



Batters’ test on the cards in Chennai

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will go into the India Tests carrying over confidence from their recent away series win against Pakistan. However, the first Test in Chennai against the Asian giants is likely to serve up challenges that would test Bangladesh’s batting which showed signs of frailty even during the 2-0 sweep in Rawalpindi.

In the two Tests against Pakistan, Bangladesh only had left-handers in the top four and all of whom struggled against in swinging deliveries, with right arm pacer Khurram Shahzad exploiting this weakness multiple times throughout the series.

Against India, Bangladesh are likely to be up against the likes of Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammad Siraj, right-arm pacers who are much quicker than Shahzad and would surely zero in on exploiting this glaring weakness.

The pitch at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai is also likely to add to the difficulties for the batters.

In the last two Tests played at the ground, England won one and India took the second during the 2021 series. Joe Root got a double hundred as England won by a big margin of 227 runs on a flat and slow surface.

India then won by a bigger margin, 317, in the second Test while there was hue and cry from the English side over it being played on a ‘sandpit’ pitch.

The Tigers do not have the best of times on rank turns, even at home. In India, spin takes on even more precedence, with

vigorous turns on offer.

If Ravichandran Ashwin is leading the spinners, there is Bumrah leading a lethal pace attack. Couple that with the experience and skill of the Indian attack and with the prominent seam—much harder than Kookaburra or Duke—of the SG balls used in India, the Tiger batters will have to effectively be prepared for anything.

India began their practice session in Chennai yesterday under new coaching staff headed by Gautam Gambhir. What their plans might be heading into a busy Test season where they play New Zealand and Australia in pacey conditions away from home, remains to be seen.

On one hand they could look to unsettle Bangladesh with spin since the conditions present that opportunity but at the same time, pacers may have something in the pitches for them to help prepare for their upcoming away series’.

Bangladesh’s former technical consultant Sridharan Sriram, who hails from Chennai, feels ‘anything is possible’ when it comes to how the Chennai pitch would play.

“I have had a lot of people asking me about Chennai, I honestly don’t know as I have been in the UK and haven’t been to the stadium after IPL. Anything is possible, depends on how much grass the square has. I don’t know how the India team management would want it,” Sriram told The Daily Star yesterday.

Thus, a heightened test of batsmanship is on the cards as Bangladesh prepare for the first Test.

Shakib said eye issue not a problem now: Hemp

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Bangladesh batting coach David Hemp said that premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan had told him during the Pakistan series this month that the eye issue that has been of concern to the cricketer as of late is no longer ‘a problem at the moment’.

“When it initially happened, he found it a bit challenging. More recently, however, he’s managed it and is coping with that [eyesight issues]. He said that the issue with the eye isn’t a problem at the moment,” Hemp told The Daily Star yesterday when asked about batter Shakib’s condition.

Recently, Shakib claimed 9-193 in the County Championship Division One match for Surrey against Somerset but managed to score only 12 and 0 with the bat.

Since the last ICC World Cup 2023 in India, Shakib’s struggle with the bat became an issue as the player was diagnosed with a retinal condition in his left eye after he reported having reported visual discomfort.

“From the work he has done in Pakistan, I can say he is getting into good positions and striking it nicely.

“I haven’t seen him bat in the UK, so can’t comment on that,” Hemp added.

Women’s football team to play World Cup Qualifiers directly

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women’s football team will get direct opportunity to compete in FIFA Women’s World Cup Qualifiers as the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) yesterday introduced a separate qualifying competition for 2031 Women’s World Cup, according to a statement from the continental body.

The AFC announced it would create a three-round preliminary competition, starting in 2027, to determine the continent’s qualifiers for the finals though the host nation for the 2031 tournament has not been decided yet.

AFC previously organised Women’s World Cup Qualifiers with the teams being decided through performance in the Women’s Asian Cup or Asian Games, but this time there will be a standalone competition that will give lower-ranked sides more opportunities to play against higher-ranked sides.

The new format will be held in three rounds with the bottom-ranked teams

— based on FIFA ranking — playing in the opening round. Subject to the number of entries, these teams will be grouped to compete in a single round-robin centralised league format.

Then the top teams, based on the group results, will advance to Round 2 which will feature 24 teams including the top eight ranked sides in line with FIFA ranking.

Teams will then be divided into six four-nation groups to face off in a single round-robin centralised league format with the top-two finishers advancing to the third round.

Three groups of four teams will then compete in a home-and-away group format with the number of qualifiers for the finals determined by the continent’s allocation.

