

Injury scares for openers

SPORTS REPORTER

ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal, Liton Das and Mohammad Naim, back-up opener for the upcoming three-match ODI series against Afghanistan next month, got injury scares during their training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.



Tamim, who had to sit out the lone Test against the Afghans this month due to a back issue, showed signs of feeling some pain on his back during a fielding exercise. He left for the dressing room after that.

Liton also suffered a blow during the training when a delivery from a thrower hit him on his hand. He took his frustration out on the stumps before walking out of the nets.

Naim, meanwhile, also got hit by a delivery above his knee. He did, however, continue batting after that.

A source close to the team management informed that neither Tamim nor Liton's injury were serious. Naim showed no signs of pain after ending his batting session.



After a goalless first half, two horrible fumbles from the Bangladesh defenders in the final minutes saw Lebanon pounce and secure a 2-0 win in their SAFF Championship Group B opener at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru on Thursday. PHOTO: SAFF



It was disappointing to concede goals in the last moments despite putting up a good performance. It [mistakes] happened suddenly and we can't blame anyone because we were building up and looking to create a few chances in a bid to win. To be honest, we want to forget the last 10 minutes of the game before facing Maldives and Bhutan next. I think this kind of performance will boost the players mentally for the next match and we will be trying to play as per the coach's instructions. — Bangladesh goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico.

Boycott lashes out at 'Bazball' approach

AGENCIES

England coach Brendon McCullum said the opening Ashes Test "validated" their attacking approach despite the two-wicket defeat at Edgbaston and that they would be even more aggressive in the second match of the series, starting Wednesday at Lord's.

Former England captain Geoffrey Boycott, however, has lashed out at Ben Stokes and Co. for getting "carried away with Bazball" and not making winning a priority, adding that England are in danger of reducing the Ashes to an exhibition series.

England were in the driver's seat for much of the match but Australia's often cautious approach prevailed thanks to a match-winning 55-run ninth-wicket partnership between captain Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon.

This was just England's third loss in 14 Tests since McCullum joined captain Stokes at the helm. "England are in danger of reducing the Ashes to an exhibition," Boycott wrote in his scathing column for 'The Telegraph'.

"England have got carried away with Bazball and seem to think entertaining is more important than winning. But England supporters want one thing more than anything else -- to win the Ashes."

"Scoring fast runs, whacking lots of fours and sixes is lovely. It is great. But only if England do not lose sight of the big prize which is to beat Australia. If at the end of the series Australia go home with the Ashes we will feel sick, regardless of how much we have been entertained."

Boycott claimed that the much-anticipated Ashes series between the two rivals would lose its importance if England don't play to win.

"If England are not playing to win then these Ashes Tests are not that important. They are only exhibition matches. They have got it back to front. It is not about entertaining and then winning. It is about winning first."

"By all means entertain but cricket is like chess. There are moments when you need to defend. Sometimes you need to be patient and accept it."

We were close to three points: Cabrera

ANISUR RAHMAN from Bengaluru

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera was disappointed with the 2-0 loss against Lebanon but expressed pride in the fight his charges showed against a much superior side in a SAFF Championship encounter at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru yesterday.

"It is disappointing to not get even one point. We deserved it. I think we were close to three points. We were very confident from the beginning and the feeling and atmosphere in the team was that we were going to achieve something today," a dejected Cabrera said after the match.

"Still, I am proud of the performance. It was very positive in

the sense that if we are able to match that level in the next two games, we will definitely have a chance to qualify [for the semifinals]," the 38-year-old said.

"The way we conceded goals is not the point. The point is that we conceded goals and were unable to get points. Forget it now and show the same attitude and same belief and we will make it next game."

The Spaniard added: "The game went as expected. We knew we were going to suffer in the beginning but we knew that we could settle down slowly. We had control of the game and had some chances to counter. We even had a chance to make it 1-0. In the end, they have very good individual players who did what they are capable of."



Expanding more on the mistakes from defenders and Fahim's missed opportunities, Cabrera said: "All mistakes are mistakes and all successes are successes."

The defence was perfect for the whole game against a strong team that press, cross and have players that make things difficult in the box. We conceded, but you are talking about a team that are in the top 100 in the FIFA Rankings. It is normal. We knew it would happen because they are a strong team. Especially when Hassan Maatouk entered the pitch, more problems were introduced. We had a chance to close the game, but we could not do it."

Cabrera's counterpart Aleksandar Ilic expressed satisfaction with the result.

"We need to be satisfied with the result. It was very difficult for us because I gave chances to players who did not play before, but we made changes in the second half and that changed the scenario," Ilic opined.

Replying to a query, the Lebanon coach said: "Yes, it is a big difference in terms of rankings, but it was difficult because our footballing values are different. Bangladesh did very well defensively and we did not get many chances in the first half. But in the second half, the situation changed and we scored."

Federer coy on GOAT debate

AFP, Berlin

Roger Federer described Novak Djokovic's record-breaking 23rd Grand Slam title achievement as "unbelievable" on Wednesday but avoided anointing his old rival as the greatest player of all time.

"I think what Novak has done is unbelievable," said Federer, who racked up 20 Grand Slams before he retired last year.

Djokovic edged ahead of 22-time major winner Rafael Nadal when he won his third French Open in Paris earlier this month.

