

RIYAD CLAWING HIS WAY BACK?

Experienced batter Mahmudullah Riyad keeps his eyes on the ball during net practice at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The right-hander, who has been out of the team for quite some time, continued his training with the hope of making a comeback. However, given the whispers surrounding Riyad's inclusion in the World Cup squad that was submitted to the International Cricket Council (ICC), the veteran all-rounder might end up travelling with the World Cup team in India. Bangladesh will make their final call on September 27. Selector Habibul Bashar informed yesterday that Mahmudullah has a good chance to play two to three games in the five-match practice series between Bangla Tigers and Asian Games-bound team, starting from Thursday in Chattogram. Tamim Iqbal, too, could feature in the series but it depends on his return to full fitness.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



U-23 team lose all

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers campaign ended with a third defeat in three matches as they lost 1-0 against Philippines at the Chonburi Stadium in Thailand yesterday.

After a barren first half, Gavin Muens converted from the spot in the 56th minute to send the men in red and green packing without a single point.

Bangladesh had earlier lost 2-0 against Malaysia and 3-0 against Thailand. It was Bangladesh's 17th defeat in 19 matches in the history of the qualifying campaign.

Head coach Zulfiker Mahmud Mintu said this team had a lot to learn in order to compete at international level.

"We have to learn how to control emotion, tempo and take right decisions at the right moments. We lack these things at international level," said Mintu after losing the third match.

"We found two clear-cut chances and we should have scored. If Javed could have calmly placed the ball on the first post, it could have been a goal while Bappu was denied by the opposition goalkeeper."

Readying a backup opener remains a top priority

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh will meet India in their final Super Four game on Friday, September 15, knowing that even a win may not guarantee a place in the final. However, the Tigers' major goal would be to regain some momentum and confidence before returning home, with the ODI World Cup just around the corner.

Moreover, given the form and fitness of current regular openers, the backup opening options may have a telling impact on Tigers' World Cup challenge.

While dealing with injuries, the kind that dawned on Bangladesh before the Asia Cup, short term fixes are often justifiable. There was no Tamim Iqbal while Liton Das -- initially ruled out of the Asia Cup due to fever -- returned to fill in the vacant number three spot left by in-form Nazmul Hossain Shanto after having missed out on the first two games.

The ongoing Asia Cup has exposed Bangladesh's fragility at the top. No one has done particularly well recently except Mehedi Hasan Miraz, a makeshift opener. In the last two years, Tigers have had to turn to nine different opening pairs in ODIs that justify readying backup options.

According to sources, the team

management do not have the confidence to play Tanzid Hasan Tamim in the final game, feeling that another failure may shatter the youngster's confidence.

Even former Bangladesh skipper Mohammad Ashraful, an exciting batter in his own right, felt that India may be a difficult challenge for Tanzid.



"There was much excitement regarding Tanzid in the team before the Asia Cup since he had a good season. But after a duck [against Sri Lanka] the hopes have somewhat gone away from the team management. Since he is young, maybe that's why the experienced [Mohammad] Naim was prioritized," Ashraful told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Even though Naim couldn't make hay, it's a positive that the

captain and coaches have backed him. I feel that too much rotation is not good. From one viewpoint, what the management did was right: regarding backing Naim. But if they would have wanted someone exciting, someone like Tanzid who has that element of excitement, could have been backed. Then maybe instead of



dropping him after the first game, we could have had one from Naim or Tanzid who can provide that kind of excitement.

"You can't complain about anyone here but if the management had shown that courage, it could have benefited Bangladesh. You have to face the likes of [Jasprit] Bumrah against India. There is doubt about if Tanzid can do it against such bowlers," added the youngest Test

centurion.

It brings the selection criterion into question once again that why management selected Tanzid in the first place if they did not have prior faith. Given regular opener Tamim's injury issues, he will have to be continued game by game if he manages to return fit enough to play the New Zealand series. A backup option would thus be vital at the World Cup, in case injury crisis resurfaces.

Opener Anamul Haque Bijoy's inclusion in Asia Cup, at the last moment due to Liton's fever, was curious given that he was not part of team management's plans for the tournament.

"I feel that the kind of wicket we batted in, Bijoy could have scored a hundred against Afghanistan. The wicket was easy and he has experience. Some opportunities would not have been bad. It's true that everyone gets opportunities but maybe someone is getting five opportunities and someone just one. It's also not possible to give equal opportunities," Ashraful said regarding Bijoy.

