Given that the Tigers have already lost their series against England in new coach Chandika Hathurusingha's first assignment and considering the Sri Lankan's philosophy, it will not be easy for Mustafizur to continue for long without performing.

Shadman sets the tone for South

SPORTS REPORTER

South Zone opener Shadman Islam scored his 11th first-class ton on the first day of the Bangladesh Cricket League final against Central Zone to help his side to commanding position at stumps at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar yesterday.



The left-handed batter smashed 18 fours and a six for his unbeaten 130 to take his team to 234 for three.

Having won the toss, South got off the blocks steadily, putting on a 46-run opening stand before Central's left-arm spinner Hasan

Murad trapped Pinak Ghosh LBW for 16 after the 24-year-old tried to sweep a full-length delivery.

Anamul Haque Bijoy hit four boundaries in his 23-run knock but was dismissed when he failed to resist a half-volley outside off-stump by left-arm seamer Abu Hider Rony. Anamul's eyes lit up when he saw a scoring opportunity but he slashed at the delivery, playing away from the body as the ball found the outside edge to first slip, who juggled it to second slip.

Right-handed batter Amite Hasan, who came in at four, didn't trouble the scorers as he went back to the pavilion for nought in the second over after lunch.

Murad did the job again as he fooled the batter with an arm-delivery that went through the bat-pad gap, leaving South three down for 97.

But Shadman motored on from his end and stitched a 137-run partnership with skipper Fazle Mahmud who remained not out on 55.



Manchester City's Bernardo Silva celebrates with Phil Foden, who put his side ahead in the 15th minute with his fourth goal in three games in all competitions, after scoring their second goal as City kept up the pressure on title-rivals Arsenal with a 2-0 victory over Newcastle United in the Premier League on Saturday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Buoyed MU ready for Anfield hostilities

AGENCIES

It has been a while since Manchester United made the trip to Liverpool with a justifiable sense of superiority but they head to Anfield on Sunday for their Premier League clash crowing.

United's struggles in recent seasons have coincided with Liverpool's rise under Jurgen Klopp and their fans have had to stomach watching the Merseysiders win the Champions League, Premier League, both domestic cups and more.

But what a difference a year makes. While Liverpool appear to be on the wane, Dutchman Erik Ten Hag has inspired a renaissance at Old Trafford.

United claimed their first silverware since 2017 last Sunday and have lost just one of their last 11 Premier League games. Since the resumption of the competition following the World Cup, no side has claimed more points (23).

Claiming a first Premier League title in 10 years remains a long shot but a win at Anfield would fuel belief that United are ready to pounce.

Ten Hag said his side were prepared to "suffer" and "sacrifice" at a hostile Anfield.

"It will be great, it will be hostile against us, but we like that," said Ten Hag. "I know these players, my squad, my team, will be prepared to go there and fight and to go there with confidence. We know we will have to suffer and we will have to sacrifice to get

a good result."

But the United boss sees no reason why they cannot win at a raucous Anfield this weekend and complete a league double over Liverpool this season. "We have to play and to make it our game," said the Dutchman.

United were hammered 5-0 at home and 4-0 away in their two league meetings with Liverpool last season, but Klopp was wary of the Red Devils in their current iteration.

"They have turned into a results machine. They are squeezing results out with some really good performances. Top football, and if it is not going so well, they still get results," Klopp said.

"This is a week where I would like to give the season a proper push," said Klopp. "I said I would like to squeeze everything out of this season. That means to finish as high as we somehow can, but nobody knows where that will be. So we just have to make the next decisive step and we go from there." Klopp also called on his team to work as a unit to contain the Marcus Rashford -- who has been in red-hot form this season with 25 goals in 39 matches.

"He had a very difficult last year. Now he is playing incredible. His speed, his technique -- it is a mix of everything. How calm he is in front of goal. He scores worldies, he scores the simple ones, he can put his head in. All these kinds of things. We have to defend against that collectively. He is not their only world-class player."