

## Ireland up for Test challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Ireland will be playing their first Test in nearly four years when they take on Bangladesh in the lone Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur from today, with the challenge for the visitors being how they adapt to the longest version of cricket, a format almost none of the current Irish side have featured in.

According to skipper Andrew Balbirnie, the biggest challenge for the visitors, who are also shorn of first-class experience, will be adjusting to conditions against a team that have been especially dominant on home soil in recent times.

"I think [the challenge will be] just the longevity. A lot of our guys don't have a huge amount of first-class experience. Five-day Tests are very different. A lot of our guys have been brought up on white-ball cricket. A batter has to set himself to bat for as long as possible. Bowlers have to be as disciplined as possible," Balbirnie told the media ahead of the Test on Tuesday.



"That's going to be the biggest challenge. Conditions will play a part in terms of the heat. These guys need to learn on the job. It is an exciting group. Certainly get the whites back on, dust off the white pads. We know how good Bangladesh are in Test cricket, particularly here. It will be challenging but exciting."

Ireland, who are yet to register a win in the three Tests that they have played so far, have a number of debutants waiting in the ranks for the game today and so decided to complete the cap presentation formalities yesterday.

"It has not happened many times in recent history but there's going to be a lot of Test debuts. It only happens to new nations. It would have happened to Bangladesh in the early 2000s. We are going to have a bit of a get-together tonight to do some presentations. I think if we do it in the morning, it will take too long.

"A lot has happened. We have been through a pandemic. There's been so many changes. Players have gone, players have come in. It was a memorable occasion in 2019 for a lot of Irish cricket people. This is memorable as well. This is a big cricketing nation, playing against a top team. A lot of good teams have come here and got unstuck. The message is to go out and play, not hold too many fears. There's not a lot to lose in a one-off Test. So, we want to enjoy it," he said.



## No IPL for Shakib this season?

A Kolkata Knight Riders official on Monday told The Daily Star that the franchise was looking to replace Bangladesh Test and T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan for the ongoing season of the Indian Premier League due to his packed schedule with the national team. Shakib, however, seemed relaxed during Bangladesh's practice yesterday despite all the noise regarding his participation in the tournament. The premier all-rounder turned up for the practice session on the eve of the one-off Test against Ireland but did not take part in the training.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

# TEST AGGRESSION on the agenda but concerns remain

SPORTS REPORTER

As groundsmen flocked to the centre pitches following the end of both teams' practice session, reporters were curiously waiting to see whether the 'greenish' looking surface would lose a bit of grass.

Why such a suspicion? News had come about just hours after Mehedi Hasan Miraz's press conference in the afternoon that key pacer Taskin Ahmed had been ruled out, with Rejaur Rahman Raja drafted in as a replacement.

Without their leading pacer, would the hosts want as much grass on the surface? While the grass was not cut yesterday, that could very well change on Tuesday morning, the first day of the one-off Test against Ireland.

Skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who had a nonchalant demeanour, did not partake in any practice. His only moment of real activity came when he headed from the dressing room to the centre pitches in the morning with Chandika Hathurusingha. In the background, a table lay on its side and Taskin, who appeared a bit distant, was looking down below.

If a picture speaks volumes, was the tumbled table a symbol of a plan foiled due to Taskin's injury? At the press conference, Miraz talked about the chance of the number of pacers in the eleven increasing, but that idea may also take a back seat following Taskin's injury.

If not for Taskin's injury, there is also the issue of Tamim and playing an extra batter. Tamim had returned to the Test side after sitting out the Tests against India, but a family emergency put his



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal is doubtful for the lone Test against Ireland in Mirpur today since his son has taken ill.

participation in doubt.

The idea that importance would be placed on pacers at home was being debated after looking at the greenish wicket and Miraz's press conference had somewhat substantiated that idea before the news of Taskin's injury.

When asked whether a spinning track was on offer or whether pace would be prioritised, Miraz believed the team had a good balance: "We have a full-strength squad and the combination is working well for us."

Belief in the pacers' ability was also at

the forefront of Miraz's presser.

"The pacers' role is very important. When they do well, the scenario inside the team changes. Pacers are doing well in ODIs and us spinners are doing well along with them. So the combination is good. Even in T20Is, the pacers are stepping up and we have begun to win matches. When a pacer gives you one or two wickets, the opponent falls behind. I believe our pacers are world-class and they will try their best to do well," Miraz said.

The idea of aggression in Tests stems from the firepower of a pace-bowling unit. Given Taskin's injury, the idea of a three-pronged pace attack with Raja looks uncertain. However, Miraz also suggested that the Tigers would look to translate their white-ball aggression into Tests going forward. The top-order batters all had a bout of range-hitting practice yesterday following regular nets session.

"There are attacking brands of cricket in the modern day. Teams are trying to attack even in the Test format at the moment. So obviously we will also try to do the same."

"If we can manage 350-400 in 100 overs, it will be good for the players but it will depend on wicket and how the opponent bowls."

"We will play Test cricket as it should be played," Miraz further relayed.

