

Afghans up for the challenge

SPORTS REPORTER

Afghanistan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi was not overburdened by the 546-run defeat in the lone Test against Bangladesh last month, saying it would serve as a good lesson as the visitors gear up to shift to more familiar white-ball surroundings when they face Bangladesh in the first of the three-match ODI series tomorrow in Chattogram.

Bangladesh's pacers were instrumental during the Tigers' record Test win and, given the recent rise in the hosts' pace unit, the visitors did their homework in terms of tackling the seamers during a 14-day training camp in Abu Dhabi.

"That Test gave us a lot of lessons. We are well prepared now since we have been in a preparation camp in Abu Dhabi for the past two weeks. We are prepared for everything and [to give] what was missing in that Test. Some of the players from the ODI side were not part of that Test match, but we still know what is expected and we are prepared for that. We did a lot of



Having missed the lone Test against Afghanistan last month due to a back injury, Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal remains a doubt for the three-match ODI series as well while the Afghans are bolstered by the inclusion of star leggie Rashid Khan as they hope to produce a better display in the white-ball series. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN/BCB



practice in terms of facing pacers," Shahidi told reporters in Chattogram yesterday.

The Afghan captain was reminded of the Tigers' strengths in the ODI format and opined that his side had also been in good form so he was expecting a tough competition, especially as they will be bolstered by the return of star cricketer Rashid Khan alongside the likes of Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi — who were not part of the lone Test.

"We have someone like Rashid in our team and that gives me and the entire team a lot of confidence. That's a positive because he didn't play the Test and now he is available. I know he will do well for us," he said.

The ODI series is going to be crucial for both Bangladesh and Afghanistan since the two sides will face each other in their first fixture of the ICC World Cup in India this year.

"This series is important for both the teams because we know each other very well and we have the Asia Cup [coming up]. This series will be a good opportunity for us to judge an opposition like Bangladesh. We will assess their bowling and batting and that will give us some good information both for the Asia Cup and World Cup," said Shahidi.

Although the visiting team are yet to have a look at the surface at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Shahidi said they were well versed in the conditions and pitch from past experiences.

Tigers ready Tamim's back-up just in case

SPORTS REPORTER

Liton Das is all set to be appointed vice-captain for the ODI series against Afghanistan, team management sources informed The Daily Star. Perhaps the decision was somewhat forced by what had happened during head coach Chandika Hathurusingha's press conference on Monday afternoon, when he suggested there was no shortage of leaders in case Tamim Iqbal was ruled out of the ODI series, just as he had been before the lone Test against Afghanistan in Dhaka last month.

Tamim Iqbal has been suffering from a back issue which kept him out of the lone Test and, following his return to the ODI series camp, he showed signs of discomfort during a fielding session prior to Eid vacations. As the team moved to Chattogram and went about their second day's practice session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Tamim did not show any signs of pain while batting in the nets.

Despite that, injuries have been a recurring factor for the ODI skipper. Team management sources suggest that there is no concern regarding Tamim's participation for the series. However, it is a fact that his situation is being closely monitored. The BCB's medical department's ploy with the captain has been to allow him time to recuperate when he feels back pain.

With the Afghanistan ODI series set to begin in a day, the media asked if the skipper was fit. Hathurusingha did not want to discuss details but verified that



I'm not going to discuss somebody's medical history here but he [Tamim] has trained the last two days and he's good so far. We're closely monitoring his progress as well as how he recovers after training. He is training as usual.

Bangladesh head coach CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA on Tamim Iqbal's fitness.

Tamim was being monitored.

"I'm not going to discuss somebody's medical history here but he [Tamim] has trained the last two days and he's good so far. We're closely monitoring his progress as well as how he recovers after training. He is training as usual," the head coach relayed during the press conference.

The vice-captaincy role is one that remains unofficial outside of the team's periphery. However, in case of injury to the

regular captain, the vice-captain takes on the role. Hathurusingha opined there were leaders who could act as back-up captain.

"I think it [the issue of back-up captain] is a good question for selectors. Yeah, we have many guys who have captained before. Recently, we had Liton captain in the Test match when Shakib [Al Hasan] wasn't there. Previously Mushy [Mushfiqur Rahim] has captained and Shakib has captained. We have enough leaders so selectors will make the call close to the game if it [Tamim being ruled out through injury] happens," Hathurusingha said.

Perhaps it is a signal to the ODI skipper that the burden of leadership may not have to be carried when there are others available. Tamim missed the series against India in December last year and his return against England was not been impactful. He also struggled against Ireland in Sylhet and only returned to runs in the final ODI against the same opponents at Chelmsford, although he was still far from his fluent best. Thus, apart from the leadership, Tamim also has to return to solid form ahead of important events.

