

Williamson to lead NZ in Bangladesh T20 series

Captain Kane Williamson will make his return to international Twenty20 cricket in the three-match home series against Bangladesh. Williamson has not played 20-overs cricket for more than a year after missing the T20 series against England in September while recovering from a long-term knee injury. At the conclusion of the ongoing one-day series against the tourists, the Black Caps will face Bangladesh in Napier on Dec. 27 before two further matches in Tauranga on Dec. 29 and 31.



'Top order has to take responsibility'

SPORTS REPORTER

Instability at the top of the batting order once again saw Bangladesh fall short in a rain-curtailed game against New Zealand at the University Oval in Dunedin yesterday, losing the first of the three ODIs by 44 runs via DLS method.

The New Zealand side was far from a full-strength one, with many notable absences, while Bangladesh, despite the experience in the ranks, also had a newness to themselves with some players returning after a gap. Yet, the hosts were able to produce the goods while Bangladesh were once left ruining the dearth of bowling options, with rain interruptions only compounding that trouble, and the inconsistency in the top order which has been on the slump for quite some time.

The first downpour had the game reduced to a 46-over-a-side game but after 19.2 overs, with New Zealand on 108 for 2, rain halted proceedings once again, resulting in a further reduction to a 30-over-a-side game with a maximum of six overs for a bowler. With Mustafizur Rahman, Hasan Mahmud, and Shoriful Islam bowling five overs each before the final rain interruption, the Tigers were forced to rely on part-timer Soumya Sarkar and off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz in the death overs.

And the inevitable happened as carnage from the duo of Tom Latham (92) and Will Young (105) saw the hosts rack up 131 runs in the final 10.4 overs.

Soumya conceded 63 in six overs, Miraz 53 in five and Afif leaked 17 in one – a scenario completely different from how the early exchanges went during which Shoriful Islam had pegged New Zealand to two for 5. It resulted in skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto saying that the "spinners need to learn quickly before the next match."

It was clear that having only four specialist bowlers in the eleven – the pace trio of Shoriful, Hasan, and Mustafizur along with spin-bowling all-rounder Miraz – became an issue for Bangladesh as part-time bowlers could not contain the Kiwis' late onslaught.

"If some of the bowlers had overs left, we could have used that. That's where the problem was and there was

A morale-boosting triumph AHEAD OF WORLD CUP



MAZHAR UDDIN

Two major trophies for the Bangladesh Under-19 side in the space of almost four years is a testament to the long-term plan set by the game development committee of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

After winning the youth World Cup back in 2020, the latest triumph for the Under-19 side came yesterday when they clinched their maiden Asia Cup title by crushing the hosts UAE in a 195-run win in Dubai.

Led by former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mahmud Sujon, the game development committee had chalked out yet another extensive campaign with the current lot of Under-19 cricketers that mainly focused on having game awareness by playing an ample number of matches in the past year and a half.

Much like the previous Under-19 World Cup winning side, the current group has played around 30 matches home and away as part of their preparation for the Asia Cup and the upcoming ICC Under-19 World Cup in South Africa in January next year.

"To be honest, I was a bit irritated over the fact that we were not able to perform as a team before the Asia Cup. But I must say the boys managed to click at the right time and with the upcoming World Cup in January

[2024], this Asia Cup win will surely give confidence to the boys. I think the age-level selectors should also get the credit since they have been scouting players from the root level which is not easy," Mahmud told The Daily Star yesterday.

It was a total team effort from the young Tigers throughout the tournament across all three departments with Bangladesh finishing as unbeaten champions.



The win against a solid Indian side in the semifinal also reflected the strong mentality of the cricketers who were able to hold their nerves in crunch situations.

Opener Ashiqur Rahman Shibly remained the stand-out performer in the Asia Cup. Having hit two tons, including a match-winning 129 in the final, the right-handed batter was adjudged the player of the tournament.

"Shibly is a very hard-working cricketer and has a very cool head.

It is not that he emerged out of the blue in this tournament as he scored a hundred against India just before the Asia Cup. His ability to face the new ball is something that makes him a solid opener and he knows how to convert those fifties into hundreds," Mahmud said.

Apart from Shibly, pacers Maruf Mridha, Rohanat Doullah Borson, and leg-spinner Wasi Siddique also impressed with their performances.

According to Mahmud, the board has been emphasising developing leg-spinners since the senior side has been yearning for a quality option in that department for a long time now.

"The national team has been searching for a leg spinner for a long time now so we have taken extra measures in developing leg-spinners from the age level. Wasi is a bright prospect, proving his worth against Sri Lanka. But apart from Wasi we have two more leg-spinners on the radar who have been preparing themselves as well and I am confident we can overcome the shortage of leg-spinners for the senior side in the coming days," Mahmud added.

Mahmud was also optimistic that a number of players from this lot would go on to represent the national side in the future just like the World Cup-winning members from that Under-19 side are doing currently.



wind and we had to use spinners," Anamul Haque Bijoy, who scored a team-high 43, said at the press conference yesterday.

