

AFGHANS inspiring Ireland

SPORTS REPORTER

Although Ireland lost the three-match ODI series without putting up a fight against the hosts, the Irish head coach Heinrich Malan informed that his side are taking inspiration from Afghanistan's victory over Pakistan as the visitors head into the first of the three-match T20I series against Bangladesh in Chattogram starting from today.

"Look, you got to go back a couple of days where Afghanistan beat Pakistan. The shorter the format, the more it gets intense and that's the exciting part about T20 cricket," Malan told the reporters in the pre-match press conference yesterday.

"We have shown in the past that we can play some good T20 cricket. So, hopefully we can adapt to these conditions and I think the boys now have a better understanding about what we could expect. Hopefully we can go out there and put up a good show," he added.

The visitors opted to rest their regular skipper Andrew Balbirnie with experienced Paul Stirling set to lead the Irish side against the Tigers in red-hot form.

According to the Ireland head coach, the visitors are willing to play an exciting brand of cricket, regardless of results in the series.

"This is going to be a tough challenge as they [Bangladesh] have shown that by beating the world champions England in the shortest format. But we are really excited as we have shown in the World Cup that we can play a brand that is exciting, which the people would want to watch."

"Look, international cricket is all about winning and losing and it's not just about how we would go and beat Bangladesh 3-0 as it's about playing a certain brand of cricket. If we can do that, the result of 3-0 hopefully can take off," he said.

The South African-born Irish coach also praised the Bangladesh team for demonstrating how hard work and planning over the years can help a team improve significantly.

"I think they have shown us, and also during the series against England, that Bangladesh is becoming an all-round side as it's not just about playing spin anymore. They have got a quality seam attack as well."

"So, it's a challenge for us as our batters generally don't face 140 kmph bowlers often in the domestic circuit -- something we identify and work on. We know why we are here and we are going to put our best foot forward," Malan concluded.



After inflicting a 3-0 whitewash on world champions England, (R) Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan apparently couldn't keep his eyes off another trophy, during the trophy unveiling ceremony yesterday, ahead of the three-match T20I series against Ireland starting in Chattogram today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

on Hathurusingha's agenda

SPORTS REPORTER

The aggression in mentality that Chandika Hathurusingha is trying to bring to the Bangladesh dressing room can be effected through openness to change and trying out new things, the head coach said a day before the first of the three-match T20I series against Ireland.

The changes being targeted and endorsed has to come about due to the psychological safety that the coaching staff is trying to establish. Bangladesh have won two out the three series under Hathurusingha. Following the loss against England in the ODI series, Bangladesh bounced back to inflict a 3-0 clean sweep against the T20 world champions before clinching the ODI series against Ireland 2-0.

Fear of failure has often stunted the growth of cricketers despite showing potential for better careers.

After two series, Hathurusingha felt not much changed in terms of skill, but the dressing room environment has found more assurance.

"I don't think anything has changed. They are the same players with same skills. Only the environment changed a little bit inside the dressing room and the way we speak and what we talk about," he said at the press conference yesterday.

"I tried to bring some psychological safety around the group and tell them that whether they do well or fail, they have value to us," added Hathurusingha, who believes that aggression has to be shown through

"No doubt they can improve skill playing IPL. It's a very top, high-class tournament. But their number one priority is to play for country."

BANGLADESH HEAD COACH, CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA



and through, not just on the field but in every area of importance.

"Aggressive cricket, as I explain, doesn't mean we go and hit hard, further as we can. It's aggressive in every sense of the word. We select [the team] with aggressive intent, field placing, our body language, batting. Tactically we're going to be aggressive. I think when we play like that with freedom, this team has always done well," he said.

The seniors such as Mushfiqur Rahim have already shown an openness to change. Coming down at number six instead of

his usual position at number four in the ODIs, Mushfiqur has shown tremendous intent in what was a switch from how he conducted himself in the England ODIs.

Hathurusingha felt that players have to worry less about outcomes and repercussions, which can often hinder progress.

"One word I can sum up is psychological safety. It's a big word. There's a lot of things behind that, like if you can create an environment that the players can do their best without worry about outcomes, without worry about repercussions. Not only coaches, not only selectors, even from their peers so they can be free to try things and if they fail, it's still okay, they are the same players and we trust them."

"I think that's the biggest change. If you create an environment like that, they can do their best. I mean, if their base is not good enough on some days, we will say that's okay," he said.

The selection of leg-spinner Rishad Hossain appears to be one where long-term benefits are sought over immediate impact.

"We think that his skill set is good enough and there's something special that we can develop in the long [run]," he said, adding that, at the same time, Afif Hossain's exclusion was due to performance.

"He has to do what everyone else does - go and score runs," the coach said as he keeps building on his idea of an aggressive team after having sent the message to those keen on going to the Indian Premier League (IPL) that country comes first.

