

‘We are ready for any kind of challenge’

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram

The Tamim Iqbal retirement and return saga, which unfolded over the past 48 hours or so, may have been the centre of attention in the country, but may provide an opportunity for Afghanistan to seal the three-match series against a rather distracted hosts in the second ODI at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram today.

Bangladesh lost the first ODI by 17 runs (DLS method) in a rain-affected game that saw the home side's batters fail to tackle the Afghan spin trio of Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman and Mohammad Nabi or contend with pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi.

Afghan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi believed his side's morale was high after the win and said they would be looking to cash in on that momentum.

“Playing in Bangladesh against Bangladesh is not easy. But we won the first game so morale is high and everyone in the dressing room is confident and looking forward to the rest of the series. Yes, of course (we want to seal the series tomorrow). Tomorrow is a big chance for us to take the series 2-0. As I said, morale is high. I know they will come hard



In absence of Tamim Iqbal, who has been granted a month-and-a-half's leave following his U-turn from retirement, Rony Talukdar and Naim Sheikh will be up for a battle for the second opening spot. (Bottom) Stand-in captain Liton Das, meanwhile, will have an uphill task of guiding the team in the second ODI against Afghanistan today, with the hosts already 1-0 down in the three-match series.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tigers move on with eye ON SECOND ODI

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

Soon after arriving for their practice session in the morning, the Bangladesh team appeared to be in good spirits as they warmed-up with a football session. All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was seen telling one of the other players to move, perhaps to initiate better link-up play and the kind of vibrancy that game was played with clearly showed they were enjoying themselves.

The Tigers had lined up Liton Das as captain for the remainder of the Afghanistan series following Tamim Iqbal's shock retirement on Thursday despite leading the team in the first ODI.

Rony Talukdar had been brought into the side as Tamim's replacement while back-up opener Mohammad Naim was in the nets with Nic Pothas, working things out. Both players were working to fill the gaping hole left by Tamim, and neither had an idea of what would transpire in the evening, when Tamim withdrew his international retirement after a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Coach Chandika Hathurusingha had taken both Liton and Shakib to the centre pitches to analyse the surface for the crucial game and make their assessments ahead of the second ODI.

The press conference, which was held amidst the backdrop of Tamim's retirement, was a curious one that saw Liton Das lose his patience with the journalists at one point because they had, without ill-intent, failed to focus on the do-or-die second ODI on Saturday and instead focused on what had the prior day, when Tamim abruptly retired.

“Is this press conference about what is going to happen tomorrow?” he asked. “Or else it's better for Liton Das not to be here. You can call the board president or the coach regarding these issues. I have come here to talk about the game tomorrow,” he strongly stated.

However, Liton was in a reasonably merry mood for most of the press



conference. “Being captain of Bangladesh is something to be proud of. When I captained before, I tried to do my best and win matches for Bangladesh. There is no alternative. I will try to do well,” he said.

Taking over as captain following the chaos that had transpired following the loss to Afghanistan was indeed a hard step

to follow but, when asked if he was feeling any pressure, Liton replied: “No. Chill.”

The BCB president had suggested during a press conference in the early hours of Friday that the team would be impacted by Tamim's retirement just before key events such as Asia Cup and World Cup.

But Liton believed the scenario would have been similar if Tamim, instead of retiring, was out injured.

“No [there won't be negative impact]. He [Tamim] was there in the previous match but won't be there for the next match. Somehow if that wasn't the case and instead, he had an injury, we would have played an alternative. So I don't think any change like that will happen. Things will stay the same.”

The batters had failed in their attempt to put up a resistance despite poor bowling from Afghanistan in the first ODI. The trio of Mujeeb ur Rahman, Rashid Khan and Mohammad Nabi combined for five wickets, which left Bangladesh in disarray.

Liton felt they needed to give less wickets to the spinners. “We made silly mistakes, we will try to reduce them. We know their main strength is their spin attack in the middle overs. The less wickets you lose during that period, the better for us,” he opined.

The Tigers wanted focus back on the game despite the chaos and Tamim eventually withdrawing his retirement. For now, they have found the mojo to move on.

‘PM wanted Tamim to play’

RAMIN TALUKDER

Former Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza revealed that it was upon Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's wishes that Bangladesh ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal withdrew his retirement on Friday.

Tamim, who had announced his retirement from all forms of international cricket on Thursday, had a fruitful meeting with the Prime Minister at the Gono Bhaban after which he annulled his retirement. The 34-year-old was accompanied by Mashrafe and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon in this meeting.

Mashrafe said that the Prime Minister bestowed upon him the responsibility of getting Tamim in touch with her for that meeting.