Bijoy, back into the eleven since the only ODI he played in September this year, also took responsibility for not converting his start into something meaningful.

"I want to take responsibility that I made a mistake. If I could score big runs and finish the game, it would have been great for us and we could have started with a win. Our top order has to take responsibility. I got set today but could not make it big," he said.

Bijoy, however, was not the only one at fault as Liton Das, Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, and even Afif Hossain, who batted very positively, fell to soft dismissals just like Bijoy, who pointed out the steep bounce generated by the Kiwi pacers being the main reason behind their downfall on the day.

For many of the Bangladesh players, it indeed has been a fast transition from the wickets with uneven bounce at Mirpur just a week ago to a lively solid batting track with good bounce in New Zealand.

Thus, despite Afif Hossain (38 off 28) and Towhid Hridoy (33 off 27) making their presence felt, the game had gotten too far away, with the Tigers now needing a quick turnaround before the second ODI on Wednesday in Nelson.

'Rediscovering' Tigresses scale new height

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's improving white-ball performances scaled a new height yesterday as they produced a dominating 119-run win against hosts South Africa, a first ever ODI win for the Tigresses in South Africa. The idea of rediscovering themselves saw the Tigresses open the portal to a new frontier.

Having drawn the T20I series 1-1 following a maiden triumph in the shortest format against the Proteas Women in the first game, the Tigresses showed the calibre and understanding needed to create such a momentous occasion at Buffalo Park on Sunday.

It was an all-round effort from Nigar Sultana and her troops. While fielding improvement maintained an upward trajectory since the last few series, the biggest takeaway was the way the batting unit coped with pressure in mapping the road to victory with their highest ODI total of 250 for three.

"There is still a crisis in batting. It is important for the top three or four to do well since there is not much batting depth lower down the order. The thing that is happening now is that the top order batters are

playing confidently. They are not in any confusion regarding themselves and are playing with very clear heads. The [improvement in the] mental side of the game was a big positive," the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) former women's wing development manager Nazmul Abedeen Fahim analysed the Tigresses' latest victory.



The cues of a change in the mental aspect came from the batters' approach in regard to the game situation. It began with the application of the two openers – Shamima Sultana and Fargana Hoque – in seeing out the new ball. The duo starred in a 66-run stand before the partnership was broken in the 15th over. However, it gave the incoming batters a platform they could seize.

Number three Murshida Khatun certainly capitalised and it facilitated partnerships

throughout the whole innings as the opening stand was followed by partnerships of 44, 80, and 60 for the third, fourth, and fifth wickets respectively.

"You need big partnerships. It was not just about going out there, playing excitedly, and returning to the dugout in a hurry. Being able to control themselves, keeping emotions in check, and seeing everything wholly were very good signs. They are showing discipline more and more," Fahim added.

Drawn home ODI series against India and the series win against Pakistan have shown that new blood coming through has energised the team.

"They are rediscovering themselves and their faith in themselves. When they play like that [like they did against South Africa], they will get more belief. The confidence factor goes to a new level. In a fifty-over game, you have to know what to do when some wickets fall. They will get used to doing this when they maintain these processes," said the veteran coach, who also praised the 'intelligent and tactically smart' skipper Joy's input in propelling the Tigresses into a new avenue.

India surprised by Wanderers wicket

REUTERS

India were surprised how helpful the Wanderers pitch was for their seamers in their eight-wicket victory in the first One-Day International against South Africa on Sunday, as captain KL Rahul said he thought it was his spinners who would win the day.

India bowled their hosts out for 116, a record low score for South Africa on home soil, and then easily chased down the runs with exactly 200 balls to spare.

The tourists won the final Twenty20 International on the same wicket on Thursday, and Rahul says he believed it would be a game for his spinners.

Instead seamers Arshdeep Singh (5-37) and Avesh Khan (4-27) both recorded career-best figures.

"It was completely different to what we expected," Rahul said at the post-match presentation. "We had planned to bring the spinners into the game early after what we saw in the T20 match.

"But there was a lot of help in the wicket and the boys did really well to put the ball into the right areas.

"It is my first ODI win here (South Africa) as a captain. When I was here last time (January 2022) we lost all three, so it is good to get that victory under your belt."



Australia's 'Garry' ascends to greatness

AGENCIES

Australian off-spinner Nathan Lyon claimed his 500th Test wicket on Sunday to join an exclusive club of just seven others to achieve the feat, with skipper Pat Cummins believing he has another 200 in him.

The 36-year-old veteran, who was once a member of the groundstaff at the Adelaide Oval, reached the milestone in his 123rd match.

