

"I'm very excited. I want to be challenged and I've got a few plans against India's bowlers. I feel like I'm moving really nicely so hopefully I get that opportunity."

Australia opener Sam Konstas ahead of the Boxing Day Test between Australia and India



Salahuddin urges buoyed Tigers to strive for consistency

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh team returned yesterday after a successful West Indies tour in which they won their first Test in West Indies since 2009 and clinched their maiden T20I series in the Caribbean.

Although Bangladesh lost the ODI series 3-0, given that the team found new performers in the absence of players like Mushfiqur Rahim, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Towhid Hridoy and Mustafizur Rahman, there are many positive the Tigers can take out of the series.

Jaker Ali shone in all three formats with important runs, Shamim Hossain hit whirlwind innings down the order in the T20Is, Soumya Sarkar looked close to his classy best in white-ball cricket while Mahmudullah Riyad turned back the clock in the ODI series.

The pacers ensured that the hosts did not take the Test series 2-0 as their efforts saw the Tigers earn a series-leveling win in the Jamaica Test.

Speedster Nahid Rana rattled the West Indies in the second Test, Taskin Ahmed and Hasan Mahmud remained affective throughout the tour and all-rounder Mahedi Hasan proved more than handy with his off-spin in the T20Is and was rightful-



ly named the player of the series.

But a series win should not take away focus from the deficiencies that exist in the team, felt Bangladesh's senior assistant coach Mohammed Salahuddin, saying it is high time for the players to start showing more consistency.

"We do have weaknesses, but it would not be right to talk about them publicly," Salahuddin told reporters on his return to the country yesterday.

"Although we won the T20 series, we

have to begin working on those weaknesses. We can't take too long, if we wait, time would get away from us. After spending so much time [in international cricket], we [Bangladesh team] should be in a position where we can play consistent cricket," he added.

A lack of consistency has long plagued the players of the Bangladesh team with batters like Liton Das, who is going through a terrible patch, Afif Hossain and even Hridoy not being consistent at the highest level for long periods.

Inconsistency has been an issue in Soumya's decade long international career as well, however, in the while-ball series in the Caribbean, the left-hander

showed composure and stuck to a process which helped him score runs.

Salahuddin said that players like Soumya are thinking more independently now which is helping their game and credited head coach Phil Simmons for giving players the freedom to think differently.

"The boys are getting used to playing with more responsibility. In our team meetings, they are getting involved and speaking up a lot more. We needed this very much.

"Our primary goal was to change their mentality. The head coach has given them a lot of freedom to change their way of thinking. I feel they are getting some success because of that. In the future, they can do even better," he said.

Salahuddin also spoke about how winning the second Test sparked their aggression for the rest of the tour.

"We got a lot of motivation from the Test series. From there we began thinking whether we should play to survive or become more aggressive. Usually what happens is that the players only think about themselves. How they are playing, how they got out, the boys mostly think about things like that.

"But when we began thinking about the opposition, we started playing aggressive cricket and that changed how we approached the game. This small change happened in the Test series. After that, we felt we have a good chance of doing well in the entire series."

WOMEN'S U-19 ASIA CUP Bangladesh lose to India in final

SPORTS REPORTER

India clinched the title of the inaugural ACC Women's U-19 Asia Cup beating Bangladesh by 41 runs in the final in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Bangladesh, despite faring pretty well with the ball to restrict the opposition to 117 for seven after opting to bowl first, failed to show fight with the bat.

Right arm pacer Farzana Easmin took four for 31 while off-spinner Nishita Akter took two 23 as the bowlers kept India under a tight leash, despite a 47 ball 52 from opener Gongadi Trisha.



The women in red and green started their chase pretty well, reaching 40 in the seventh over losing two wickets, however, things started to go downhill since then. Apart from Fahomida Choya (18) and Juairiya Ferdous (22), none of the others managed to reach double digit as Bangladesh were eventually bowled out for 76 runs in 18.3 overs, conceding a heavy defeat.

This was Bangladesh's second defeat in the tournament and second to India, having lost by eight wickets against the same opposition in Super 4 stage.

WOMEN'S BCL Joty hits 85 on batters' day

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh skipper Nigar Sultana Joty hit an unbeaten 85 for Central Zone against North Zone on the second day of their BCL match at the Shaheed Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi.

On a day ruled by batters, off-spinner Jannatul Ferdous bagged a fiver for 85 runs for North Zone. Earlier, Murshida Khatun and Farzana Akter hit fifties before Joty stitched together a 77-run stand with national teammate Shorna Akter and later forged a 62-run stand with Nahida Akter to take Central Zone to 308 for five at stumps. On day one, Nahida had grabbed headlines with a seven-wicket haul for 48.