But without a practice game, adaptability will be key and with Ebadat Hossain and Khaled Ahmed as the only experienced pacers, it remains to be seen if Tigers can start to build on their motto of aggression from the one-off Ireland Test.

## 'Can't argue, I've seen the bodycam'

REUTERS

Referees in grassroots leagues in England feel more confident and "safer" when wearing body cameras whilst officiating, the Football Association's head of refereeing said amid a trial into the efficacy of the technology.

In February, the FA announced it will trial body cameras on grassroots referees in a bid to ascertain whether the technology could help "improve participant behaviour and respect towards referees".

Paul Field, president of England's Referees' Association, in February said that the verbal and physical abuse of grassroots referees in the country is getting so bad that lives are at risk.

A BBC questionnaire responded to by more than 900 amateur referees revealed worrying levels of abuse and intimidation with multiple cases of death threats being made.

Last year the FA banned 380 players and coaches for attacking or threatening referees and match officials.

"The early signs are positive, the referees feel more confident, reassured, protected, safer," Daniel Meeson, the FA's head of refereeing, told the BBC.

"Referees tell us some players have taken a second glance, seen the bodycam, and made a joke like, 'Oh I'd better not argue with you ref, I've seen the bodycam'."

The cameras being used in the trial do not record for the entire duration of the match, but have a 30-second capture that can be triggered by referees. The FA have said that no referees have felt the need to activate the body cameras yet.

"It's a positive start - no activations - so in my mind it looks like the deployment of these devices is acting ultimately in the way we want them to, which is that deterrent," Meeson said.

"Better to prevent misconduct and prevent poor participant behaviour than to have to cure it."

If the trial is successful, the FA have said they will look into implementing the technology "across additional adult grassroots football leagues in England during the 2023-24 season".

## SAF to receive medal after 40 years

REUTERS

Sir Alex Ferguson is already known as one of the greatest managers in football history but the Scot will have to make room in his trophy cabinet for one more medal that is set to be awarded 40 years after he guided Aberdeen to European glory.

Before Ferguson became a serial winner with English side Manchester United, where he won 13 Premier League titles and two Champions League trophies among other honours, he managed Aberdeen from 1978 to 1986.

His greatest success at the Scottish club came when they beat Real Madrid in extra time in the final of the European Cup Winners' Cup in May 1983.

However, only the starting 11 and five substitutes received winners' medals on the night in Gothenburg.

UEFA have now agreed to provide six additional medals, with Ferguson the first name on the list.

"It's a great honour to be receiving this medal and I am grateful to everyone who has worked so hard to make this happen," Ferguson, 81, said in a statement.

"Their efforts, along with the co-operation of UEFA is much appreciated. It's also fantastic to see some of the wonderful people who worked tirelessly behind the scenes during this hugely successful period for the club now being honoured."



In the midst of their high-flying Serie A season, Napoli were brought crashing down as AC Milan defeated them 4-0 at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona in Naples yesterday. It was the first time Napoli lost a home league match by a four-plus goal margin since October, 2000. Although I Partenopei remain 16 points clear at the top of the table, the loss means that Luciano Spalletti's men can no longer break Juventus' record tally of 102 points -- the most recorded in a single campaign.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## 'Why am I still sitting here?'

REUTERS

Liverpool boss Juergen Klopp jokingly questioned why he still had a job as clubs around the Premier League sacked their managers as the season enters its home stretch.

Chelsea sacked Graham Potter on Sunday with the club sitting 11th in the league, hours after relegation-threatened Leicester City parted ways with Brendan Rodgers. Meanwhile, Tottenham Hotspur also parted ways with Antonio Conte late last month.

Klopp has been at Liverpool since 2015 but despite guiding them to Premier League and Champions League titles, he is under pressure with the Anfield club eighth in the standings -- eight points off the top four after losing 4-1 to Manchester City.

"What can I say about that (the sackings)?"

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The elephant in the room is probably why am I still sitting here in this crazy world? Last man standing," Klopp told reporters ahead of Tuesday's game against Chelsea.

"So I think both clubs are not in the spots where they expect to be... I respect them (Potter and Rodgers) a lot. Really good people and fantastic managers, both of them. But things can go wrong.

"We all accept that part of the business,

but that's it. Conte was last week, (Julian) Nagelsmann and now these two. The season is in a decisive part, people are afraid of maybe not reaching their targets."

Nagelsmann was shockingly sacked by Bayern Munich during the international break despite being in a much healthier position in the league.

The Premier League has had a record 12 managers sacked this season, which Klopp described as an "awful number".

"It is how it is. Some clubs are under achieving, definitely us too... There are expectations out there, rightly so, and if you don't reach them, then you have to accept the decisions," he said.

On his own future, the German manager said Liverpool have "smart owners" but he did not like the fact that he was still in the job because of his previous success with the club.

"I'm here to deliver, I'm not here as a talisman or for murals on houses' walls," he said.

"I know as well I'm still here because of what happened in the last few years, I don't like the fact that I have to rely on that.

"But we have to sort it, we cannot just continue playing like we do from time to time. Not always, thank god. That's not allowed, really. I'm really disappointed about us, but it happens and we have to find a way out."