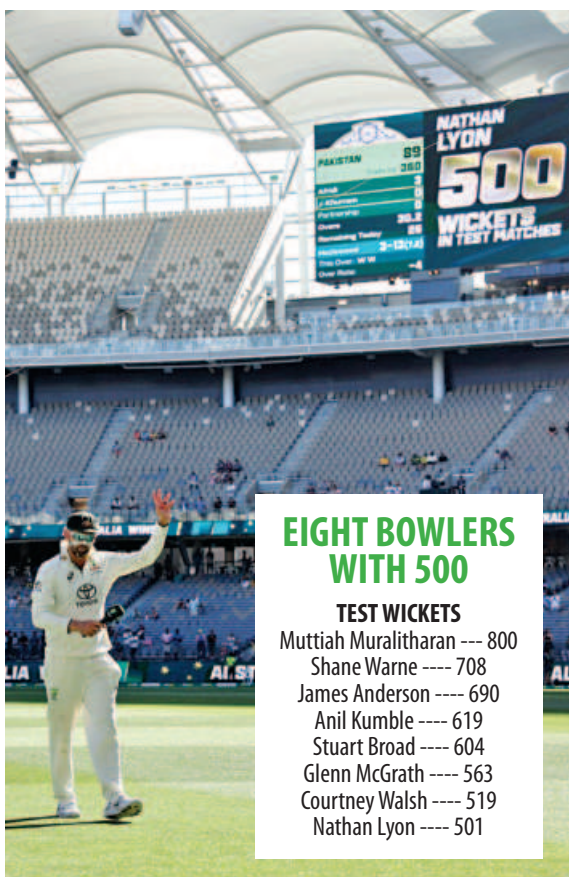
He began the first Test against Pakistan in Perth on 496 and was left stranded on 499 after their first innings.

But he finally reached 500 on Day Four by dismissing Faheem Ashraf lbw on review, with his teammates mobbing him in celebration. Lyon then bowled Aamer Jamal in the same over for his 501st.

"It's something I'm very proud about, I don't think it's hit me yet," said Lyon. "There's obviously been a lot of hard work gone into the journey and I've had a lot more bad days than good days, but to be back out there in the middle ... it's pretty special.

"I still pinch myself when I see my name next to those guys," he said of the exalted company he has joined, including fellow spin kings Muttiah Muralidharan and Shane Warne.

Affectionately known as "Garry" after



EIGHT BOWLERS WITH 500	
TEST WICKETS	
Muttiah Muralidharan	--- 800
Shane Warne	--- 708
James Anderson	--- 690
Anil Kumble	--- 619
Stuart Broad	--- 604
Glenn McGrath	--- 563
Courtney Walsh	--- 519
Nathan Lyon	--- 501

former Australian rules football player Garry Lyon, he made his debut in 2011 against Sri Lanka in Galle and took a wicket in his very first ball in Test cricket, dismissing Kumar Sangakkara.

His rise to the Australian Test team was meteoric, considering he had made his first-class debut just six months before donning the baggy green.

The off-spinner has best figures of 8-50 and has collected 23 five-wicket hauls and 10 wickets four times so far.

He told reporters before the Perth match that he wanted to continue playing at international level until Australia's next Ashes sojourn to England in 2027.

Lyon would not say how many more wickets he could get, but Cummins suggested he had another 200 in him.

"I still think he's got 40-50 Test matches," he said.

"That's four or five years at 10 a year, probably average what four (wickets) a game, that's another couple of hundred [wickets] and that's 700."

That would move him close to fellow Australian Warne, who has 708 and is second on the all-time list behind Sri Lanka great Muralidharan on 800.

A classical spinner who flights the ball, the right arm could feasibly catch West Indian great Courtney Walsh (519) during the current three-Test series.

'Underdog' Mohammedan want to conquer Kings

SPORTS REPORTERS

A rejuvenated Mohammedan SC are looking to draw inspiration from the past before squaring off against favourites Bashundhara Kings in the Independence Cup final at Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj today.

Reigning champions Kings, who made it to their fourth consecutive final with a thumping 4-0 win over Abahani, are the favourites against Mohammedan on paper.

But the Motijheel-based outfits are hoping for a repeat of their 2-1 win over the Kings in the Federation Cup semifinal in May and clinch their fourth Independence Cup title in their first final after nine years.

"On paper, Bashundhara Kings are a better side than Mohammedan and we are the underdogs. But mentally we are not underdogs because we beat them in last season's Federation Cup to win the tournament. We believe we have the ability to beat them," Mohammedan SC coach Alfaz Ahmed told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

In the previous 12 meetings between the two sides, Kings won eight times, lost and drew two times each.

Star-studded Kings were a shadow of themselves in their first three matches of the Independence Cup before firing at all cylinders against Abahani in the semifinal in a 4-0 rout.

But Alfaz claims he is not worried about the menacing form of the Kings. "They [Kings] are best in every department but many things depend

The final will take place at the Fazlul Haque Mani Stadium in Gopalganj at 4:00 pm and will be televised live by T Sports.

on the condition of the match such as how the players perform; how the players read the match; the physical condition of the players on the day. So, we are looking forward to the game," said

Kings, who are still reeling from their heartbreak in the AFC Cup's group stage, will be hoping to revive the team's spirits by lifting the season's first trophy.