At Bangla Trac Cricket Academy Ground in Rajshahi, South Zone piled on the runs as opener Ayesha Rahman hit 94 while Rubya Haider made 82. Rabeya Khan also managed 70 as South Zone were bowled out for 347. Spinner Shorifa Khatun bagged four for 67 for East Zone.

Salma Khatun bagged two wickets before end of play as East Zone finished the day on 26 for three.



NCL T20

Metro beat Khulna, set up final with Rangpur

Khulna Division's experienced stars did not turn up as Dhaka Metro clinched the second qualifier by 38 runs to qualify for the final of the National Cricket League (NCL) T20 at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Metro, who went undefeated in the league phase, will get a chance to avenge their defeat in the first qualifier and take home the trophy when they take on Rangpur Division in the final in Sylhet on Tuesday.

Yesterday, batting first, Metro hobbled to 119.8 as only three of their batters reached double figures with opener and captain Mohammad Naim top scoring with 57 off 53 balls.

Masum Khan, Sheikh Parvez Jibon and Mehedi Hasan Rana took two wickets each while Mustafizur Rahman, on his return, finished as the most expensive of the Khulna

bowlers, conceding 35 in his four overs for the solitary wicket of Naim.

Chasing a paltry total, Khulna batters misfired badly. Four of their batters reached double figures with skipper Nurul Hasan scoring the highest 22 off 18 balls, but none of them could bat through and take them home.

The Metro spinners ruled the proceedings, with Mosaddek Hossain bagging 3-13 while Rakibul Hasan and Alish Al Islam picked up two and one wicket respectively to bundle Khulna out for 81 in 17.4 overs.

Although the league phase saw some big totals, both the qualifiers and the eliminator were low-scoring games. Khulna batter Mithun felt playing too many matches in quick succession caused this.

"There were many consecutive matches and the wicket didn't get rest," Mithun said in a press conference. "Next time this tournament takes place, it would be better if it takes place over a longer period."

Hockey set to return after seven months

SPORTS REPORTER

The ad-hoc committee of Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) is set to start its work by holding Victory Day Hockey Competition with four services teams, BKSP and Hockey Players' Welfare Unity, a team comprising national, age-group and former national players.

Star-studded Bangladesh Navy will play against BKSP in the opening match today as six teams, split into two groups, will fight for the title, which will be decided on December 30.

Services teams like Navy, Army, Air Force and Police usually take part in invitational tournaments regularly but the inclusion of Hockey Players' Welfare Unity caught everyone's attention due to the presence of current and former national players.

"Players who are not involved with services teams requested us to include them in the competition. They will play under the banner of Hockey Players' Welfare Unity, a move we welcomed," BHF general secretary Lt Col (Rtd) Riazul Hasan said at a press conference at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

National forward Pushkor Khisha Mimo

informed that they have just got together to play the tournament as there has been no competition since the Dhaka Premier Division Hockey League ended in April.

"Bangladesh Navy, Army, Air Force, Police and even BKSP have some fixed players but there are also many players outside of those teams. They would have been sitting idle. So we have taken the initiative to play the competition because of our love towards hockey," Mimo told The Daily Star over phone.

Mimo also informed that a couple of individuals promised them to provide them with expenditures of jerseys, food and running of the camp as the players won't benefit from this tournament.

The national forward also urged the new committee to keep hockey on the ground.

"We want the continuation of hockey from the ad-hoc committee through the premier hockey league and franchise league. The committee should think of the players who are not involved with the service teams instead of thinking only about the services teams," said Mimo.

BHF general secretary Riazul said that they want to run the sport without any interruption and the victory day tournament is the first step towards that goal.



Simeone's Atletico on a roll

Alexander Sorloth struck deep in stoppage time to hand Atletico Madrid a 2-1 comeback win at Barcelona on Saturday that moved them top of LaLiga, with 41 points from 18 matches, three ahead of the Catalans who have played a game more. Pedri put the hosts ahead in the first half but Rodrigo De Paul levelled after the break before Sorloth found the net in the sixth minute of stoppage time.

Atletico handed Barcelona a third straight home league defeat.

The win was Atletico's 12th straight victory in all competitions.

Sorloth's stoppage time winner saw Atletico win their first match away at Barcelona since 2006. It is also the first time that the Catalans lost to a Diego Simeone-led Atletico team at home.



PHOTO: REUTERS