

Australia back Head for WC's business end

AFP, New Delhi

Australia are "aware of the risk" of carrying Travis Head in their World Cup team despite an injury and hope the opener will recover soon, chief selector George Bailey said.

Head, who broke his hand in Centurion earlier this month, remains part of the 15-member Australian team that will open their campaign against hosts India in Chennai on October 8.

"First and foremost, it's about him recovering and that's the hurdle he's got to overcome. There's not a specific date in terms of a game (for his return)," Bailey told reporters on Friday.

"We are aware of the risk that if there is a setback there at some point then it makes it really challenging for Trav."

Bailey said, "He's a really important player for us. He is certainly a player who is on our first choice XI. Hopefully when he does come online, he can have a really important impact for us towards the back end of the tournament."



WC mascots' names revealed

ICC

After fans around the globe participated in voting, the ICC has announced that 'Blaze' and 'Tonk' have been unanimously chosen as the names of the mascot duo ahead of the Men's Cricket World Cup 2023.

'Blaze' is a female mascot, a fast-bowling sensation. She is adorned with a belt carrying six power cricket orbs, each meticulously prepared for various game-changing tactics.

'Tonk' is her male counterpart, with icy-cool composure, possessing an electromagnetic bat and versatile shot repertoire, making him a batting champion.

The two mascots will be seen in action across 10 venues in India, starting from October 5 to November 19.



Rain continues to play spoilsport in the World Cup warm-up fixtures as fans were denied an encounter between two hot-favourites, India and England, at the Barsapara Cricket Stadium in Guwahati yesterday. The day before, the match between Afghanistan and South Africa suffered the same fate. India coach Rahul Dravid will have a chance to assess his charges against the Netherlands on October 03, a day after holders England take on Bangladesh in the two side's last warm-up clash.

PHOTO: AFP

'IMPROVED' MAHEDI offers Tigers variety

SPORTS REPORTER

Off-spinner and all-rounder Mahedi Hasan has showcased his ability to bowl with guile and consistency of late, using both the new and old ball to good effect, eventually making the cut in Bangladesh's 15-member World Cup squad.

Mahedi was not even in contention for a place in the final 15-member squad before the Asia Cup in August but the 28-year-old showed his worth in two matches he got to play in the continental event. He went on to further solidify his claim with effective displays in the following New Zealand ODIs at home.

On Friday, Mahedi was instrumental in Bangladesh's win over Sri Lanka in their first World Cup warm-up match in Guwahati. His three wickets for 36 runs helped pull the momentum back towards the Tigers after the Lankans got off to a blistering start, leading to the island nation getting bundled out for 263 on a good batting surface.

The off-spinner maintained tight lines, reflecting his 4.48 economy-rate in ODIs, and displayed his guile through notable variations – all of which he is known for.

According to his mentor Mohammad Salahuddin, Mahedi has worked on his variations and ability to bowl in the middle overs which will help Bangladesh in the mega event.

"From what I observed in the last few matches, I think his bowling has improved a lot. In the early stage of his career, he bowled well only with the new ball but as the ball got older, he tended to struggle,"



Salahuddin told The Daily Star yesterday. "I think now he has got a few variations and also understands how to bowl in the middle overs. I think this is his advantage and the best thing I noticed about him is that he is able to get some purchase even on flat tracks."

Mahedi along with Mehedi Hasan Miraz are the two specialist right-arm off-spinners in the Tigers squad. They are of the same breed but differ in strengths and weaknesses. Considering that, Salahuddin feels that both the players can offer a lot of variety for the captain.

"As spinners get older, they get mature

as a result of playing more and are able to figure out what to do. When he (Mahedi) faces top batters, he will be able to improve. I think he and Miraz are two different bowlers and both can offer a lot of variety in the playing eleven considering the strength and weakness of the opponent," he said.

Bangladesh's revamped pace unit has shown great promise and already has brought results for the Tigers, and

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MOHAMMAD SALAHUDDIN

naturally the pacers would be expected to play a massive role in India. However, considering the subcontinent conditions in store, Salahuddin has backed the spinners to play their part.

"The biggest strength of our bowlers is that they bowl at the stumps regardless of the variations but it won't be wise to judge them on their home performances only," Salahuddin said.

Apart from his bowling, Mahedi's batting can also come in handy for the Tigers. The right-hander has a reputation for being able to hit well and a decent domestic record backs that.

China win 100m sprint Asian Games double

AFP, Hangzhou

China claimed a 100m sprint double at the Asian Games on Saturday as Xie Zhenye and Ge Manqi delighted the home crowd in Hangzhou.