“That, I don't know for sure [whether Tamim would return as captain]. It is up to them [Tamim and Papon] and they will discuss it. The main thing is that the Prime Minister wanted Tamim to play – and for him to play in the [ODI] World Cup [later this year]. That is final and that is what has happened,” Mashrafe told The Daily Star.

The 34-year-old will not, however, feature in the next two ODIs against Afghanistan in Chattogram and is set to take a one and a half month hiatus for rehabilitation to regain complete mental and physical fitness after which he would take the Tigers to the Asia Cup as captain.

“I can decline everyone but not the Prime Minister,” Tamim told the media after coming out of the meeting.

The tentative date for the Asia Cup is from August 31 to September 17.

When asked whether Tamim would be under pressure to deliver after coming back from his break, Mashrafe replied that he believed in the southpaw to overcome the adversity and meet the demands of international cricket.

“This is international cricket. When you're here, you have to play by having the ability to overcome all the pressure. I believe Tamim has that. He will play well. Bangladesh will play well. That is the expectation,” he said.

Favourites cruise as BPL returns

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a one-month break for the national team's international engagements, Bangladesh Premier League resumed yesterday with all favourites cruising to victories at three different venues.

Bashundhara Kings, who have already ensured their fourth league title, handed a 3-1 defeat to Sheikh Jamal in their penultimate match in Gopalganj, with the three goals coming through Miguel Ferreira, Dorielton Gomes and Robson da Silva while Abu Shaied reimbursed a goal for Sheikh Jamal.

In Cumilla, Malian captain Souleymane Diabate slammed his third hattrick of the league to power Mohammedan to a 6-0 win over Azampur FC.

Sheikh Russel notched a 2-0 win over Fortis FC, with Sunday Udoh and Kenneth Ngwoke scoring in the 33rd and 63rd minutes respectively.

Kings took their tally to 52 points from 19 matches, 26 more than fourth placed Mohammedan and fifth-placed Sheikh Russel, who stayed behind Mohammedan on goal difference. Sheikh Jamal, Fortis and relegated Azampur are in sixth, seventh and 11th places with 21, 20 and five points respectively.

Phenomenon, Lula weigh in on foreigner debate

AGENCIES

The raging debate in Brazil about whether their famed national team should depend on a foreign manager on a full-time basis for the first time in their history after the appointment of Carlo Ancelotti was announced reached fever pitch on Friday, with two of the nation's most prominent figures sharing differing opinions on the issue.

Ancelotti is set to become the first foreign Brazil manager since Argentine Filpo Nunez, who took charge for one friendly against Uruguay in 1965. The only other foreigners were Uruguay's Ramon Platero and Portugal's Joreca, with the former lasting under a month and the latter serving for four days.

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva criticised the Ancelotti's appointment, claiming he would be better off sorting out the Italian national team's problems.

“I admire Ancelotti, but he has never been Italy's national coach,” Lula told TV station SBT on Thursday. “Why does he not resolve Italy's problem, who did not qualify for the 2022 World Cup?” added the 77-year-old.

In the interim, Fluminense coach Fernando Diniz will be in charge of Brazil for their opening 2026 World Cup qualifiers. “I am a fan

of Diniz,” said Lula. “He has the personality, the creativity and it is he who commands the dressing room.”

Earlier in the day, Ronaldo, chimed in with a different opinion.

Speaking on the ‘Mano a mano’ podcast, O Fenomeno relayed Brazil's coaching standards through the lens of Vinicius Jr.

“They didn't prepare Vinicius Jr or improve his technical fundamentals. He didn't know how to control the ball with his left foot! Today, after growing up in Spain, he is the most decisive attacker in world football,” Ronaldo said. “Vini arrived in Europe without tuning. For many years, talents have been left like unpolished diamonds. This is a clear case.

“He has developed a lot, with professional methodology and with the help of great technicians. He has gone from water to wine in two years. And he was playing for Flamengo. They didn't train him properly, they didn't improve his left leg.”

“Today we have ten coaches from abroad in the First Division. They are better prepared than the Brazilians. I know they will criticize me for that, because they will think that I am unpatriotic and that I prefer foreigners, but that is not it. I think we have to hire the best,” he said.



England captain Ben Stokes' latest dashing counter-attack kept his side's Ashes hopes alive in the third Test against Australia at Headingley on Friday. Trailing 2-0 in the best-of-five series, England were in danger of conceding a large first-innings lead but all-rounder Stokes' brilliant 80 took them to 237 all out, a deficit of just 26 runs, despite Australia captain Pat Cummins' fine return of 6-91.

PHOTO: ECB