

Shakib absent in optional session

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

When Shakib Al Hasan is immersed in cricket, he becomes one of the game's most admirable students, picking up cues on what he needs to work on very quickly. It is a key reason why he does not need a lot of practice time to begin with, but the Ireland series has given him a lot more leeway in terms of practice turning optional. A day ahead of the third ODI, reporters' eyes, usually trained on Shakib, were searching out the Bangladesh all-rounder at the practice session. When team officials were contacted, they informed that the training before the third and final series-deciding ODI was an optional session.

12 of the 14-member squad had showed up and, even a day before, it had not been communicated as an optional session. Mushfiqur Rahim had a family emergency and missed the session but was due to return yesterday as well.

Asked yesterday, team manager Nafees Iqbal said: "It was an optional practice session today. Since it was optional, it depends on the player and whether they want to attend or not. Shakib will arrive today."

Shakib had flown in from Sylhet to Dhaka a number of times. He joined the side on Friday and, having played the first ODI, departed for Dhaka to attend his graduation convocation on Sunday. He returned the same day and played the second ODI on Monday but departed for Dhaka on Tuesday to attend a commercial event.

He was expected in the team by yesterday night, but such aggressive scheduling from Shakib appeared the least 'optional' this Ireland series.

ODI WC likely from Oct 5

STAR SPORT DESK

The 2023 World Cup will start on October 5 and the final will be played at the world's largest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad on November 19, ESPNcricinfo reported.

The report adds that 12 venues are still in consideration, including Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Dharamsala, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Lucknow, Indore, Rajkot and Mumbai.

Usually, the schedule for the World Cup is released at least a year in advance, but the BCCI has been awaiting approval from the Indian government regarding tax exemptions and visas for the Pakistan team.

Under a contract that the BCCI signed with the ICC in 2014 when they were awarded the 2016 T20 World Cup, the 2018 Champions Trophy and the 2023 ODI World Cup, they reportedly included a clause to help secure tax waivers for the ICC and its commercial partners.



Under the tutelage of Allan Donald, Bangladesh pacers have flourished in recent times and they would be looking to impress once again against Ireland in the last match of the ODI series in Sylhet today. (Bottom) Meanwhile, after missing out on the first two matches due to injury, all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz will be eager to get back to action.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Donald bridging the skill gaps through aggressive mentality

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

Bangladesh take on Ireland in a series-deciding third ODI at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium today and the surfaces in Sylhet have fallen in line with the more aggressive approach that the hosts are looking for in series leading up to the World Cup in India.

That aggression, as pace-bowling coach Allan Donald relayed, has to be collective. Pack mentality, letting go of fear and the necessary skills of reverse swing were on his mind.

Donald had been a fearsome prospect in his playing days. His stare, the sheer pace and aggression, all while deploying some of the most cunning gamesmanship to outmanoeuvre batters, left a mark.

"Since I was 16 or 17, my mindset hasn't changed. It has to be aggressive," he said about his current mindset as he looks to make the Tigers' pace attack talk the talk.

Donald could bowl a dominating Test match length into the batter's body over and over again to break down even the most resilient opposition. While talking about Ireland, he identified the need for consistency heading into the World Cup.

"We got belief and consistency after beating India, beating England in T20Is and hopefully we can close the deal tomorrow out here [against Ireland]. What I am looking at is consistency and success. We're slowly and surely getting there, but it's a long road ahead. One area is to become consistent with our wins," he said about the mentality going forward.

The batting has already moved up a gear, targeting bigger scores, but pitches in



Pakistan and India will pose a challenge to the bowlers when it comes to restricting runs.

Donald identified death-over bowling to be the most significant aspect heading to India. "I think, from here on, we have to take what we did and transfer that to Chelmsford, Afghanistan and the Asia Cup. Wickets in Pakistan are going to be absolutely gun. Very fine margins in the World Cup... I'm talking about the skill of bowling at the death," he said.