Federer, 41, speaking at the Halle grass court tournament on Wednesday, admitted however it was "hard to say" who was best player of all time.

"The whole matter is difficult to answer," said Federer. "I asked a friend, what is more difficult, winning Wimbledon at 17, like Boris Becker, or the French Open at 36 like Novak?"

"I don't know. It's a great time to be a tennis fan but also a player," added the Swiss great who was guest of honour in Halle for 'Roger Federer Day'.

"It means a lot to me," Federer said of his return to Halle, where he won a record 10 singles titles.

"Of course I'm overjoyed. I was able to shape this tournament myself with so many victories. It feels like a home away from home."

Federer spent over an hour signing autographs and posing for selfies on centre court in the sun but said he did not miss being in the heat of the action.

"Of course, you want to experience that again. But as long as you know your body cannot do it at this level, you don't feel the need to be out on the court," he said.



'I feel it's better to not captain anymore'

After waiting a long time for his bat to do the talking, former Bangladesh Test skipper Mominul Haque finally scored a Test ton after 26 months during the Tigers' one-off Test against Afghanistan in Mirpur earlier this month. His captaincy saw the rise of the pace unit that now positions Bangladesh as a better Test unit. The left-hander discussed the processes of the latest Test against Afghanistan, his outlook on captaincy, the technique he uses to keep himself prepared and much more in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): Are you more confident about upcoming Tests following your ton?

Mominul Haque (MH): Obviously when someone scores a hundred, they carry confidence. But you have to prepare in a new way. The upcoming Tests we have are all against tough opponents. We have to play more structured and organised cricket and I have to strengthen my shots from which I am already scoring runs. It is mainly about maintaining the process.

DS: How was the Mirpur wicket and the conditions?

MH: We took preparations during our practice sessions. On the second day, the wicket behaved differently. Maybe it was a good toss to lose. Actually, we don't always understand what's happening with the Mirpur wicket. Someone may have a different view but, in my opinion, it depends fully on the cloud cover.

DS: Bangladesh play very few Tests. How important is visualisation technique for you to get yourself ready? Can you use it for any bowler?

MH: You can just close your eyes and think

up scenarios of a bowler bowling to you in different areas when you have free time. The best players all know how to use that technique. I try to visualise everything, the bowlers' wrist position, their run-up, all in my mind. For instance, you are seeing a bowler after a long time but if you are using visualisation, you won't feel that way. It is part of my process, watching videos to get ideas about their strength and then visualising it in my mind.

DS: How did the team prepare for such a wicket?

MH: I feel that our pace-bowling unit has improved considerably. Thus our batting is better. Our bowlers bowled in good areas and created match-like scenarios with field setups. They weren't bowling to us according to the batters' areas of strengths. They gave me a tough time. And not just me but all the batters.

DS: You gave these pacers the support they needed. Ebadot said you are the best captain. How do you feel about it?

MH: They were lacking in Test experience but I felt the more they play, the more they

would improve. But you can't just back a player; he has to be willing to perform too. I believe the credit belongs to them. After getting opportunities, they realised that they needed to improve. There were many players in Bangladesh who were backed by their captains but didn't take the opportunity. But Ebadot had the willingness to improve. That's the most important thing and not the fact that I am being credited.



DS: Have we understood the process of Test matches better under Chandika Hathurusingha? Is Bangladesh's Test cricket at an all-time high?

MH: The young players are coming into the team more mature than before. They

understand their roles better. In Tests, you need high intensity no matter who you are playing against. I feel that in the last two Tests, intensity was high, especially against Afghanistan. When bowlers do well, that intensity increases but our next challenge is how we can support them when they aren't bowling well. That's the mark of a big team.

DS: Shakib Al Hasan wasn't there but the team still maintained the process. What is this process that everyone talks about?

MH: A team only gets good results when they maintain the process regularly whether their best player is there or not. Rather than being result-oriented, we are more process-oriented now. Each and every batter, every player has a process. I have a process which begins a month or two before a match. It continues through my routine during preparation right till the day before the game. The strength I have as a batter is part of the process, what I will be practising is also a part of a process. Skill training, mental strength and fitness are all part of my process. In the same way, the team also has a process.

DS: Do you see yourself captaining Bangladesh again? Do you envision growth

of new leaders from the pack?

MH: No, I don't enjoy captaincy. I feel it's better to not captain anymore. I think Shakib bhai is good as a leader and if anyone comes after, I feel Liton is there. Najmul Hossain [Shanto] and [Mehedi Hasan] Miraz are also there. Those three are the ones.

DS: Do you want to play other formats?

MH: Yes, I want to play white-ball cricket and for that I have to perform regularly in Tests. That's how I can knock on the door. Wherever I play, I have goals in mind but I also need to perform in the Premier League, for instance. And not just there but everywhere I play.

DS: What are Bangladesh's chances in Asia Cup and World Cup? Is it Bangladesh's best opportunity?

MH: In 2027 as well, a good opportunity will come. The 2023 ODI World Cup is a big opportunity for us. There are a lot of senior stars in the team with many matches under their belt. The junior stars are performing regularly and the bowling line up is very good, especially pacers. In the Asia Cup, I am not thinking hard. I am expecting more from the World Cup.