

Tigers' set-up taking shape ahead of World Cup

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

Bangladesh came into the Ireland series with some specific strategical shifts and plans of tinkering ahead of the World Cup to find the best set of players ahead of the showpiece event.

Since Chandika Hathurusingha came, plans are being put in motion with the Tigers put to test against England in the recent ODI series where wickets did not have the traditional outlook of a slow and low nature. The wickets helped give an impression of the batting depth required, and coming into the Ireland ODIs, there has been good wickets to further observe what will be required going forward.

Following the England series, changes came in the side and the need for acceleration gathered steam in the Ireland ODIs as Bangladesh put up their highest scores in both ODIs. Mahmudullah Riyad was rested while Zakir Hasan fell out of the series due to injury.

Yasir Ali and Towhid Hridoy came into the side as well to give the impression that the middle-order was where Bangladesh could find new avenues for evolution.

The balance of the side going forward has found some solidity following the two ODIs with only Mehedi Hasan Miraz unable to play the two matches due to injury. Hridoy has already showcased the ability to accelerate and keep the score moving in singles and doubles at number four while Mushfiqur Rahim has found a new position in the order at six, where he has taken his game to new levels with aggressive intent. That intent had been part and parcel to Shakib Al Hasan already.

Yasir has played at number seven in both ODIs since return while Afif Hossain had to sit out and was eventually excluded from the squad for the third match. The roles have been decided and management are only looking for players that may be able to fulfil such roles. Talking about a possibility on Afif's promotion up the batting order, Hathurusingha did not appear too impressed following scores of 15, 23 and 9 in the England ODIs.

"Afif didn't have the best series that he wished for, and we want to see. He has to get back to his best form that he has shown before," the Sri Lankan had said.

The drop was likely. "His chances of being in the eleven are slim," selector Habibul Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday as reason for Afif's exclusion from the side.

The key motif has been the range of shots which will be needed to accelerate in the middle-overs. By the looks of the intent, there is ideally no defensive role in the batting order, which explains Afif and Mahmudullah's current state. Players will have to fulfil roles according to match scenario and targeting 300-plus scores will be the norm.

"Everyone is batting with intent in the middle overs. It wasn't like everyone was trying to hit big sixes but what happened was that we can hit ones and twos and fours. Those that batted had very good intent," Liton Das said after the second ODI which was washed out.

Liton also stated that they were playing cautiously at the top to make room for cameo knocks at the middle and death overs. An attacking philosophy is gaining ground where Miraz would also be in the mix when conditions allow. For now, Yasir, Afif and possibly Mahmudullah have chance to make a case in that slot alongside an all-rounder. Performance will be important but intent will be key.



Young girls of Bancharampur Model Govt. Primary School were elated after a 2-1 win over Tangail's Nolma Govt. Primary School in the final of the Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Gold Cup at the capital's Army Stadium on Tuesday. PHOTO: BSS

Bancharampur clinch Bangamata Gold Cup

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Bancharampur Model Govt. Primary School from Brahmanbaria clinched the title of the ninth Bangamata Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib Gold Cup with a 2-1 win over Nolma Govt. Primary School from Tangail in the final of the primary school football tournament at the Army Stadium in Banani yesterday.

Rabeeya Akter Sumi gave Bancharampur a fifth-minute lead before Romana Akter doubled the margin in the 10th minute.

In the final of the 10th Bangabandhu Gold Cup on the same day, Purba Panchapukur Primary Government School from Nilphamari became champions with a 2-0 win over Binodpur Collegepara Govt Primary School from Rajbari.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina watched a segment of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup final before distributing prizes among the finalists. A total of 11,13,993 boys from 65,529 schools and 11,13,976 girls from 65,528 schools participated in the countrywide tournament, arranged by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education.

Third straight title fails to mask shortcomings

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh maintained their dominance in the Bangabandhu Cup International Kabaddi, clinching their third title in a row with an emphatic 42-28 win over Chinese Taipei in the final at the Shaheed Noor Hossain National Volleyball Stadium yesterday, but the hosts were clearly lacking the match temperament that once buoyed them to the top of the kabaddi world.

Under the guidance of Indian coach Chhaju Ram, Bangladesh have become unstoppable in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, but Chhaju believes a lack of matches is a hindrance to further progression.

"The boys don't have any problem except in terms of match temperament. The Indian players play a lot of competitive matches and gain that match temperament, but here in Bangladesh there is hardly any opportunity to play competitive matches except this international tournament," the coach lamented. "Technique and tactics are all good, but the players' mindset is not good. It will develop as they will play competitive matches."

Bangladesh were once ahead of teams like Iran, Pakistan and South Korea, but the downturn has been sharp, with the men in red and green even failing to qualify for the semifinals of the kabaddi event at the Asian Games in the last three editions since reaching the last-four in the 2010 Asian Games.

To close the gap with the top teams, the Indian coach suggested play more friendly matches against India, whose players usually play a lot of competitive matches including the domestic Pro-Kabaddi League.

