



Hasaranga suspended for BD Tests

Sri Lanka all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga has been suspended for the two-Test series against Bangladesh. During the third ODI in the recently concluded series against Bangladesh, Hasaranga was found guilty of breaching article 2.8 of the ICC Code of Conduct. The all-rounder was already on five demerit points and now he has breached the threshold of eight demerit points, which have been converted into four suspension points. The four suspension points equate to a ban from two Tests or four ODIs or T20Is, whatever comes first.

Pacers excel but remain untested at the death

SHABAB CHOWDHURY

Bangladesh pacers put up a revelling display as they spearheaded the team's second-ever ODI series win over Sri Lanka with a four-wicket win in the series-deciding third match in Chattogram on Monday.

The four frontline pacers – Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, and Mustafizur Rahman – accounted for 19 of the 27 wickets the Tigers took in the three-match series and even Soumya Sarker, a part-time pace option, managed to bag one.

Taskin ended the series as the highest wicket-taker with eight scalps and Shoriful picked up five in three outings each, Sakib had four to his name in two games while Mustafizur scalped two in his only match.

In the series, the pacers excelled in the first two phases of the innings – the first and second Powerplays – and this success shielded them from getting tested in the most happening phase of play, aka the death overs.

This aspect of their skillset was one of the major shortcomings behind a string of lacklustre displays in the 2023 ODI World Cup where the pace unit failed miserably to keep a lid on things and looked out of ideas in the final phase of the innings when faced against higher quality oppositions.

The Lankans failed to build a platform to



launch in the first ODI as they posted 255 and were not required to go hard at the bowlers in the second match where they had to chase down 286, courtesy of a masterful 185-run stand between Pathum Nissanka and Charith Asalanka.

The third match went the same as the first as only Janith Liyanage could muster up some fight among as he carried his side to 235 with his maiden ton.

WHAT THE PACERS DID RIGHT

Taskin, Shoriful and Sakib stuck to their strengths in the series as they persevered

on Test-match lines and lengths and used what came naturally to them.

Taskin used the new ball to great effect, especially in the third ODI. He got it to move in the air and at times off the pitch.

Shoriful has been Bangladesh's most improved bowler across formats and since adding the ability to swing the ball back into the right-handers, he has been very difficult to play against.

The left-arm pacer's biggest weapon in the latter part of the innings is how he can mix up lengths, going short or full or hitting it on a hard length, to keep

the batters guessing. But that was not as prevalent in the Sri Lanka series as he was seen persevering on outside the off-stump corridor, typical Test match bowling.

Meanwhile, Sakib was able to solve the middle-overs problem for the Tigers in the first ODI when the hosts were under the cosh after an unproductive first Powerplay.

A four-over burst saw him shape the ball towards the batters and then nip it away off the pitch, a strength he can use to wreak havoc on a good day. His ability to maintain the tightest of corridors outside the off-stump and then nip it either way off the surface made him stand out in the ODI opener.

In the third ODI, Mustafizur had to play Sakib's role in the middle-overs, as the young pacer was out with a hamstring injury.

Mustafizur did a commendable job, consistently pitching the ball back of a length and extracting enough movement off the surface to scalp two wickets from outside edges to the keeper.

Overall, it was a series where the Bangladesh pacers had their confidence boosted with reliance on their abilities reinforced.

However, it would be wiser of them to not let the success get to their heads considering they were never in a situation where their Achilles heel was exposed.

Mushfiqur blow for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh batter Mushfiqur Rahim was ruled out of the upcoming two-match Test series against Sri Lanka due to a fracture on his right thumb.

The wicketkeeper-batter suffered the injury during the third ODI on Monday while gathering a delivery but went on to keep wickets, taking four catches in the game, and later battled it out to score a steady 37 with the bat to help the Tigers clinch the series.

"After the match, Mushfiqur underwent an X-ray examination in Dhaka, which revealed an avulsion fracture on the MIP joint of his right thumb.