Flat surfaces, such as in Pakistan, are cues for reverse swing. It is also a skill that Bangladesh have had little clue of in the past. Donald divulged that lots of work has

gone on with roughed-up balls.

"The ball will reverse in India, no question about it and it will reverse in Pakistan. That's what we have been working on for so, so many hours in the nets, bowling at balls and tyres and whatnot. So we want to be ready when it comes down to the next time where it really matters," he said, identifying that surfaces in India would allow balls to get 'abrasive'.

"The old ball is going to be absolutely key. When the time comes, dealing with two balls, one comes through and reverses," he said.

The difficult art of swing and other skills had to come from the core aspect of aggression, something that the team found difficult in the past. He said that things began to change "once we started to offload the shackles of fear of failure and fear of disappointment".

Donald felt he had a similar style to Chandika Hathurusingha and opined that the Tigers were able to unshackle themselves under the new head coach. "Hathu has been brilliant around the group and has expressed his freedom and I think they have sort of unshackled themselves to play aggressive cricket," he said and as the culture changes take root.

But aggression alone will not be enough if not part of a pack mentality.

"There's a sense of dovetailing. So if Ebadot [Hossain] doesn't have a good day, Taskin [Ahmed] will be there for you. It's nice to see this pack mentality and how they come for each other is starting to have a wonderful impact," he said as Tigers look to find more means of competitiveness.

Difference was tactical and technical: Medved

SPORTS REPORTER

Fans have become accustomed to scintillating performances from Bangladesh's women's football teams over the past five to six years, especially when in age-group tournaments comprising South Asian nations, but an entirely different scenario unfolded yesterday as Bangladesh were handed a 0-3 drubbing by Russia in the SAFF U-17 Women's Championship at the Shaheed Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium.

Bangladesh simply found it too tough to handle Russia yesterday.

The margin may still be flattering considering it was a lopsided match-up between an Asian team and a European team, but Russia had the upper hand in every department, showing better technique, tactical understanding, skill and stamina.

Bangladesh are used to playing in the attacking third but yesterday they were against the ropes as Russia's aggressive press kept Bangladesh from building up from the back.

"I said before that Russia are ahead of Bangladesh in terms of physique, technique and experience, which I think made the difference. But I believe the girls learned a lot from this match,"



head coach Golam Rabbani Choton said. "The girls started poorly because they were under pressure but they played better as the match progressed."

Choton also believed the experience would help strengthen his team's mentality ahead of other SAFF and AFC competitions. He also opined that the team would have performed better had they been training together for five-six years instead of two.

Russia coach Elena Medved was impressed by Bangladesh's performance and was happy to get off to a winning start.

"The match was so difficult because we had some plans but we could not implement them. But we are happy with the win," said Medved. "There was difference in tactical preparation and technique as well but we can see that Bangladesh are working closely on technical aspects."

Ozil calls time

REUTERS

Germany's World Cup-winning midfielder Mesut Ozil announced his retirement from football at the age of 34 on Wednesday.

The former Real Madrid and Arsenal player retired from the squad in 2018 amid a political debate in Germany about an influx of migrants and after backlash over a photograph taken with Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, saying he faced "racism and disrespect" over his Turkish ancestry.

"I've had the privilege to be a professional football player for almost 17 years now and I feel incredibly thankful for the opportunity," Ozil, who most recently played for Turkish side Istanbul Basaksehir, said in a statement on Instagram.

"But in recent weeks and months, having also suffered some injuries, it's become more and more clear that it's time to leave the big stage of football."

Mancini looking for answers AGAINST ENGLAND

AFP, Milan

Roberto Mancini is wondering where the next generation of Italian talent is going to come from as the Azzurri begin their Euro 2024 qualifying campaign on Thursday with the visit of England.

Italy coach Mancini is in the process of another rebuild after the European champions missed out last year's World Cup following a second straight disastrous play-off defeat.

The euphoria of beating England at Wembley in the Euro 2020 final had well and truly dissipated by the time North Macedonia stunned Italy last year.

