

Confident Afghans ready to dare Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

A lack of experience in the longest format of the game and the absence of some of their regular cricketers saw Afghanistan succumb to a massive 546-run defeat against Bangladesh in the lone Test in Mirpur last month. But as the format shifts to white-ball cricket and players like superstar Rashid Khan and the experienced Mohammad Nabi return to the side after missing the Test match, the visitors have emerged as a strong unit for the three-match ODI series starting today in Chattogram. Although Bangladesh have been consistent in the 50-over format and could be labelled favourites after beating Afghanistan in four of their last five ODIs, Hashmatullah Shahidi's side are capable of testing the hosts. When asked if he thought Bangladesh were favourites, the 31-year-old replied: "Afghanistan are also here to play cricket and win". He certainly meant what he said, reflecting the confidence gained from winning twelve of their 18 games over the past two years. He added: "It's not about them. Yes, of course, they have played good cricket but we are also here to play good cricket. We have also done well over the past two years." The obvious threat remains the world-class Rashid, who has proven to be a game-changer against the Tigers



in their den by picking up twelve wickets in six games at an economy of 3.87. Nabi also brings loads of experience both with bat and ball and is another cricketer in the Afghan camp who could turn things around. He also bagged twelve wickets in 10 games in Bangladesh at a miserly economy of 3.70 while his batting credentials will surely attract a lot of attention. On the other hand, mystery spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman has been quite toothless against the Tigers, managing to scalp just one wicket from the three games he has played against Bangladesh so far. The Afghans included five new faces, including young uncapped leg-spinner Izzatullah Naveed, who has already made his mark in franchise cricket leagues. Uncapped left-arm spinner Zia Akbar can prove to another surprise element for the visitors. While Bangladesh are aware of the spin threat, Shahidi did not forget to remind what he has in his pace arsenal, led by left-arm seamer Fazalhaq Farooqi and Azmatullah Omarzai alongside a bunch of uncapped pacers raring to make an impact. "The good thing is we had good spinners. But now we have good seamers like Fazal and Azmat, who are doing well. We also brought the new guy Wafadar Momand who has good pace and also Saleem Safi. He also has good pace and it definitely gives us an advantage. Alongside good spinners, we also have good pacers as well," he said. Batting-wise, Rahmanullah Gurbaz can be devastating on his day while the likes of Rahmat Shah, Nabi, Shahidi and Najibullah Zadran have the ability to spoil the Tigers' party.

Federer wows Wimbledon crowd

AFP, London

Wimbledon paid tribute to Roger Federer on Tuesday as the eight-time champion returned to the scene of his some of his greatest triumphs. The Centre Court crowd gave the Swiss great a prolonged standing ovation interspersed with cheers as he entered the royal box. Federer, fresh from appearing on stage with Coldplay in Zurich at the weekend, was visibly moved before taking his seat next to Catherine, the Princess of Wales. The 41-year-old has mostly stayed away from tennis since bowing out in emotional scenes at the Laver Cup in London in September but was similarly honoured at the grass-court event in Halle, Germany, last month. Federer, who ended his career with 20 Grand Slam titles, won his first Wimbledon title in 2003 and a record eighth men's crown in 2017. He played his final match at the All England club in 2021, losing in the quarter-finals to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz. Novak Djokovic is the hot favourite to equal Federer's Wimbledon mark this year and secure his 24th Grand Slam title.



Having missed the lone Test against Afghanistan last month due to a finger injury picked up during the Ireland tour in May, star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is set to return to action in the white-ball series against the Afghans, starting with the first of the three-match ODI series in Chattogram today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Cautious of 'risk', Tigers gear up for Afghanistan