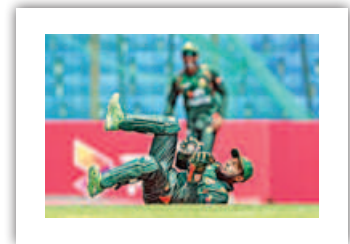
"He is currently undergoing conservative management for his injury and is expected to be sidelined for around three to four weeks, consequently ruling him out of participation in the Test series against Sri Lanka," BCB physio Bayjedul Islam Khan was quoted as saying in a press release.

Team management sources said that they will be looking at batters to replace Mushfiqur in the squad given that Zakir Hasan is already the backup wicket-keeper in the squad.

"We won't be naming a replacement today [Tuesday]. We will be heading to the board tomorrow [Wednesday]. After we decide we will name a replacement," chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mushfiqur would be left a bit disappointed at being sidelined as he averages over 50 against Sri Lanka in Tests and the first of his three Test double tons also came against Sri Lanka back in 2013.

The first Test begins in Sylhet on March 22 while the second Test will get underway in Chattogram on March 29. Both Tests are part of the World Test Championship.



Rookie Rana wants to bowl 'as fast as possible'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh pacer Nahid Rana, known for consistently clocking in excess of 140 km/h, admitted of being fixated on bowling fast.

The 21-year-old, who received his maiden call-up to the Bangladesh squad for the first Test against Sri Lanka, starting on Friday in Sylhet, had caught everyone's attention last year in the Bangladesh Premier League when the right-arm pacer was repeatedly seen registering speeds north of 145 km/h for Khulna Tigers.

"I want to bowl as fast as possible. I want to maintain my line and length also. Besides, another strength of mine is giving bouncers. That effort will be there if I get the chance," Rana told The Daily Star yesterday.

"It comes naturally to me. That's how I prepare myself, keep fit and try to emphasize on speed; it [bowling fast] happens that way," he added.

Rana has taken 63 wickets from 15 matches since making his first-class debut in November 2021. He got to play just two matches in the recently concluded 10th edition of the BPL and scalped one wicket in each match, giving away 34 and 33 runs, respectively.

Alongside Rana, Shoriful Islam, Khaled Ahmed, and Mushfiqur Hasan make up the Tigers' pace unit for the opening Test.



Can Bangladesh stop Palestine?

SPORTS REPORTER

Before going for a two-week training camp in Saudi Arabia ahead of the World Cup Qualifiers against Palestine, Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera had repeatedly said that his team needed to put in more than they did against Lebanon in a 1-1 draw in November last year.

Cabrera was optimistic before the match against Lebanon, especially after facing the same opposition in the SAFF Championships. However, the 39-year-old coach is clearly warier of the threat from Palestine, having watched the performances of the 97th-ranked nation in the AFC Asian Cup where the Middle East nation made it to the round of 16 before being beaten by eventual champions Qatar.

On the first day of training in Kuwait on Monday, experienced defender Tapu Barman stated that the whole team needed to defend against Palestine – an apparent indication of what the game plan of Bangladesh might be, come March 21.

Bangladesh will be way of the Palestine team, who boast a number of overseas-based players playing in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Malaysia, Kuwait, Indonesia, Thailand and Belgium.

The Lions of Cannan usually attack through the flanks to take aerial advantage of having tall forwards, with Oday Dabbagh, who plays for Belgium's premier league side Sporting Charleroi, considered lethal on the ground and in the air. Dabbagh recently scored three goals in the Asian Cup to take his national team tally to 13 goals.

Shehab Qunbar, who finished as the top scorer in the Palestine league for two consecutive years, could be another threat for the Bangladesh defenders.

Al-Ittihad midfielder Mahmoud Abu Warda and

Bangkok United forward forward Mahmoud Eid might also put Bangladesh defence – featuring Tapu Barman, Shakil Ahmed, Hasan Murad, Issa Faisal, Bishwanath Ghosh and Saad Uddin – under a lot of pressure.

