

Tigers dismiss favourites tag

SPORTS REPORTER

"I don't want to use the word favourites a lot," Bangladesh ODI captain Tamim told reporters at the Cambridge University's Fenner's ground yesterday.

It was clear that the Tigers were not keen to focus on their opponents but rather on how the team can improve in all departments, with a chance to furnish their skills in away conditions such as England's.

"We came here to play good cricket and win games but in cricket, you can't say anything beforehand in terms of what will happen. They are a good team in these conditions and they are quite familiar with the conditions. We hope that it will be a good and competitive series," he said.

The Tigers will have one more practice session at Chelmsford, Essex, before the first ODI on May 9.

Bangladesh's practice sessions at the Leys had gone according to plan but their warm-up match at Fenner's had to be abandoned due to wet outfield. Tamim said that preparations have not quite gone according to plan.

"We couldn't prepare to our potential as weather is not in our hands. We are trying to prepare as much as we can, and the rest will have to be mental preparation. The target is to play well and win. We will visit the ground tomorrow (Monday) where the game will be held and if weather allows, we will practice.

"We haven't held all our sessions there (Chelmsford) but it was not availed entirely as the county championship is going on. I am certain that the more we can mentally prepare ourselves, the better it will be for us," the skipper remarked.

The Tigers have the Afghanistan series coming up following the Ireland series, which is part of the ICC ODI Super League. The two series will give a better understanding of the combinations for the World Cup.

The skipper said that he can only think of the combination after looking at the Chelmsford wicket as they may play an extra pacer in England but remarked that youngsters' performance has been a positive for his side recently.

"Young players have grabbed their opportunities with both hands. There are no particular spots that, I can guarantee, are already fixed. We will play this series and then the next one in different conditions and the best possible team will go [to World Cup]. For now, whoever has gotten the opportunity has done well, for instance Towhid Hridoy. It's too early to comment but the one series he played in; he has done exceptionally well," Tamim remarked on his team.



Having spent time with family in the United States, superstar Shakib Al Hasan, who joined the Bangladesh camp late, practiced with the team in Chelmsford yesterday. Meanwhile, Mushfiquur Rahim and skipper Tamim Iqbal were seen in a relaxed mood as the Tigers prepare for the three-match ODI series against hosts Ireland starting Tuesday.



PHOTO: BCB

Prantik a winner in defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Prantik Nawrose Nabil, member of Bangladesh's U-19 World Cup-winning team, did something unprecedented for Prime Bank in their Dhaka Premier League's Super League fixture against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club yesterday.

A steady partnership of 136 between Nabil and Shahadat Dipu had just ended in the 30th over and two deliveries later in the same over, Sheikh Jamal were vociferous in their appeal and Prantik walked with the umpire only raising his finger after the batter started walking.

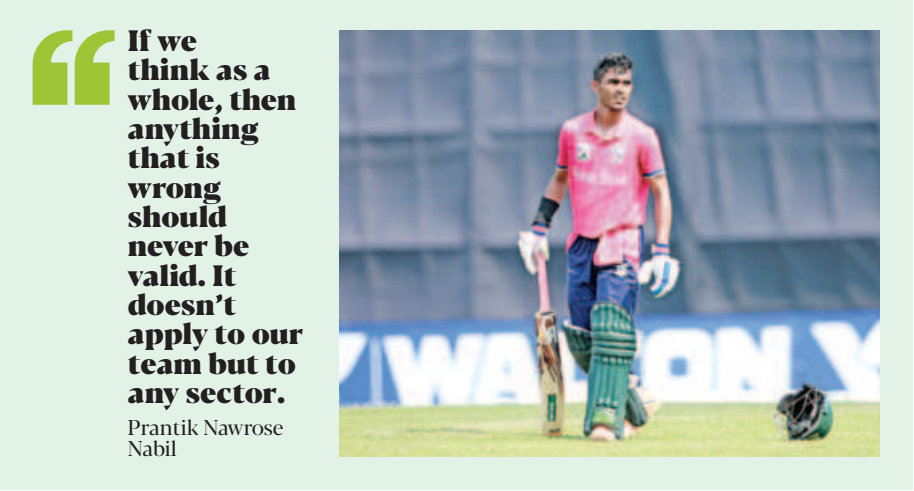
His knock ended on 75, having taken his side to a strong position. In his mind, however, taking the higher ground had taken precedence over results as Prime Bank fell short by 13 runs in the end.

"It's always been this way and after I nicked it, I didn't look at what the umpire was doing. While I was walking back, I realised that he hadn't given out and I knew that I was never going to walk back," Prantik told reporters yesterday.

"It's about your personal ethics and it feels fulfilling to myself if it comes this way in regards to the hard work I've done. Maybe if I had scored the century, it'd feel like I didn't do this the proper way," he added.

He was asked if he could have not walked thinking about the team.

"It's a tricky question. If we think as a whole, then anything that is wrong should never be valid. It doesn't apply to our team but to any sector. We must



always think what is right and what is wrong amidst the situation," he said strongly.

Many of his teammates from that U-19 World Cup have made the national team or at least been in the limelight. Prantik though was keen on the process, not feeling any hurry to make the national setup.