"If Bangladesh plays friendly matches against India regularly, then the gap with other top teams can be reduced. Bangladesh have talented players; the only weakness is that they lack match practice. Meanwhile, Indian players play a lot



of local tournaments, thus gaining in confidence and learning how to control, attack and everything else. They get all that from domestic competition," Chhaju said, adding that their next objective was to deliver a medal in the upcoming Asian Games in China.

Although the Indian coach emphasised the Bangladeshi players lack of competitions was hindering their improvement, he believed the team had grown significantly under his coaching.

"Raids have improved, but the defence has not been as good as our raiding in the last three years. However, this time I am satisfied with

the defense. They performed well in the tournament," said Chhaju. "The boys had before been caught in do-or-die situations during raids, but they have improved a lot. They also improved in defending in crucial moments. It was tough for opposing raiders to take points from them."

During the final against Chinese Taipei, Bangladesh struggled, conceding points from raids as well as allowing their opponents to pick up bonus points and dominate proceedings. The hosts finally hit back to regain the lead in the second half and never looked back since, winning 42-28.

Captain Tuhin Tarafder said: "Our target was to deliver our best and make the team champions three times in a row. We executed the game plan well. We supported each other and notched an easy win."

"The start was not good because we were observing the opponents to find out their weaknesses and strengths. Then we exploited their weak points and came out successfully," said man of the final Tuhin Tarafder, adding that they have plans to tour India as part of their preparations for the Asian Games.

"India, Iran, South Korea and Pakistan are ahead of us but I think we have the ability to beat Pakistan. Despite having a healthy lead, we lost narrowly to Korea in 2016 due to inexperience. We have been improving since and I think we can win a medal in the Asian Games, subject to the draw."



Tigers enjoy rest day in scenic Sylhet

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

With no practice or media activities planned on the agenda, the Tigers enjoyed a quiet day at Sylhet on Tuesday. Rain had swept away any chance of the second ODI of producing a result on Saturday, putting rest and sight-seeing squarely on the agenda.

Hasan Mahmud found partners in coach Chandika Hathurusingha and manager Nafees Iqbal along with a few support staff for a visit to Shada Pathar in Bhologanj, looking to take in the quiet morning period.

"Recreation is important to all," the manager wrote in a caption on an Instagram photo he posted with the head coach.

Liton Das was out and about while Mustafizur Rahman took the opportunity to visit Ratargul swamp forest with family and friends, enjoying a boat ride and getting attuned with nature.

Afif Hossain, meanwhile, left for Dhaka, the same destination that Shakib Al Hasan jetted off to for a commercial engagement.

The all-rounder said at the event that it would have been good to win the second ODI, saying: "It would have been a good thing for Mushfiqur [Rahim] bhai, but rain is not in our hands."

As Liton had said after the match on Monday, the team is enjoying themselves and Tuesday allowed another such opportunity.



Having landed in Argentina from Paris on Monday, La Albiceleste's World Cup-winning captain Lionel Messi joined the team's practice session at the Ezeiza stadium yesterday ahead of their friendlies against Panama and Curaçao on March 25 and 28, respectively. The match against Panama at El Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires will be Argentina's first since lifting the World Cup in Qatar last year.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Buffon's 'biggest mistake'

AGENCIES, MILAN

Gianluigi Buffon, now playing for his childhood club Parma, admitted that leaving PSG was 'his biggest mistake'.

"It was the most beautiful experience in my life and leaving was my biggest mistake," he admitted. "I couldn't accept being second-choice. But I felt like a free man there and I think I'll never see the same quality again."

He also spoke of the Parisiens' mental fragility, recalling when they lost to Manchester United in the Champions League after leading the first leg 2-0.

"The game against United [in 2019] is the biggest regret of my career. We threw it away. They played in Paris with children. We made a mess, mentally. We were very strong, a mega team."

Tamim's 142 in vain

SPORTS REPORTER

Tanzid Hasan Tamim's hundred went in vain as Brothers Union stumbled to their third consecutive defeat in the Dhaka Premier League as they suffered a three-wicket defeat against Legends of Rugganj at BKSP-3 ground in Savar yesterday.

Courtesy of Tamim's run-a-ball 142, featuring 14 fours and four maximums, Brothers posted 299 for five in 50 overs. However, Rugganj batters replied strongly, with Shirag Jani smashing a team-high 94, and Irfan Shukkur and Parvez Hossain Emon hitting fifties, to chase down the big total with eight balls to spare. This was also Rugganj's third consecutive win in the league.

At the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Prime Bank romped to their third win on the trot in the league, beating Shinepukur Cricket Club by 78 runs.

Skipper Mohammad Mithun top-scored with 93 while Adil Amin hit an unbeaten 64 as Prime Bank posted 295 for eight in 50 overs. Unable to pose any threat, Shinepukur were bundled out for 217.

Meanwhile, defending champions Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club won by five runs (via DLS) against City Club in a rain-curtailed game at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah.

After electing to bat, Sheikh Jamal, despite a brilliant 110-run opening stand between Shykat Ali and Saif Hasan, were bundled out for 228.

Chasing the revised target of 168 runs in 32 overs, City Club eventually ended up on 162 for eight.