

## Markram ready for 'exciting spin challenge'

SPORTS REPORTER

South Africa skipper Aiden Markram embraced the trial by spin the Proteas might face in the first Test of the two-match series against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, starting today.

Markram, who is deputizing as skipper for the injured Temba Bavuma, said the spin challenge would be exciting in the Tigers' den where no member from the current squad, except for Bavuma, has ever played a Test before.

"It's a new condition to experience and again it's an exciting opportunity to put many sessions of good cricket together and if we do that, it will lead towards a positive result. But we have no doubt it's going to be tough and different for us as a team," Markram told reporters during the pre-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

"Spin obviously is a big talking point, especially when you are from South Africa. We don't get conditions like this on home soil. It's an exciting challenge for us to face a team that's relatively young and doesn't play too



Former Pakistan leggie Mushtaq Ahmed, who re-joined as Bangladesh's spin-bowling coach for the South Africa series, was seen speaking with spinners Nayeem Hasan and Mehedi Hasan Miraz separately yesterday during training in Mirpur on the eve of the Tigers' first Test against the Proteas. Given the slow nature of the Mirpur surface, spin might once again just be the turning point in this crucial World Test Championship fixture. [Bottom] Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and South Africa's stand-in captain Aiden Markram yesterday pose with the trophy of the two-match series.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/BCB



many Test matches.

"It's just an exciting thing as a player to be exposed to new conditions, learn, and take the lessons with us to the next Test and also to future sub-continent tours.

"We are here for this [to win Test matches] for sure. We like to play some good cricket. We feel like a Test unit that has the skills and better options now to face spin bowling.

Markram also revealed that his troops have been taking inputs from their experienced left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj, who earlier this year featured in the Bangladesh Premier League.

"Kessy [Keshav Maharaj] is extremely experienced and a clever cricketer. The guys have been tapping him for a lot of information, knowledge and some advice about whatever it might be," Markram said.

The subcontinent has not been a happy hunting ground in Tests for South Africa. It has been more than 10 years since the Proteas won a Test in the sub-continent after their win over Sri Lanka in Galle in the opening Test of the two-match series in July 2014. Since then, they've failed to win in 14 Tests played in four different countries - Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan - losing 10 matches and drawing the remaining four.

## Ravindra helps New Zealand to famous win in India

Rachin Ravindra made a fine 134 in the first innings and then remained unbeaten on 39 in the second innings to help New Zealand to their first Test victory in India in 36 years yesterday at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru, the hometown of Ravindra's parents.

The eight-wicket win over India in the first Test in Bengaluru yesterday is New Zealand's first victory in the format in India since 1988. This is also the Black Caps' third Test win in 37 matches on Indian soil.

New Zealand also became only the third team - after Australia and England - to claim a Test victory in India since 2013.

New Zealand chased down the 107-run target with over two sessions left on the final day, being the first team to chase a 100-plus target in the fourth innings in India since 2000.

India's 462 all out in the second innings is the highest total in a home defeat for the hosts.



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh coach Peter Butler tried to put on a brave face following the defending champions' shock 1-1 draw against Pakistan in their opening match of the SAFF Women's Championship in Kathmandu yesterday.

The Englishman, who took charge in March this year after a brief spell from Saiful Bari Titu following the resignation of long serving Golam Rabbani Choton last year, praised his team profusely while lamenting not getting 'deserved three points'.

"I'm not disappointed with how it went but I'm a realist. We march on and take the momentum from tonight's game into the next game against India on the 23rd. We'll kick on and surprise a few people," said the former West Ham midfielder.

Bangladesh were only saved utter embarrassment against a side they had beaten 6-0, thanks to a stoppage-time goal from Shamsunnahar Jr. While the women in red and green did dominate possession and shot taken, they looked anything but the force they were when they brushed aside all oppositions on their way to the maiden title two years ago under Choton.

Butler, however, felt her team played

The players who are here are all capable, everyone will play their roles," Shanto said.