"I was always focused on the process and that's what I'm doing. Someone does it early and someone does it later. It's not about how quickly I make it but about how long I can make it," the 19-year-old youngster said.

Sheikh Jamal won important points that keep them in the race for the title, still ahead on head-to-head over Abahani



'Celebrate a little bit, not too much'

Relieved Real keep feet on ground despite Copa title

AGENCIES

Brazilian Rodrygo struck twice and compatriot Vinicius Junior was "difficult to defend" as Real Madrid beat Osasuna 2-1 on Saturday to win their 20th Copa del Rey title, ending a nine-year wait to lift the trophy again.

Osasuna, who have never won a major trophy, fought well but ultimately fell short against the reigning Spanish and European champions, who face Manchester City on Tuesday in the Champions League semifinals.

Osasuna head coach Jagoba Arrasate fired a word of caution towards City after match.

"It's very difficult to defend against (Vinicius) and on Tuesday I am sure City will suffer too," said Arrasate.

Madrid had an uncharacteristically disappointing run so far in the La Liga as they have virtually conceded the league title to FC Barcelona with five games left, trailing by 13 points against their eternal rivals.

However, Los Blancos remain a whole different beast when it comes to cup competitions.

Madrid had beaten both Atletico Madrid and then rivals Barcelona to



"I dedicated it to Nacho, a kid I visited at Juegaterapia (in Madrid), which is a place that cares for children with cancer. I went over there to pay them a visit and give them a gift or two. He asked me to make the 'I' for Ignacio if I scored, so the second goal was for him." Rodrygo explained the touching reason behind the celebration after scoring Real Madrid's second goal in the Copa del Rey final.

reach the final and Ancelotti said it was time to "celebrate a little bit, not too much" ahead of the clash with City, who have peaked at the right time in becoming the frontrunners to seal another Premier League silverware under Pep Guardiola.

Veteran midfielder Toni Kroos and defender Dani Carvajal reflected the predominant winning mentality in the Madrid camp that resulted in them winning the Champions League a record 14 times, seven more than AC Milan -- the second on the list.

"At this stage, they [City] were

the toughest opponents we could have got but we're confident. We're Madrid and we will try our best to win, as ever," said the German.

Carvajal said, "Our ambition remains intact, we can win another Champions League and we're going to go all out to do so."

Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois was "delighted" to have won the only trophy that eluded him in all whites.

"Winning this final gives us positive energy for what's to come... The Copa del Rey is important, even if the Champions League is the biggest competition a player can win."



Even though Real Madrid have all but failed to defend the La Liga title, Los Blancos still have a lot of achievements to boast this season. The 2-1 win over Osasuna on Saturday saw Real end a nine-year wait for the Copa del Rey trophy, the third silverware for Carlo Ancelotti's side this season alongside UEFA Super Cup and FIFA Club World Cup. Real also have a chance to defend their Champions League title, but for that they must outdo an in-form Manchester City in the semifinal in the coming weeks.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID

Cabrera wants to be competitive in SAFF C'ship

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh football team's head coach Javier Cabrera claimed his team are in very good shape and, given good preparation, can be competitive and make things difficult for other teams in next month's SAFF Championship.

The regional apex football tournament will take place from June 21 to July 04 in Bengaluru and the men in red and green will play a FIFA friendly as part of the build-up in Cambodia on June 15.

Speaking to reporters at the BFF House yesterday, Cabrera said his team wants to achieve something important for the country.

"The team is excited, the players are excited and the coaching staff is excited. We believe we can achieve something important and give to the country," the Spaniard said, while avoiding to set any specific target for the team.

"We will go game by game and be competitive and by being competitive, we know we can make things difficult for everyone," the 39-year-old coach said, adding that teams like Kuwait entering the fray will add new challenge for the team.

BFF vice-president Kazi Nabil Ahmed informed that the team will have their training camp at the Bashundhara Kings Arena before flying to Cambodia, and will leave its capital Phnom Penh for Bengaluru on June 16.

Meanwhile, the BFF official, who is also the vice-president of Bangladesh Olympic Association, said they are trying to convince the BOA to include men's football team in the upcoming Asian Games contingent.

BOA, in an executive committee meeting on Saturday, decided to not send the men's team, citing 'a lack of performance' despite the fact that the men's team made it to the knockout rounds of football competition for the first time in the last edition held in Indonesia in 2018.

"We are having talks with the BOA to have our men's team in the Asian Games in Hangzhou," Nabil said. "I spoke with the BOA president yesterday [Saturday] evening and told him that the men's team, too, needs to be sent."

'Swiatek always pushes me to the limits'

REUTERS

Aryna Sabalenka beat world number one Iga Swiatek to win the Madrid Open in the pair's second clash in a final this year, with the Belarusian saying she hopes their burgeoning rivalry will continue to enthrall tennis fans throughout the season.

Sabalenka had a 2-5 win-loss record against the Pole prior to Saturday's 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 win, with four of those losses coming in 2022.

"She always pushes me to the limits. I'm really enjoying our battles. Hopefully we can play many more finals this season," Sabalenka told reporters.

"I would say that this year's matches are completely different. I improved a lot, and I really want to win against her, because she's such a great player.

"To have this win, especially on clay, that's something unbelievable."

