

Sri Lanka favourites, says Silverwood

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka head coach Chris Silverwood tipped his side as favourites against Bangladesh in the three-match T20I series, starting today in Sylhet.

The visitors arrive into the contest on the back of consecutive T20I series wins at home against Zimbabwe and Afghanistan.

"Well, obviously, I'm going to say Sri Lanka are going to be the favourites," Silverwood said in yesterday's pre-match press conference.

"But listen, as I've already said, there are two good teams that will both be pushing very hard to win this series. Because we're all building up to the World Cup now, we want to start making sure that we're playing top cricket going into that. So, as I said before, I expect this to be very competitive," he added.

The Lankans won both of their bilateral T20I series in Bangladesh in 2014 and 2018. Out of five T20Is, the only time they lost in the country against the hosts was a 23-run loss in the 2016 T20 World Cup.

All three T20Is will be played at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, a venue where the Lankans have played only one match across all three formats. They won the second of the two-match T20I series at the venue in 2018.

The hosts have an even two-all record at the ground, with two wins against the Afghans last year, and a couple of losses against the Lankans and West Indies in 2018.



With the backdrop of a tea garden in Sylhet, Najmul Hossain Shanto, who is set to lead Bangladesh for the first time tomorrow since being announced as permanent skipper across the formats last month, poses with the trophy alongside Sri Lanka captain Wanindu Hasaranga ahead of their first of three T20Is at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium today. Hasaranga, however, will not play the first two matches owing to a suspension. [Bottom] Meanwhile, the Tigers' middle-order duty will most likely fall on the likes of experienced Mahmudullah Riyad, Soumya Sarkar, and uncapped Jaker Ali Anik, who was called into the team in place of injured Aliss Al Islam on the back of an impressive Bangladesh Premier League campaign. PHOTO: BCB

Messi aims for MLS title

AGENCIES

Inter Miami and Lionel Messi are ready to go for a Major League Soccer title after their pummeling of Orlando City on Saturday.

After the conclusion of their match Saturday evening, the Herons' talisman spoke with Apple TV about their ambitions as a club going forward.

"I think that with the pressure on us, we're conscious of the team, and what we've built and we are going to prepare ourselves to fight for the MLS title," Messi said during a postgame interview with Apple TV.

"We know that is a long road and it's just getting started, but the reality is that all of us are aware that we have a group ready to compete and we are going to go for it. It is also important that we start the season off well, especially in the first few games because then the league will pause, and other tournaments will begin."

The Argentine World Cup winner added that he is incredibly happy with their progress so far, especially ahead of major tournaments for club and country on the horizon.

BANGLADESH VS SRI LANKA				
	MATCH	DATE	TIME	VENUE
T20Is	1st T20I	Mar-04	6:00 PM	Sylhet
	2nd T20I	Mar-06	6:00 PM	Sylhet
	3rd T20I	Mar-09	3:00 PM	Sylhet
ODI	1st ODI	Mar-13	2:30 PM	Chattogram
	2nd ODI	Mar-15	2:30 PM	Chattogram
	3rd ODI	Mar-18	10:00 AM	Chattogram
TEST	1st Test	Mar-22	10:00 AM	Sylhet
	2nd Test	Mar-30	11:00 AM	Chattogram

- Bangladesh only boast four wins in the 13 T20Is played against Sri Lanka. The Lankans have won the other nine matches.
- The Tigers have won only one of the five T20Is played against Sri Lanka at home. That 23-run win came back in the 2016 Asia Cup in Mirpur.
- Bangladesh have never been able to win any match in a bilateral T20I series against Sri Lanka at home.
- Bangladesh are unbeaten in their last five bilateral T20I series, winning four of them and drawing the last one 1-1 away to New Zealand in December last year.
- Bangladesh experienced their most successful phase in the shortest format in 2023. Of the 14 T20Is played last year, Bangladesh won 10, lost three, and saw one game yield a no result.
- Sri Lanka suffered a three-run defeat against Afghanistan in their last T20I in February this year. They, however, come to this series on the back of a 2-1 series win against the Afghans at home.

Shanto's new beginning in old role

SPORTS REPORTER

On November 11, 2023, after Bangladesh's final match in the ICC World Cup ended in a sound defeat to Australia, Najmul Hossain Shanto, who had captained in that game in place of the injured Shakib Al Hasan, boldly told the media that he was ready to lead the Tigers full-time if the opportunity arises.

Since that match in Pune, Bangladesh have played eight matches across three formats – two Tests, three ODIs and three Twenty20s – all against New Zealand, under the captaincy of Shanto.

Today, the left-handed batter is set to once again lead the Tigers onto the field for the first T20I of a three-match series against Sri Lanka at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

This time, however, he will not be leading the team as a stand-in but as Bangladesh's new all-format skipper, set to captain the team for all of 2024.

"Every cricketer dreams of leading their country. I am grateful to the Bangladesh Cricket Board for giving me this opportunity and I am very happy," Shanto told the reporters in Sylhet yesterday.

The 25-year-old took over the role from Shakib, who had incidentally become Bangladesh's first three-format captain in almost a decade after being named the ODI captain for the World Cup following Tamim Iqbal's resignation. Shakib was already leading the team in the other two formats.