Meanwhile, selector Abdur Razzak was seen taking a good look at the wicket during yesterday's practice session and discussing with spinners Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nayeem Islam. These two along with Taijul Islam, who is expected to spearhead the attack in Shakib's absence, will most likely hold the key in the match for the hosts.

Shanto said he expected a traditional Mirpur track and hoped his spinners would stick to the process.

"Not expecting anything extra. They will bowl how they have done in the past. I would want that the process to be right,"

Home advantage has not always been easy to procure for the Tigers in Mirpur, where they have played 27 Tests, won eight, lost 16 and drawn the remaining three.

In the last Test here against New Zealand, Bangladesh's spin plans backfired as the hosts lost by four wickets.

Still, South Africa coming here with a relatively fresh squad with little experience of playing in Bangladesh presents a golden opportunity for the Tigers, said Shanto.

"We have never won against South Africa but this is a big opportunity for us," Shanto reminded.

By afternoon, as some fans gathered outside the Mirpur Stadium to protest Shakib's absence and another group arrived harbouring anti-Shakib sentiments, chaos ensued. There was a huge presence of security forces amidst concerns, all of which is hinting that this may end up being a Test like no other in Mirpur.

## SOUTH AFRICA suffer heartbreak in final again

SPORTS REPORTER

For the second time this year, South Africa suffered heartbreak in the final of an ICC T20 World Cup, this time the women's team falling short against first-time champions New Zealand at the Dubai International Cricket Stadium in the UAE yesterday.

Unlike the men's team, which lost to India by a whisker in June, the South Africa women's team were completely outplayed by the White Ferns, losing by 32 runs in what turned out to be a one-sided final.

New Zealand, who had come into the tournament on the back of 11 defeats in white-ball cricket, were not considered amongst the favourites but under the leadership of veteran all-rounder Sophie Devine, they went all the way.

"I let myself dream last night about what it would be like to hold the trophy. Didn't want to get too far ahead of myself. Hard to put into words what it means," Devine said after the final.

This was a chance at redemption for the South African women's team, having lost the final of the 2023 edition to Australia at home, but once again they faltered at the last hurdle.

"We obviously had a really good semifinal. Focus was to reset. Not get too ahead of ourselves. Knew we had a quality opponent in New Zealand to go up against. Didn't play our best cricket tonight," said South Africa skipper Laura Wolvaardt.

New Zealand's Amelia Kerr was the star performer of the final, first making a 38 ball 43 which helped them post 158-5 and then taking three for 24 with her leg-spin to help restrict South Africa to 126-9.

Kerr, who finished as the highest wicket-taker in the tournament with 15 scalps, took the decisive wicket of the match when she dismissed Wolvaardt (33 off 27 balls), after which South Africa never looked in contention.

"I'm a little bit speechless and I'm just so stoked to get the win, considering what this team's been through. It's what dreams are made of," said Kerr, who was named both player of the final and the player of the tournament.

The tournament was originally supposed to take place in Bangladesh but was shifted to the UAE at the last minute due to security concerns.



Curtis Jones struck Liverpool's winner in a 2-1 victory over Chelsea at Anfield to keep Arne Slot's side top of the Premier League table on Sunday. Mohamed Salah's 29th-minute penalty put the hosts in front against the run of play but Chelsea levelled through a Nicolas Jackson strike after the break.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Butler rues not getting 'three deserved points'



A heavily bandaged Shamsunnahar Jr celebrates her last-ditch equaliser as defending champions Bangladesh came out with a 1-1 draw against Pakistan in their first Group A match of the SAFF Women's Championship at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

exceedingly well and were unlucky not to get three points against a side full of 'expatriates from around the world' who got 'everyone behind the ball'.

"I'm really proud of the girls. I thought they were absolutely superb. Anybody who criticises us knows nothing about football," said Butler.

"I've played in every level, the English

Premier League and I've managed over thousand matches. And I can honestly say that I've never been involved in a game where we've dominated possession so much, controlled the whole game, played such really really good football and not really got the just deserved, which should have been the three points," the 58-year-old coach added.