However, captain Susab Battat delivers difficult crosses from an advanced right-back position and will take stern test of Faisal in Bangladesh's left-back position.

The charges of coach Makram Daboub are also good at set pieces, hence it is going to be tough for the Bangladeshi defenders to tackle the Palestinians in air.

Cabrera, in this case, will certainly miss the services of centre-back Tariq Kazi due to an injury.

His charges will try to attack on the break, where the likes of Rakib Hossain, Faisal Ahmed Fahim and Mojibur Rahman Jonny might have a hard time getting past Kuwait-based Michel Termanini, Saudi Arabia-based Camilo Saldana and Mohammad Saleh.

Still Bangladesh will want to produce a positive result against the Middle East side who drew 1-1 against the Men in Red and Green in 2006 after notching five straight wins.

"We have been together for a long time and we are going to play against Palestine in the middle of the Bangladesh Premier League, so there is not much question about the fitness of the players. I also think that output is better when there is a mixture of senior and junior players in the squad and we are progressing in that way because we have good communication amongst ourselves," Tapu told the media after the training session on Monday.

"If we can translate that on the pitch, we can expect a good result. We want to implement the game plan and objective the coach will task us in the match," the defender added.



Tigresses to rely on spin, Aussies look for pace

SPORTS REPORTER

During the opening day of the Dhaka Premier League last week, one Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official felt bemused by the preserved wickets at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. He, however, got the gist of the scenario swiftly as he was heard saying that "Australia are coming".

The Bangladesh women's team are gearing up for a crucial three-match ODI series against the reigning world champions, beginning tomorrow, and for the hosts, spin would be key in perhaps their biggest challenge in recent times at home.

Left-arm spinner Nahida Akter made the ICC ODI team of the year for 2023 and chief selector Sazzad Ahmed felt it was affirmation of Tigresses' strength in spin.

In addition, Fahima Khatun, Shorna Akter and Rabeya Khan are set to feature as leg-spinners, the latter two almost certain picks in the playing eleven.

"Talking about what is the reality here, subcontinental tracks are different. They [Australia] are used to fast and bouncy tracks. But playing here is not easy. If we look at our

neighbouring country India, we will see that any team can suffer there. Conditions here are not too different and I feel due to the wickets here, we have a fair chance," Sazzad told reporters at



Mirpur yesterday. The Tigresses have managed wins against India and Pakistan at home of late. They drew the ODI series 1-1 against Asian powerhouse India and clinched the Pakistan ODI series 2-1 in November last year. Bangladesh might feel they have an edge over

the world-dominating Aussie side due to spin.

"Traditionally these wickets might not be favourable for Australia. It could be said [that Bangladesh are ahead in spin]. We

have a home advantage. I think we have a good chance against them and winning the series is our target. If we want to play globally [ICC Women's Championship] we need points

against South Africa in South African conditions.

"We played our last series in South Africa and we faced pace bowlers there and we handled them well and I don't think it will be a big difference here. Those pacers we know [of Australia] are not that fast and our batters are prepared for that," he said.

Australia, however, have the pace threat required with Ellyse Perry and Megan Schutt, while 25-year-old speedster Tayla Vlaeminck, sitting just outside the first-choice attack, may get a chance.

"She's [Vlaeminck] really excited and looking forward to hopefully seeing her have some opportunities and get back out there, so she's pumped at the moment," coach Shelley Nitschke was quoted as saying by news.com.au.

Bangladesh will have their work cut out spin-wise as well. Sophie Molineux fired Royal Challengers Bangalore to the title with a three-wicket over in the final recently and Nitschke was not against going for more spinners.

"I certainly do feel [three spinners] is an option for us if the conditions present," Nitschke said.



Australia pacer Kim Garth puts in the hard yards during a practice session at the Mirpur nets yesterday, ahead of the first ODI against Bangladesh on Thursday. [Inset] Bangladesh players pose for a group photograph as spinner Nahida Akter is handed over the ICC Women's Player of the Month award for November, 2023 by the BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury. PHOTO: BCB