

Mushfiqur prepares for a new experience in Tests

SPORTS REPORTER

In a Test career spanning over 19 years, Mushfiqur Rahim has accomplished more in the red-ball format than most Bangladeshis.

In his long career, which began in May of 2005 at the age of 18, the wicketkeeper-batter has emerged as the country's greatest accumulator of runs in Tests (5676 runs), has featured in the highest number of Test matches (88) and has Test centuries in five countries, most by a Bangladeshi.

At 37, well into the twilight stage of his career, Mushfiqur's chances of experiencing new challenges in Test cricket are slimmer compared to younger players like Zakir Hasan or Shadman Islam.

But in one sense, the veteran batter and the two youngsters mentioned above are on equal terms. Just like Zakir and Shadman, Mushfiqur is right now in Pakistan for the first time as part of the Bangladesh squad for the two-Test

series, beginning with the first Test in Rawalpindi on August 21.

"This is my first time in Islamabad. It is beautiful. The facilities are also quite great," Mushfiqur said in a clip sent by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday.

Mushfiqur has played Tests in eight countries including Bangladesh. The two notable omissions in his resume are Australia and Pakistan.

Not having played a Test in Australia is a common feature in the careers of all active Bangladeshi cricketers barring Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, as the Tigers have not toured Down Under for a Test series since 2003.

Mushfiqur did have an opportunity to play Tests in Pakistan

in 2020 when the Tigers last toured the country.

However, at that time the wicketkeeper-batter had opted out of the series, citing concerns over safety. He was the only Bangladeshi player who refused that tour.

Mushfiqur, however, has played white-ball matches for Bangladesh in Pakistan before, having taken part in the 2008 and 2023 editions of the Asia Cup, playing a total of seven ODIs.

Mushfiqur was among the five players of the 16 member Test squad that went to Pakistan ahead of time to take part in Bangladesh 'A' team's first four-day match against Pakistan Shaheens in Islamabad, which

ended in a draw on Friday, as part of preparation for the upcoming series.

However, those plans got dented a bit owing to poor weather during the four-day game and to make matters worse, the right-hander also copped a blow on his finger in a net session, which kept him from batting in the second innings.

Limited involvement in the build-up to the series seems to have only made Mushfiqur more eager to make his first Test experience in Pakistan more memorable.

"We wanted to come here and have some sessions before the rest of the Test side comes... The training was interrupted due to a couple of rainy days. So, we couldn't properly practise. In the first couple of days, we only had one net session and it was also not a proper one."

"I tried my level best [in the match], but the first innings it didn't go our way. I hurt my fingers in the nets so I didn't bat in the second innings. Hopefully, I will recover very soon and will play the first Test," he added.



Rabby guides HP into semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Mahfuzur Rahman Rabby's unbeaten 13-ball 32 blitz powered Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) High Performance to a three-wicket win over Perth Scorchers and sealed them a place in the semifinal of the nine-team Top End T20 series in Darwin, Australia yesterday.

Rabby's knock, which included a couple of fours and sixes each, was supported by skipper Akbar Ali's 35 off 33 balls and opener Jishan Alam's run-a-ball 26, which helped their side reach 130-7 in 19.3 overs.

Perth pacer Matthew Kelly had rocked HP with early strikes and finished with figures of three for eight from his four overs, however, he could not eke out a victory for his side.

Earlier, fielding first, the HP restricted Perth to 129-5 with Ripon Mondol and Rakibul Hasan claiming two wickets each.

Perth opener Teague Wyllie hit the lone half-century of the match, making a run-a-ball 56.

Chasing 130, the HP were reduced to 15-3 in 5.4 overs after Kelly removed Tanzid Tamim (one), Parvez Hossain Emon (0) and Ariful Islam (two) in quick successions.

HP were staring at defeat when Rabby came to the middle as the eighth batter of the innings, with his side needing 41 runs off 23 balls. He smacked 20 runs in the 18th over and hit a four in the next to guide his side home.