And while the rest of the world's top teams prepared for Qatar, Italian football was again pondering its place in the world, with Mancini lamenting a lack of young players in a country which used to be a conveyor belt of world class talent.

Italy has three clubs in the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time since 2006, with three more in the last eight for Europe's other two competitions, but Mancini is not hailing a rare continental success story for Serie A.

"They (Napoli, AC Milan and Inter Milan) have seven or eight Italians in the team between them... This is the reality and we need to do something different," Mancini told reporters on Monday.

"Italian football hasn't been reborn... If there were 33 Italians on the pitch, maybe, even half of them being Italian would be enough."

Mancini has lamented in particular a lack of



forwards and used Leeds United winger Willy Gnonto as an example of how young talent is overlooked by Serie A clubs.

However he has also been criticised for some of the selections in his 30-man squad for the Thursday's match in Naples, which includes a first call-up for Argentina-born Tigre striker Mateo Retegui.

Udinese defender Destiny Udogie, who will move to Tottenham next season, Juventus midfielder Nicolo Fagioli and Lazio pair Mattia Zaccagni and Nicolò Casale are the omissions which have most befuddled fans.

Zaccagni has scored nine times for Lazio this season, including the winner in Sunday's Rome derby, and him missing out while Federico Chiesa was selected -- before succumbing to yet another

injury -- has raised eyebrows.

Italy will face both England and North Macedonia in Group C, a reminder of both the highs and lows of Mancini's reign, which began in 2018 with uncharacteristically swashbuckling football before falling into the same pit of despair which led to him being hired in the first place.

Making the Nations League final four while also relegating England from the top tier was a welcome plus but failed to change a general feeling in Italy that the national team is on another downturn.

Mancini and England boss Gareth Southgate will be rivals again on Thursday but both their sides will be favourites to take the two qualifying spots available in the five-team group which also includes Ukraine and Malta.

Southgate too has said he is concerned about strength in depth despite a host of talented young players coming through to England's senior squad in recent years, echoing a similar sentiment expressed by Rudi Voeller when he was made the new director of Germany's national side in January.

"You'd love to have that depth, but we are shorter than the other big nations on depth of selection. I'm happy with the quality we have to pick from, but in certain positions we are short of depth," Southgate said last week.

"Those numbers are deteriorating rapidly in the Premier League, it's not a concern for me in the next 18 months but in four of five years time, we have to be really careful on that."

Sabalenka's struggle with 'hate' in locker room

REUTERS

Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka said she struggled to understand the "hate" she encountered in the locker room amid strained relations between some players following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The world number two has previously said she has nothing against Ukrainian people and felt bad for them as Moscow's action rages on. Belarus has been a staging area for the invasion, which Moscow calls a "special military operation".

"It was really tough for me because I've never faced that much hate in the locker room," Sabalenka said ahead of the Miami Open. "There are a lot of haters on Instagram when you're losing matches, but in the locker room I've never faced that."

"It was really tough to understand that there's so many people who hate me for no reason. I did nothing."

Australian Open champion Sabalenka lost in the final of Indian Wells to Elena Rybakina on Sunday.

Earlier in the tournament, Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko withdrew

from her match against Sabalenka over a panic attack triggered by a conversation with WTA chief Steve Simon about tennis's response to Russia's invasion.

Sabalenka said she had been having "weird conversations" with members of some players' teams in the last year.

"It was really tough but now it's getting better," she said.

World number one Iga Swiatek has called for more support to be offered to Ukrainian players, saying the tennis leadership was not doing enough, but two-times Grand Slam champion Victoria Azarenka of Belarus said that was not the case.

"There are certain players that have different feelings and behaviours. Overall, I don't necessarily share the same opinion as Iga does," Azarenka said.

"I'd encourage her to look at the things that have been done before she makes comments. As a player council member I'm happy to provide the facts. That would be a more appropriate way to have that conversation."