Reagui in dreamland after win over Brazil

REUTERS

Morocco coach Walid Reagui has hailed his team as history makers after they followed up their giant-killing feats of last year's World Cup with their first win over Brazil in a friendly in Tangier on Saturday.

The Atlas Lions became the first Arab team to defeat the five times world champions, with goals from Sofiane Boufal and substitute Abdelhamid Sabri earning Morocco a 2-1 victory.

"It feels like I'm dreaming," Reagui told reporters. "We wrote history. We beat Brazil, who are number one in the FIFA rankings and the country of football."

The match, Morocco's first since their stunning run to last year's World Cup semi-finals, was played out in a festive atmosphere at a sold-out Ibn Batouta stadium in front of more than 65,000 fans.

"To make the celebration beautiful, we had to win this match and that's what we did," Morocco centre back Romain Saiss said.

"We were at the level even though it was complicated. The mental state of the team made the difference and made people happy again and that's what is important."



Russia to play first home match since start of war

REUTERS

Russia's men's team will host their first match on home soil since November 2021 on Sunday, a friendly against Iraq in St Petersburg, having been kicked out of international competition because of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Both European soccer body UEFA and global football's governing body FIFA decided in February, 2022 that all Russian teams - national or club sides - would be suspended from participation in their competitions following the invasion.

The Russian Football Union (RFU) has touted switching from UEFA to the 47-nation Asian confederation (AFC), but its executive committee has not officially proposed this idea.

TASS reported that the RFU expects around 20,000 fans to attend Sunday's game at the Gazprom Arena, which had been due to host last year's Champions League final before Russia was stripped of that honour.

Russia's men have played four friendlies since the invasion, all away from home. Russia won 2-1 away in Kyrgyzstan last September, before draws against Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Iran.

Russia's women have not played at home since February, 2022.

The RFU and four Russian clubs had appeals against the bans dismissed by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) last July.

Scoring plenty for Bangladesh is KINGSLEY'S 'NEXT DREAM'



After having earned Bangladeshi citizenship in 2021, Eleta Kingsley became the country's first naturalised footballer to represent Bangladesh national football team as the Nigerian-born striker featured against Seychelles in a FIFA friendly match on Saturday. The morning after, Eleta spoke to The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman before training in Sylhet. Here are the excerpts of the conversation:

DS: Did you have a sound sleep after your dream of donning the red and green jersey came true?

EK: I couldn't sleep because I had a lot to reflect on. Normally when you have beautiful moments, the next night is very difficult to sleep.

DS: How do you feel now after making the long-awaited debut?

EK: At last, I've done it! I'm very excited for this chance I got in the national team. The dream would have been completed had I taken my first [scoring] chance.

DS: Did you even dream of playing for the Nigeria national team when you started playing football?

EK: Yes, I dreamt. As a Nigerian, I had a chance to get in the national team but selection saw me out. I was upset and decided to go outside and play football.

DS: One of your dreams has been fulfilled, what's next?

EK: Scoring as many goals as possible for

the national team is my next dream because [eventually] I want to sit back and count how many goals I scored for my country as a striker.

DS: Did you ever think about becoming a citizen of Bangladesh and to play for the national team after marrying a Bangladeshi?

EK: I never thought I was going to be Bangladeshi before 2015 even though I got married in 2012. However, when I won the Sheikh Kamal International Club Championship [for Chittagong Abahani], I took a flag of Bangladesh and ran around the ground to thank our fans. From that moment, my wife [Liza Jafar] was telling me how

I wished it was real and that was how I started the journey.

DS: Were you nervous after being on the ground in debut and finding the first chance to score?

EK: Yesterday I was just unlucky because the ball bounced off the ground. I blame the pitch which has not been up to mark for international standard. I was a bit nervous because putting on a jersey for the first time and scoring a goal at the same time was too much load. But, if you ask me just to play, I score.

DS: How was the reaction from your family members, especially your mother in Nigeria?

EK: My wife and daughter have come here to watch my first match and fulfilled my dream. I spoke to my mom and brothers yesterday [Saturday] and everyone is happy.

DS: How challenging is it to play football at the age of 33?

EK: Yes, but in my case, I have to rely on experience. As long as the coach tells me I'm supporting the team on and off the ball, I think that's enough for me.

DS: Can Bangladesh expect something from the upcoming SAFF Championship with your inclusion after having been eliminated from the group stage in last five editions?

EK: In the first meeting I had with the coach, we talked a lot about SAFF Championship. We don't want just to play SAFF this time and qualify for the group, we want to become champions.



South Africa opener Quinton de Kock celebrates his 43-ball-century against West Indies in the second T20I at SuperSport Park in Centurion yesterday. South Africa scored 259 in a record chase, with six wickets in hand and seven balls to spare.

PHOTO: AFP