HP will face Northern Territory in the first semifinal today.

Travel warning puts WC hosting in jeopardy

SPORTS REPORTER

The chance for Bangladesh to host the Women's T20 World Cup in October this year hinges on the withdrawal of travel advisories from four participating teams: India, Australia, England, and New Zealand.

"Being the host nation, we are regularly communicating with the ICC [International Cricket Council] regarding this issue, and even in our last communication yesterday [Friday], they expressed concern over the travel advisories from four participating nations," said a BCB official, who is maintaining the communication, on condition of anonymity.

These four countries issued travel advisories following a massive student-led movement, which ultimately resulted in the resignation of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

"See, if these countries don't withdraw their travel advisories, there is no chance for us to host this event. While Australia initially advised reconsidering travel plans to Bangladesh, it now suggests 'do not travel to Bangladesh.' So, you can understand the situation," he said.

"Time is running out, and the ICC will not wait long because there is a huge risk of financial setbacks if we ultimately fail to host the tournament due to security reasons."

A final decision is expected to be made by the ICC board on August 20.

According to the cricket website ESPNcricinfo, Zimbabwe has emerged as one of two options being considered to host the event, which is due to start on October 3. The UAE is the other option being considered, after India ruled itself out.

"Actually, the ICC always selects an alternative host nation for any global event, but unfortunately, that's not the case for this tournament, and that's the reason they are now searching for a host country," informed a BCB director.

Footballers demand BPL with all clubs

SPORTS REPORTER

A significant number of footballers from various clubs, including those at risk of missing the upcoming season, urged the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday to convince clubs to form squads.

Nearly 50 players from top-tier clubs, under the banner of "Professional Football Players," held a press briefing at the BFF House and presented a seven-point demand list to general secretary Emran Hossain Tushar.

Their demands include deferring the transfer window, holding the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) with all clubs participating and without foreign players, and arranging a meeting with the sports adviser of the interim government as soon as possible.

While none of the 12 clubs slated to join the BPL have officially notified the BFF of their intent to withdraw, insiders from at least two clubs remain pessimistic about participation. Several clubs had requested the BFF to defer the August 19 cut-off date for pre-season transfers, citing difficulties in securing funds due to a lack of sponsors following the ouster of the Awami League-led government on August 5.

After repeated requests, the world football governing body, FIFA, agreed to extend the cut-off date to August 22.

However, with only four days left until the extended deadline and with most clubs far from securing their squads, it is highly unlikely that the BPL will feature all 12 teams in the upcoming season. That is why the players have urged authorities to ensure that all the clubs participate.

Former national team goalkeeper Ashrafur Islam Rana, who played for Chittagong Abahani last season, said they are "willing to play even with a cut in wages" while urging sponsors not to back out.

Raihan Hasan asked what will happen to "100-120 players as three or four clubs don't want to form teams."

When contacted, Chittagong Abahani manager Arman Aziz told The Daily Star that he had called the club president, Shamsul Alam Chowdhury, yesterday, but the call was not picked up. The former national team footballer also said that he heard the club president had picked up a call from the BFF in the afternoon,

saying they were still willing to participate in the league. Shamsul, however, could not be reached by The Daily Star for a comment on the issue.

While there is still hope for Chittagong Abahani, the fate of Sheikh Jamal and Sheikh Russel, and the players who were in the process of going to these clubs, hangs in the balance.

A source inside Sheikh Russel said that despite the withdrawal of their chief sponsors, they were intent on forming a squad, but the main roadblock is political. He added that it is highly unlikely the club could participate in the league under its current name, the change of which would be a long and arduous process.

BFF general secretary Emran gave the footballers some assurance, saying he would forward the letter to the professional league committee to decide on a course of action. He also said they would try to arrange a meeting by today with Asif Mahmud, the sports adviser to the interim government, where representatives of the players would be present.



