

Mushfiqur to return after SL game

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim will be returning home following the Tigers' Asia Cup Super Four encounter with co-hosts Sri Lanka in Colombo today.

Mushfiqur's wife is expecting, which is why the experienced batter will be returning to the country, Bangladesh team operations manager Nafees Iqbal confirmed to The Daily Star yesterday.

No replacement will be made for Mushfiqur as the 36-year-old is expected to rejoin the team before Bangladesh's last Super Four game against India in Colombo on September 15.

"He will return to the country after the game [against Sri Lanka]. His wife is expecting, so it will happen after this game [Sri Lanka game]. The next game is on 15th [September], so there's a break of 6-7 days and he will head back [to Sri Lanka]," Nafees said.

Having lost their first Super Four game, the Tigers' team management would be happy to get Mushfiqur's services in their remaining games in order to make it to the final.



Looking at others to determine their fate is something that Bangladesh would not want and to avoid just that, Shakib Al Hasan's side will have to beat Sri Lanka in Colombo today. Star all-rounder Shakib, veteran Mushfiqur Rahim, and others trained at the R. Premadasa Stadium on the eve of the match hoping to keep their Asia Cup destiny in their own hands. PHOTO: BCB

Saikat gets deserved recognition

SPORTS REPORTER

Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat is set to be the first Bangladeshi to officiate in the ICC Men's ODI World Cup, and the 46-year-old said that he is looking forward to the challenge.

Saikat was named as one of the 20 match officials for the league round of the ODI World Cup 2023 in India. He will be the fourth umpire in the opening match between England and New Zealand on October 5 in Ahmedabad, said a press release from the ICC.

"To be honest, I am someone who is hardly touched by emotions. But yes, it's a great honour and joy for me. At the same time, it is also a challenging [task]. I am looking forward to making this opportunity count and let's see what happens," Saikat told The Daily Star yesterday.

Saikat, who was among the four umpires from the ICC Emerging Umpire panel along with the 16 Elite panel umpires in the 20-member list, informed that it was a roller coaster ride for him to eventually make it to the mega event.

"Look, it was a long process for me to eventually get there and it didn't happen suddenly. But I think it will open a new horizon for the other umpires in the country. We need to prove our mettle at the highest stage and remain consistent," he said.

Interestingly, despite being a highly regarded umpire in the country, Saikat officiated in his first bilateral series away from home during the three-ODI series between Pakistan and Afghanistan in Sri Lanka last month.

Saikat was also not considered to officiate in the ongoing Asia Cup.

Saikat has also remained under the radar in the domestic circuit, with the cricketer-turned-umpire yet to officiate in a Bangladesh Premier League final.

Tamim 'positive' to play from start of NZ series

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal is hopeful that he will be able to recover from his back injury and feature from the start in the upcoming three-match ODI series at home against New Zealand, scheduled to begin on September 21.

The opener had already begun his rehabilitation since returning from the UK last month. The left-hander was seen batting in the nets with low intensity in the past few days.

"I was able to tick all the boxes as prescribed during the rehabilitation programme. I will have 10 more days and I am planning to start training in full intensity [from Sunday]," said Tamim while attending a commercial endorsement in Dhaka yesterday.

"So far, there has been no setback but still there are things that need to be done. However, I didn't feel any pain so far. I think the next week will be crucial as I am planning to start training with full intensity. I am very hopeful and positive to play from the start of the New Zealand series," he added.

Tamim backed his teammates to do well in the coming days but was reluctant to comment on skipper Shakib Al Hasan and the team management's plan for the ongoing Asia Cup.

BANGLADESH VS SRI LANKA ODI STATS

The first time the two sides squared off in the ODIs was in the Asia Cup in 1986.

It took the Tigers 16 attempts to beat Sri Lanka for the first time in the format.

Till date, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka featured in 52 matches. The Tigers won on nine occasions, with two matches yielding no result.

In 14 Asia Cup encounters, Bangladesh won two times against Sri Lanka -- in 2012 and 2018 editions in Mirpur and Dubai, respectively.

Since the 2019 World Cup, Bangladesh won two of their seven matches against Sri Lanka.

The last time Bangladesh won against Sri Lanka in Sri Lanka was in Dambulla in 2017.

Bangladesh are yet to win against Sri Lanka in Colombo after 15 outings.

Overall, the Tigers emerged victorious in two of 21 fixtures in the island nation.

A win against Bangladesh today will take Sri Lanka's winning streak to 13 -- the second-highest in history, behind Australia's 21 achieved in 2003. Meanwhile, the Tigers won six of their last 12 matches, with two encounters yielding no result.

Combinations pondered to address inconsistency

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be eager to bounce back against Sri Lanka today, following the batting slump against Pakistan on a flat batting deck in the ongoing Asia Cup.

Anything short of a win at the R. Premadasa Stadium would leave the Tigers desperately looking at other results, with their third and final Super Four fixture against India all set to be a difficult prospect.

Bangladesh have already played Sri Lanka at Pallekele in their first Group B fixture, a game where the batting had suffered.

"From the Bangladesh batting perspective, we have to make sure to keep them under pressure. We know they haven't got runs, but we know what they are capable of getting -- and give them that respect."

Sri Lanka coach Chris Silverwood said on the eve of today's match.