With three ODI matches to come against New Zealand at home, the Tigers would need to have more defined plans if they are to avert concerns at the World Cup in case regular openers such as Liton or Tamim succumb to injuries.



Dunith Wellalage's five for 40 against India became the best bowling figures by a Sri Lankan left-arm spinner in the Asia Cup. Wellalage led the Sri Lankan spin attack along with part-time option Charith Asalanka, who scalped four wickets for 18, his best ODI bowling figures during a Super Four match in Colombo yesterday. In-form spinner Maheesh Theekshana picked up the other wicket as for the very first time in their ODI history, India lost all 10 wickets to spinners as the Rohit Sharma-led side were bundled out for 213 in 49.1 overs after electing to bat. Overall, this is the 10th occasion when spinners have bagged all 10 wickets in an ODI.



Sharma enters 10,000-run elite club

AGENCIES

India skipper Rohit Sharma became only the 15th batter to reach 10,000 runs in the history of One Day Internationals.

The right-hander completed the feat when he reached 23 with a six straight over Kasun Rajitha during Asia Cup Super Four encounter against Sri Lanka yesterday. He ultimately scored 53 runs.

He became the second-fastest batter to reach this landmark. He took 241 innings to get here, which stands only behind his compatriot Virat Kohli (205 innings).

Rohit was the sixth India batter to achieve this feat. Preceding him are Sachin Tendulkar, Virat Kohli, Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid and MS Dhoni. He has the highest individual score (264) in ODI history, and is the only batter to hit three double tons in the format.

He also has the most number of sixes for an India batter in ODIs (285). This is the third-highest in the world, after Shahid Afridi (351) and Chris Gayle (331).

Batters with 10,000 runs: Sachin Tendulkar (18426), Kumar Sangakkara (14234), Ricky Ponting (13704), Sanath Jayasuriya (13430), Virat Kohli (13024), Mahela Jayawardene (12650), Inzamam-ul-Haq (11739), Jacques Kallis (11579), Sourav Ganguly (11363), Rahul Dravid (10889), MS Dhoni (10773), Chris Gayle (10480), Brian Lara (10405), Tillakaratne Dilshan (10290) and Rohit Sharma (10031*).

Pogba sinks to new low after doping revelation

AFP, Milan

Once the most expensive footballer in the world, France star Paul Pogba has sunk to a new low after being provisionally suspended for a doping violation.

Injuries and a bizarre blackmail plot involving his own brother have dominated his second spell at Juventus, and the latest revelations came just as the midfielder looked ready to get back to his best.

Italy's anti-doping authority NADO revealed on Monday that Pogba, who is still only 30, showed elevated levels of testosterone in a test taken after Juve's season-opening win at Udinese, a match in which he did not even play.

Pogba has since been a substitute in Juve's other two Serie A matches and despite picking up a thigh knock against Empoli earlier this month could well have featured in Saturday's home fixture against Lazio had he not been dealt the latest of a series of blows to his career.

The test result came soon after the release of an interview with Al Jazeera in which he said he wanted to make his critics "eat their words".

"I want to show them I'm not weak. They can talk bad about me. I will never give up," he said.

He has only started one match since returning to Juve as a free agent from Manchester United in July last year, six years

after leaving the Turin giants for a then world record 105 million euros with four Italian league titles to his name.

It was a move which was supposed to regenerate his career which had gone stale in England, but he almost immediately suffered a serious knee injury in pre-season.

And his initial decision to not undergo surgery in a bid to make the Qatar World Cup eventually back-fired, ending his chances of helping France defend their world title and further complicating his club campaign.

Pogba was a key figure in the 2018 triumph in Russia and scored one of France's goals in their 4-2 win over Croatia in that year's final, but he has not featured for his country since a friendly win for Les Bleus over South Africa in March last year.

From being on top of the world Pogba has slowly slipped down to the depths, ravaged by injuries and a difficult personal life which he admits has been adversely affected by the vast sums of money earned by football's top players.

"Money changes people. It can break up a family. It can create a war," he said.

"Sometimes I was just by myself thinking, 'I don't want to have money anymore. I just don't want to play anymore. I just want to be with normal people, so they will love me for me -- not for the fame, not for the money'."



PHOTO: AFP

Bruno Fernandes ran the show for Portugal as they romped to a record 9-0 win over Luxembourg on Monday without suspended talisman and all-time top goalscorer Cristiano Ronaldo to preserve their perfect record in Euro 2024 qualifying. Portugal's previous record was 8-0, which they achieved three times - twice against Liechtenstein (1994 and 1999) and once versus Kuwait (2003).