The next edition of the Women’s World Cup will be played in Brazil in 2027, with the Women’s Asian Cup — to be hosted by Australia a year earlier — acting as the continent’s qualifiers for the finals.

A new two-phase qualifying competition for the 2029 edition of



the Women’s Asian Cup, to be played in Uzbekistan, has also been launched, meaning Bangladesh will get more competitive matches in coming days.

Round 1 will feature participating teams ranked ninth and below in the as the AFC aims to draw teams into eight groups of three or four, with the top 16 teams progressing to Round 2, subject to the number of entries.

Then, 16 teams will join the top eight FIFA-ranked sides and the 24-team second strong cast will be divided into six groups of four teams and the winner of each group and the five best second-placed team will advance to the finals of Women’s Asia Cup.

Bangladesh, however, will miss the matches of Olympic Qualifiers with AFC abolishing the previous three-round qualifiers for Olympic Games by introducing a new format in which the top eight teams of Asian Women’s Cup will battle for the right to reach the Olympic Games.

Hathurusingha returns tonight

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha is set to arrive in Dhaka tonight at 11:30 PM ahead of the Tigers’ upcoming tour of India.

Hathurusingha, who left the country for Australia on September 5, a day after the Tigers returned home from Pakistan, didn’t feature in their week-long training session in Mirpur.

However, the Sri Lankan’s stay in Dhaka will be a short one as the Bangladesh contingent is scheduled to leave for India at 1:15 PM on Sunday to feature in the two-match Test series. The series will be followed by three T20Is.

Earlier on Thursday, pace bowling coach Andre Adams, who also took a short break after the Pakistan series, arrived in the country and conducted a training session with the pacers in Mirpur yesterday.

The Tigers have no practice scheduled for today, but players may practice individually.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has arranged a winning bonus handing over ceremony for the team for their recent series win over Pakistan at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel today at 4:00 pm. Adviser for the Ministry of Youth and Sports Asif Mahmud will be the chief guest at the event.

‘Matter of time for Vinicius to reach his best level’

REUTERS, Madrid

Bombarded with questions about Vinicius Junior’s form at a press conference on Friday, Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti said he was unconcerned about his star forward’s form and mentioned that he expected the Brazilain to bounce back quickly.

Ancelotti acknowledged that Vinicius was not at his best and stressed that the player needs support following criticism of his slow start to the season with Real and lacklustre performances for Brazil in a narrow win over Ecuador and a shock loss at Paraguay during the international break.

“He’s not at his best, but he’s still very important for us. We’re in no hurry because the team has managed to score and he has been important... and the last concern for me is Vinicius’ condition, but we have to take good care of him,” Ancelotti said ahead of their LaLiga clash at Real Sociedad on Saturday.



“He always works well and it’s a matter of just time for him to reach his best level. I can’t fool myself thinking that I’ll have all players at 100% at all times.

“I don’t want to go into his problems in Brazil but what I see is a more general issue because they are not managing to bring out their best version as a group. Here we are delighted with Vinicius

because although he is not at his best right now, no one can forget that with Vini we have been able to win two Champions League titles... We have to be very fond of him at Madrid.”

Ancelotti said that he will have to evaluate the fitness of Vinicius and his Brazil team mates Rodrygo and Endrick after a long trip back from international duty

in order to minimise the risks of injury as his side gear up for a busy schedule with seven games in the next three weeks.

Ancelotti will face a selection headache ahead of Saturday’s clash at Sociedad with defender David Alaba and midfielders Jude Bellingham, Eduardo Camavinga, Dani Ceballos and Aurelien Tchouameni still recovering from injuries.

“The players who have just come back from the international break, like Vinicius Jr, Rodrygo and Endrick who had long travels with Brazil, are under observation because they haven’t had time to rest or train.

“We have to try to avoid injuries, last year we had a lot of injuries but we managed to cope very well. With this schedule, it’s normal to have injuries and we have to face it,” Ancelotti said.

Barcelona top the LaLiga standings with 12 points, four ahead of Real Madrid, Atletico and Villarreal and five above fifth-placed Girona.



PHOTO: LIVERPOOL

Liverpool boss Arne Slot will want to keep his talisman Mohamed Salah happy if the Reds are to continue their marauding start in the Premier League. Liverpool and rivals Manchester City are the only two sides left with a 100 percent record with three wins. Salah has had an explosive start to the season, scoring one in each of Liverpool’s opening fixtures. The 32-year-old, who is in the last year of his contract, has also provided three assists so far.