Overall, Shanto has led Bangladesh in 11 matches – two Tests, six ODIs and three T20Is – winning three matches, one in each format, suffering seven defeats while one T20I in Mount Maunganui got washed out.

His win-loss ratio as captain doesn't look too impressive, but the three wins that came under him against New Zealand were monumental.

Under Shanto, Bangladesh ended their winless streak in ODIs and T20Is in New Zealand and achieved their first home Test win against the Kiwis.

The pressure of captaincy also brought the best

out of Shanto as a batter, as the left-hander averages 36.63 across three formats while leading the team, considerably higher than his average of 29.84 when playing without captaincy.

Before beginning his journey as the long-term captain, Shanto has already set a number of lofty goals for the team in different formats.



"I don't think we have progressed much in Test cricket. But compared to where we were before, we have begun playing good cricket in Tests. Personally, I want to win most of our home matches and build up the importance of playing Tests in the team. When we tour abroad, I want us to compete."

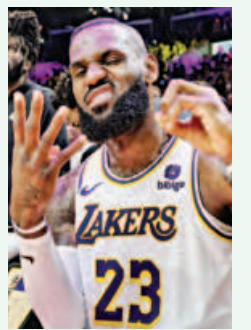
"We are doing well in ODIs but we haven't won a trophy as a team. We will plan on how to do well in big tournaments and win trophies for the country. The last year went very well for us in T20s. We have improved and if we can improve even further than we can win against any country in any condition."

Although achieving these goals will be a challenge, Shanto believes they can do it if they play as a unit. "It's very important to play as a team. If we look at last year, all the players contributed in the matches. We need to continue doing that. Trusting each other is also vital."

SHORT CORNER

LeBron James hits 4000 mark

LeBron James became the first NBA player to reach 40,000 career regular-season points on Saturday, the 39-year-old superstar scoring nine against defending champion Denver to achieve the milestone. James, who just over a year ago overtook Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for the NBA's all-time scoring mark, is a four-time NBA champion and four-time NBA Most Valuable Player as well as the league's oldest active player, now in his 21st campaign.



CM Sakline to train in Spain

National under-20 chess champion and Candidate Master Sakline Mostafa Sajib has been invited for a week-long training in FIDE Chessable Academy Camp in Menorca, Spain from March 27 to April 2. The 13-year-old prodigy has apparently impressed the academy through his performance in an online training camp organised by the academy.

Cummins hails Lyon, Green

Australia captain Pat Cummins heaped praise on team-mates Nathan Lyon and Cameron Green on Sunday for match-winning performances as his side secured a 172-run triumph over New Zealand in the first Test. Lyon spun the visitors to victory in the morning session on day four in Wellington, taking six wickets as New Zealand crumbled to 196 all out.

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Tempers flared at the Mastella on Saturday as hosts Valencia and Real Madrid played out a 2-2 draw in a LaLiga clash. Vinicius Jr, returning to a stadium where he was racially abused last year, scored a brace to help Real fight back from two goals down, and the league leaders could have walked out as winners had it not been for a controversial decision right at the end of the game. Jude Bellingham was shown a red card following a protest after referee Jesus Gil Manzano blew for time an instant before the English midfielder hit what would have been a 99th-minute winner. Madrid players, coaches, and substitutes flooded the pitch to confront the referee Jesus Gil Manzano. PHOTO: X

Ruman open to return if facilities increased

SPORTS REPORTER

Having decided to quit national duties with long-held indignation and frustration over the state of archery, Ruman Sana is open to retracting his decision if he offered better facilities compared to what he gets now.

Ruman, one of only two athletes of the country to have qualified for Olympics directly, tendered his resignation to the archery federation nearly a month ago citing shoulder injury, poor performance, lack of confidence and inability to take pressure as his reasons to leave the national team.

However, in conversation with The Daily Star, Ruman admitted that it is the lack of incentives from archery which made him take the shocking decision.

No official from the game's local governing body, meanwhile, have communicated with Ruman to persuade him to change his decision – a sign of reluctance to bringing the player who flew the Bangladesh flag in the archery world.

"I don't know whether I will change my decision in coming days but it is sure that I will never return under the existing facilities. I only get Tk 3000 as allowance per month apart from accommodation and food in the national camp. They are, however, giving me an additional Tk

2000 as house rent of since I got married," Ruman told The Daily Star yesterday.

"If they increase the facilities, I can stay in archery. Otherwise, I will not be here because I badly need financial support to continue playing. I am planning to do business with my father and brother apart from continuing my job in Bangladesh Ansar," said the archer from Khulna.

Explaining the reasons behind his sudden decision, Ruman said, "Gradually I became disenchanted. At the end of the day, I don't have anything in possession. No doubt, I earned a lot of honour and image from archery but at the same time, I also got my honour taken away," Ruman said, referring to his suspension handed over by the federation in 2022.

Since coming back to archery after serving the suspension of more than a year on disciplinary ground, Ruman endured a long lean patch, recently missing out on the Asia Cup squad after being denied Olympic scholarship in 2022.

"There is no future playing for the national team. I just deliveries one after another (medal) but I don't get anything from anyone. I never got any support from the government, federation or anyone but a lot of athletes received a lot of things over small achievements compared to me," said a frustrated Ruman.