"Shakib obviously won't be a vice-captain. The talk about a back-up captain is for the future," a source close to the team said.

Amidst all the talk about the back-up captain, Hathurusingha also hinted that Mohammad Naim was in the plans for the opening slot. "Whenever we get an opportunity, we want to give him a game," he said.

'All we're thinking about is winning 3-2'

REUTERS, London

England captain Ben Stokes said there would be no change in his team's approach to the Ashes despite losing the second Test by 43 runs against Australia at Lord's on Sunday and going 2-0 down in the five-Test series.

Stokes, who put on a stunning batting display in his side's unsuccessful run chase, and England coach Brendan McCullum have come under fire for sticking to their freewheeling, no-holds-barred approach against the world Test champions, who now need only a draw to retain the Ashes urn.

"All we're thinking about is winning the series 3-2," Stokes told reporters after scoring a swashbuckling 155.

He suggested that England's perilous situation plays into their hands in view of the swashbuckling way they have been playing the game since McCullum took over in May 2022.

"It's very exciting to know that the way in which we are playing our cricket actually couldn't be more perfect for the situation we find ourselves in — we have to win these three games to get this urn back," he said.

"We are a team who are obviously willing to put ourselves out there and do things against the narrative. So now these next three games are an even better opportunity for us than we've ever found ourselves in before."

Stokes said the team's approach boiled down to making every player feel they have the freedom to play their own game, and then to execute that as best they can.

"What we've managed to do in the dressing room is give every individual clarity in what they want to do. You've got the backing of the whole dressing room to go out there with something in your head that you feel is the best way to take the game on at that given time," he said.

"I just tell the lads 'Let's try to make our execution better'."

Having said before that the team will not be "results-driven", he insisted England would be sticking to their mindset. "We'll keep on giving every player the best chance to be completely clear in their head about what they want to go out and do," he said.



India and Kuwait, who played out an intense 1-1 draw in the group stage of the SAFF Championship, will meet once again in the final of the regional football extravaganza at the Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru today. India, record eight-time champions, will be hoping to retain the title against the Middle Eastern side and keep the SAFF title in its region. On Monday, India defender Sandesh Jhingan and Kuwait goalkeeper Bader Al saanoun posed with the trophy ahead of the final. PHOTO: SAFF



The Centre Court at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, the venue for Novak Djokovic's first-round Wimbledon clash with Pedro Cachin, appeared to have borne the worst of yesterday's rains, which caused most of the tennis in London to grind to a halt. As moisture around the baseline caused further delays after the rain had stopped, Djokovic and Cachin were left bemused before the 23-time Grand Slam winner even took matters into his own hands, coming on to court and trying to mopping up the water with his towel to speed up the process. PHOTO: REUTERS

MARTINEZ came to repay Bangladeshi fans' love

SPORTS REPORTER

Argentina's World Cup-winning goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez said he came to Bangladesh to repay the faith of the millions of fans who supported his team through the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

The 30-year-old spoke of his early struggles and his football philosophy as well as his philosophy on life during a candid interview with the organisers of his brief visit to Bangladesh, Next Ventures, at the company's office in Dhaka yesterday.

"I knew about Bangladeshi people and their craze about Argentina, but after we won the Copa America, the marketing people said there were many followers in Bangladesh. Then I started searching about Bangladesh, and during the World Cup, what I saw was crazy," the goalkeeper, who plies his trade at Premier League side Aston Villa, said during the interview.

"One of the reasons I decided to come was to repay the love," Martinez



said, adding that he would love to come with the rest of the Argentina team to play a match here.

The Mar del Plata native relayed during the interview his early struggles and the sacrifices he made

to become a better professional and a better human being.

"I left home at the age of 12 to be a professional footballer and help my family to survive...Over the years I've been obsessed with becoming a

better person and a player," Martinez said. "I don't smoke; I don't drink...I left nightclubs for training. You have to leave a lot of stuff out in order to make it."

Martinez re-lived the moments of the World Cup final, when he saved a shot from France's Kolo Muani right at the death and then saved a couple of shots in the penalty shoot-out to help the Albiceleste win their third World Cup. He showed the tattoo of the World Cup trophy, emblazoned on his left leg, the leg which made that iconic save against Muani.

When asked what made him so competitive by the interviewees, which included two top officials of NEXT Ventures and State Minister for ICT, Zunaid Ahmed Palak, the Argentine goalkeeper replied: "The obsession and passion I have got, I don't think many have. I think many goalkeepers are more talented than me but the passion and the work I do (are not matched by).... I never relax. Once I'm in my comfort zone, I'll put my gloves away and retire."