This time they would be without Najmul Hossain Shanto, who had scored 89 in holding the innings together before it eventually crumbled. Without Shanto, Matheesha Pathirana and Maheesh Theekshana might appear to be bigger threats this time around.

The Tigers' head coach, Chandika Hathurusingha, put on a brave face at the press conference yesterday regarding

playing the Lions at their home.

"Where Matheesha releases the ball is very different from others. It's something that many cricket teams cannot prepare for. That in itself is an advantage because you don't get to practice against that kind of bowler much. Malinga was very successful, and I think Matheesha has a big future," Chandika said about Pathirana who picked four wickets in the last game.

With Theekshana once again likely to open with the ball to fit Tigers' opening combination, coming up with a counter plan must have been the need of the hour in the team meeting yesterday.

Chandika suggested there is every chance of changing the playing eleven but mostly they need some consistency as two poor outings with the bat showed their plans did not quite match reality.

"We are very much aware of what has happened in recent past, but we have been playing good cricket. We have to play in different conditions in last two or three games. It is a big challenge for us. We talk about that we are more capable of than what we have shown here. Inconsistency is what needs to be addressed. We actually spoke about that [batting inconsistency], so we are looking forward to putting up a good show."



Where could they search for consistency at the top?

Would Mehedi Miraz once again appear as a makeshift opener? Liton may likely once again feature at number three, given Shanto's absence, although Chandika did not want to comment on these aspects. Moreover, Afif Hossain and Shamim Hossain have not found consistency either in lower-middle order.

Anamul Haque Bijoy could also come into the fray given the need for a right-handed opener to counter mystery spinner Theekshana, who has picked 24 wickets in his last 10 games.

"I think both teams will consider different combinations. We will certainly think about it. We will assess the conditions tomorrow. We won't make an early decision with the eleven," Chandika opined.

Given Mohammad Naim's failure to capitalise on starts he got in this Asia Cup, Chandika too was asked about Bijoy.

"Everyone in the squad has an opportunity to play tomorrow. We haven't made a decision yet. I can only judge his [Anamul's] mentality by his actions. He looks like he is enjoying. We saw that he is fielding brilliantly in the match against Afghanistan. He is training well. Looks like he is enjoying the environment," the Bangladesh head coach remarked regarding Bijoy.

LABUSCHAGNE ready and waiting

AFP, Bloemfontein

All-rounder Cameron Green will miss a substantial part of Australia's Cricket World Cup build-up after being struck on the head by a ball from Kagiso Rabada during the first one-day international against South Africa on Thursday.

An Australia team spokesperson confirmed on Friday that Green will undergo an eight-day concussion protocol during which he will be monitored by the team's medical staff.

He is unlikely to be available until the fifth and final match in Johannesburg on September 17.

It adds to a list of injury concerns for Australia with the World Cup starting in India on October 5, less than a month away.

It also provides an opportunity for Marnus Labuschagne to press his claims for a call-up if a vacancy opens up in the World Cup squad.

Labuschagne was man of the match on Thursday after batting as a concussion substitute for Green. He made 80 not out to steer Australia to an unlikely three-wicket win.



Injuries meant that only 11 of Australia's World Cup squad of 15 travelled to South Africa. Green's injury reduced that number to ten, which means Labuschagne has a good chance of playing in at least the next three matches, starting with the second game in Bloemfontein on Saturday.

Australian captain Pat Cummins is recovering from a wrist injury. Other World Cup players missing the South African tour because of injuries of varying degrees of seriousness are Glenn Maxwell (ankle), Mitchell Starc (groin) and Steve Smith (wrist).

Australia still have a three-match one-day series in India ahead of the World Cup in which injured players can prove their fitness.

Labuschagne was supposed to tour South Africa due to poor ODI form. He was added to the squad when Smith withdrew.

After his match-winning performance on Thursday he played down his chances of getting to the World Cup. "I wasn't too shocked when I was dropped. But I did say (to the selectors) that I still want to be that person batting for you in the middle order. You've just got to sit tight and wait for that opportunity and when the opportunity comes you've got to be ready."

Reserve day reserved for Ind-Pak

AFP, Colombo

Asia Cup organisers on Friday added a reserve day for the blockbuster clash between India and Pakistan after their first encounter at the 50-over tournament was washed out.

The arch-rivals are scheduled to play in Colombo on Sunday but thundery showers are forecast for the Sri Lankan capital over the weekend.

"If adverse weather suspends play during the Pak vs India game, the match will continue on 11th September 2023 from the point it was suspended," a statement said.

The match is the only one in the Super Four stage to have a reserve day, but coaches for both Sri Lanka and Bangladesh -- the other two teams in round two -- made guarded statements.

"It will be a problem if the reserve day provides points to the teams and not someone else, but nothing we can do about so we keep preparing and do the best we can," Sri Lanka coach Chris Silverwood said.

Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha said "yes, it's not ideal." He added he hadn't seen anything like this before.



India opener Shubman Gill's focus and determination were apparent during their indoor practice as they prepare for another blockbuster clash against archrivals Pakistan, who arrived in Colombo on Thursday. India will face Babar Azam and Co tomorrow in the Asia Cup Super Four match of the six-nation tournament. PHOTO: FACEBOOK