Need to help Mbappe adapt: Ancelotti

AFP, Madrid



With Kylian Mbappe set to make his La Liga debut for Real Madrid on Sunday against Real Mallorca, coach Carlo Ancelotti said the superstar needs to adapt to his new club.

The France captain scored on his long-awaited first Madrid appearance as Los Blancos beat Atalanta to win the UEFA Super Cup on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old striker, who arrived at the end of his PSG contract, was not at his best but finished lethally after Fede Valverde sent the reigning Spanish and European champions ahead.

"Mbappe is an extraordinary talent, we have to help him adapt as quickly as possible," Ancelotti told a news conference Saturday ahead of the team's opening La Liga clash.

"He has started well in the dressing room, very focussed, with humility."

Mbappe was asked if he was planning to score 50 goals this season after the Super Cup triumph and the forward said there was "no limit" to what he might achieve.

Ancelotti said he was avoiding setting a target for the former PSG hitman, whose arrival at his dream club Madrid was years in the making.

"I will never tell a player how many goals he has to score, what I ask of them is to give everything they have for the team, nothing more," added the Italian coach. "Everybody has their qualities, whether they are technical, tactical or motivational, and have to harness them for the team."

City's unprecedented quest begins at chaotic Chelsea

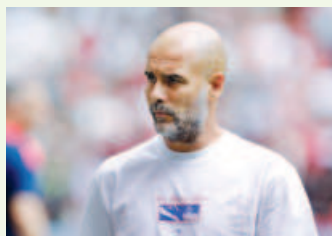
AGENCIES

As it has been the case for a number of years in recent history, Manchester City remain the team to beat as Pep Guardiola's men begin their quest for an unprecedented fifth straight Premier League title on Sunday afternoon when they travel to Stamford Bridge to face Chelsea in their opening fixture of the season.

It will definitely be a tough task for the reigning Premier League champions, but more so because of the unpredictability that surrounds a Chelsea squad that have more than 40 players at their disposal – something that will also be a headache for Chelsea's new coach Enzo Maresca.

As Maresca attempts to solve the jigsaw puzzle of whom to stick with for the starting eleven, some clues might be on offer today when Chelsea players emerge from the tunnel with their first competitive line-up after yet another summer of mind-boggling spending.

Around 160 million pounds (\$205.10 million) has been splashed out on players such as winger Pedro Neto from Wolverhampton Wanderers, midfielder Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall from Leicester City and goalkeeper Filip Jorgenson from Villarreal.



Directing a huge squad proved beyond Mauricio Pochettino for the majority of last season before an impressive end to the campaign hinted at the identity he had been seeking to forge.

But then Pochettino was replaced by Italian Maresca and Chelsea fans will hope that things fall into place quicker this time.

"At the moment if I start to think I

have 43 players it is not a good thing," Maresca said on Friday.

Sunday's game is quite the baptism of fire for Maresca, a former Man City assistant under Guardiola who takes charge of a Chelsea side seeking to end a six-game winless run against the Citizens. The Blues have, however, picked up more points (67) than any other Premier League club from their opening matches of a new season.

Tasked with managing such a huge squad in his very first season, Maresca could be calmed by the words of his former boss.

"All the managers need time," said Guardiola on Friday.

"I don't know if Chelsea is the place to do this but give him time and it will work."

Meanwhile, Guardiola also has headaches of his own ahead of the crucial fixture as key midfielder Rodri and Norwegian forward Oscar Bobb, who set up the only goal in City's tiebreaker win over Manchester United in the Community Shield, will be sitting out due to injuries.

Bobb could miss up to four months after breaking his leg in training while Rodri is still recovering from an injury sustained at Euro 2024.



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (c) celebrates scoring their second goal with Luis Diaz and Diogo Jota, who netted the opener, during their 2-0 win over newly promoted Ipswich Town in a Premier League fixture at Portman Road yesterday, marking a strong start to their season in the post-Juergen Klopp era under the leadership of Arne Slot.

PHOTO: REUTERS