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

The Bangladesh team appeared to have put in the hard yards over the past two days and thus had a rather light training session in Chattogram yesterday on the eve of the first ODI against Afghanistan today. The majority of the work went on behind closed-door sessions, with only Shakib Al Hasan, making a return following an injury, doing specific work in the nets with head coach Chandika Hathurusingha. The pacers had a day off the day on Monday and, bar Shakib, the rest of the batters, including skipper Tamim Iqbal and the likes of Afif Hossain, Mohammad Naim and Najmul Hossain, had net sessions. Mushfiqur Rahim and Towhid Hridoy were a common denominator between the training session on both days, giving it the feel of a fragmented routine with separate days to focus on bowlers and batters. Allan Donald worked in the morning with all five pacers in Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud and Mustafizur Rahman. They went about their rhythm routine while bowling near the centre wickets before partaking in a fielding exercise, namely high catches with Shane McDermott. With all five pacers fit, Tamim opined that 'in these three games, you will see different combinations of pacers.' Mushfiqur and Towhid did not need much guidance and Hathurusingha could put his attention to Shakib's elbow position after the all-rounder brought it to his attention. The head coach also spent some time with Liton, going for a look at the centre wickets along with the batter, perhaps preparing him for a role that may befall him if Tamim's injury worsens. The Tigers' ODI skipper has been struggling with back pain recently and informed during the press conference yesterday that he was available for the game today despite not being at a hundred per cent. "After the game tomorrow I will be able to understand what the situation is. But till now, [the decision is] I am



You might see some changes in the pace bowling department. Everyone here is doing well and we might play different combinations according to our plans in each game. But it will depend on how the pitch plays tomorrow. But I can confirm that you are going to witness different combinations in the three games.

Tamim Iqbal
Bangladesh ODI captain

playing tomorrow," the skipper said. Indeed, there was a risk attached to playing with a problematic back. "Right now I feel that I am ready for tomorrow but during the game if I feel that I am not ready and it can be too risky then I, along with the medical department, will take a decision," Tamim said. Although Tamim's eagerness to play has a risk, his selection is obvious. "If the captain is available, there isn't a matter of selection. So it will mean he is playing," a team management source said. Tamim's injury problem is a headache for the team management but in Shakib and Liton, they will now look to find an adequate response in case a leadership vacuum arises this series.



Top seed Carlos Alcaraz opened his Wimbledon campaign yesterday in ruthless fashion as he routed French veteran Jeremy Chardy with a dominating 6-0, 6-2, 7-5 first round victory, underlining his status as the main challenger to reigning champion Novak Djokovic.

PHOTO: AFP

Zim miss out on World Cup

AFP, Harare

Michael Leask helped Scotland to a stunning 31-run victory over Zimbabwe on Tuesday to set up a winner-takes-all clash with the Netherlands for a place at the World Cup. The defeat for the hosts also meant that the African nation will not be playing in the World Cup for the second time in a row. Sri Lanka became the first of the top two teams in the Super Six table to have qualified for the October-November World Cup in India when they beat Zimbabwe on Sunday. The hosts could have clinched the second spot with victory over Scotland in Bulawayo, but it was not to be after a poor batting display by their top order. Leask top scored with a 34-ball 48 as Scotland racked up 234 runs for eight wickets off their allotted 50 overs. Coming in at number eight, he combined with Mark Watt (21 not out) for an invaluable eighth-wicket partnership of 46 after the Scots had been left reeling at 170-7. Three other batters -- Matthew Cross (38), Brandon McMullen (34) and George Munsey (31) -- all got into the 30s, but failed to build on their



PHOTO: ICC

time at the crease. Sean Williams grabbed 3-41 off his 10 overs, but failed to shine with the bat as Zimbabwe were quickly reduced to 37/4 in the run chase, under intense pressure from Scottish quick Chris Sole (3-33). Wessly Madhevere hit 40 and the dangerous Sikandar Raza 34 as Zimbabwe fought back. Ryan Burl gave the host nation most hope, however, hitting 83 off 84 balls. But Burl crucially fell to the offbreak of Leask, who also had a smart catch off his own bowling to dismiss Richard Ngarava.

Choton back in coaching

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's football team's former head coach Golam Rabbani Choton took over Bangladesh Army's women's football team for two months. The successful coach of the women's team stepped down from Bangladesh Football Federation's duties late in May, with the BFF acknowledging his resignation today, extending its best wishes to its former coach. The coach took charge of the new team from July 2 for two months, but told media that he would be willing to coach any team -- men or women -- in future. Meanwhile, the national women's team is currently undergoing training under assistant coach Mahbubur Rahman Litu for two FIFA friendlies against Nepal later this month. BFF's technical director Paul Smalley is scheduled to return to the country today, and BFF sources said, decision about a new head coach will be taken after consultation with Smalley.