Xie powered home to take the men's title in 9.97sec, ahead of Thailand's Puripol Boonson on 10.02 and Malaysia's Muhammad Azeem Mohd Fahmi on 10.11.

The 30-year-old Xie claimed the first Asian Games individual gold of his career, having been part of China's title-winning 4x100m relay team in 2014. He was also part of the China team that won bronze at the Tokyo Olympics two years ago.

China's Su Bingtian, who reached the 100m final at the Tokyo Games, skipped the Asian Games to focus on his preparations for next year's Paris Olympics.

Ge came home in 11.23sec to take the women's title ahead of Singapore's Shanti Pereira on 11.27 and Bahrain's Hajar Alkhaldi on 11.35. Defending champion Edidiong Odiong finished sixth.



MOURINHO has 'no fear'

AFP, Rome



Jose Mourinho insisted Saturday he has no fear for his future despite Roma's floundering start to the Serie A season.

The Portuguese is having the worst start to his coaching career with five points in six matches, leaving the capital side 16th.

"Three months ago, people said that it would be a tragedy if I were to leave," the Portuguese coach told a press conference ahead of Sunday's Serie A trip to Cagliari. "And now it seems like I'm the problem. 'I don't listen or read what's written or said about me, there are people reporting things to me. I'm not the problem, behind every situation, there are several factors,'" he continued.

"I've never claimed to be solely responsible for a victory, I don't do so for a defeat either. I'm here to fight every day alongside my players and the fans."

"It is only Mr. Friedkin (the club's owner) who can tell me that this stops before June 30."

"I'm not afraid, I don't lack confidence, I will assume my responsibilities", added Mourinho, 60, who has coached Roma since 2021.

Roma have won just one of their six league matches, a 7-0 thrashing of Empoli, and lost 4-1 at Genoa during the week.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Walton renewed their contract with Bangladesh all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz for a third successive time. The 25-year-old will continue to assume his role as the company's Brand Ambassador for the next two years.

Selim speechless after reaching quarters

SPORTS REPORTER FROM HANGZHOU

Boxer Selim Hossain stormed into the quarterfinal of the U-57kg category in Asian Games after he knocked down Asror Vokhidov in the second round of the pre-quarterfinals at Hangzhou Gymnasium yesterday.

The first round went against Selim's favour but the 31-year-old boxer bounced back heavily and knocked down his Tajik opponent in the final minute of three-minute second round.

The referee stopped the competition after Vokhidov suffered a cut above his eye. Selim, as a result, was declared winner.

"I can't express my feeling in words, especially after posting back-to-back wins in this big tournament," said Selim.

Sprinter Imranur underperforms

Imranur Rahman could not become Bangladesh's first sprinter to qualify for the final of 100m sprint in the Asian Games after he finished sixth out of eight athletes in the first semifinals of the event at the Hangzhou Olympic Sports Stadium yesterday.

The England-based sprinter finished overall 19th out of 24 with a time of 10.42 seconds, 00.23 seconds more than the sprinter who sealed the eighth and last



place to advance in the final.

"I underperformed and that's why I could not progress to the finals," said Imranur after completing his run.

Hockey tastes second win

Bangladesh hockey team yesterday registered back-to-back victories in Asian Games with a 4-2 win over Uzbekistan in a pulsating Pool A fixture at Gongshu Canal Sports Park Stadium.

Bangladesh, who came into the match on the back of a morale-boosting 7-3 win over Singapore after two defeats against Japan and Pakistan, had twice suffered equalisers but did not look back after netting the third goal in the 42nd minute, courtesy of Ashrafur Islam who scored a brace.

Siddiqur improves position

Country's ace golfer Siddiqur Rahman somewhat bounced back in the Asian Games by playing two-under-par 70 in the third round of the individual golf event at West Lake International Golf Course yesterday.

The 38-year-old golfer, who started with the day at the 25th position, occupied the 21st place at day's end while compatriot Jamal Hossain stayed at 39th.

Weightlifter Smrity impresses

Smrity Akter finished top among four weightlifters in her Group B of 55kg category after clearing a total of 160 kg.

Smrity matched her career-best performance (72kg) in Snatch but failed to keep the momentum in Clear and Jerk.

"I am both happy and unhappy because I could not put my best," Smrity said.

Shooters off target again

Bangladesh wrapped up their shooting campaign in Asian Games with another dismal performance as the mixed pistol team finished 14th out of 19 teams yesterday. Shakil Ahmed (280) and Amjad Anila (282) together scored 562, which was 11 points less than Pakistan who qualified for the bronze-decider event as the sixth and final team.



Forward Hwang Hee-chan celebrates having scored the winner as Wolverhampton Wanderers ended Manchester City's perfect start to the Premier League season with a 2-1 home win at the Monileux Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS