

CHAMPIONS TROPHY CORNER

Cummins 'hugely unlikely' for Australia

Australia captain Pat Cummins is "hugely unlikely" for the Champions Trophy because of injury while fellow paceman Josh Hazlewood is also a doubt, coach Andrew McDonald said Wednesday. Cummins skipped the ongoing Test tour of Sri Lanka for the birth of his second child but also has an ankle problem. The Champions Trophy in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates begins on February 19.

Saikat and 11 others to officiate

After officiating in the ICC ODI World Cup in 2023 and the T20 World Cup in 2024, Bangladeshi umpire Sharfuddoula Ibane Shahid Saikat will be officiating in the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy. The International Cricket Council has confirmed the match officials. A team of 12 umpires will take charge of the proceedings in the 8-team tournament to be played in Karachi, Lahore and Rawalpindi in Pakistan and Dubai in the UAE.

Root 'crucial' for England: Butler

England captain Jos Buttler on Wednesday said Joe Root will play a "crucial role" in India on his ODI return and as they build up to the Champions Trophy this month. The visitors went down 4-1 in the preceding T20 series and now face India in three ODI matches starting with Thursday's opener in Nagpur.

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Bangladesh set to get Mushtaq boost in Champions Trophy

SPORTS REPORTER

Spin bowling coach Mushtaq Ahmed is set to rejoin Bangladesh ahead of the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy, scheduled to be held in Pakistan and the UAE from February 19.

A spin wizard during his playing days for Pakistan, Mushtaq had previously worked with the Tigers during last year's T20 series against Zimbabwe, the T20 World Cup, Test series against Pakistan and South Africa, and away ODI series against Afghanistan, is expected to join the side during their short preparatory camp at home from February 8.

Both Mushtaq and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) confirmed the development to *The Daily Star* yesterday. However, a BCB official said they are currently exploring the possibility of offering the 54-year-old a long-term contract, as the position of permanent spin-bowling coach has remained vacant since Rangana Herath's departure in early 2024.

"His contract for 2025 is still under discussion," BCB's cricket operations in-charge Shahriar Nafees said.

Meanwhile, Nafees also confirmed that BCB's lead analyst, Nasir Ahmed Nasu will be providing his service in the Champions Trophy. He added that all logistical preparations for the tournament have been completed.

"We are now just waiting for the team to fly out for the tournament on the night of the 13th [February 14]," he concluded.

Bangladesh, who are in Group A of the eight-team marquee event, will begin their campaign against India in Dubai on February 20, before facing New Zealand and Pakistan in their remaining matches on February 24 and 27, respectively, in Rawalpindi.



SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Fortune Barishal would not want to stop now, having already made it into the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) final, to be played in Mirpur on Friday. However, even if they trip in the final hurdle, Barishal would still have a lot to take away from the tournament.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said of Najmul Hossain Shanto, the all-format Bangladesh skipper who has found it hard to make an impact in the competition.

Shanto has featured in just five of the 13 games this season. And, with his last opportunity coming on January 16 in a game against Dhaka Capitals, chances of Shanto appearing in the all important final look slim.

"When you break the combination, there is a chance of losing and the momentum goes away," Barishal head coach Mizanur Rahman Babul told reporters yesterday.

However, Barishal's fear of losing momentum is now becoming Bangladesh's issue before a major tournament -- the Champions Trophy, set to begin later this month.

Shanto's five BPL appearances this season saw him manage just 56 runs, with 41 of those coming in a game against Rangpur Riders, at an average of just over 11. However, arguments have been laid out that the BPL and the Champions Trophy

are completely different formats.

"The two [competitions] are in different formats, one is T20 and another is a fifty-over tournament and the pattern is different. Sometimes cricketers go through a lean patch. Maybe, he [Shanto] faced some problems coming in this format. The type of cricketer Shanto is, he can make a comeback anytime. I am hoping that in the upcoming

Shanto was in the team and we played him at the beginning. Maybe he hasn't scored runs. There are many cricketers on our side who have not played any matches. We have to see the team first and what combinations to play against which side,

Barishal head coach Mizanur Rahman Babul.

Champions Trophy, he will lead Bangladesh, and, as a batter, he will lead from the front," Mizanur added.

Even though the matter has been downplayed by Barishal's coach, considering Bangladesh's chances in Champions Trophy, Shanto getting his mojo back holds the utmost importance as the leader needs to be in and among the runs in order to be able to lead from the front.

When it comes to regaining

confidence, Shanto will now have to bide his time and get his rhythm back when the Champions Trophy begins. With the Tigers set to open their campaign against India on February 20 in Dubai, it will be a steep task for Shanto to find his feet early in the tournament.

It was Barishal captain Tamim Iqbal, who said that it was unfortunate that Shanto could not be given more opportunities.

"I must say it's unfortunate because I could not give him the chances that he deserved, and if you see my team, it is difficult to get the combination right," Tamim told reporters on January 29.

Yesterday, Barishal coach Babul also echoed similar sentiments.

"Shanto was in the team and we played him at the beginning. Maybe he hasn't scored runs. There are many cricketers on our side who have not played any matches. We have to see the team first and what combinations to play against which side," Babul told reporters.

Shanto was picked from the draft despite Barishal already having Tamim, a left-handed opener in the side, alongside other regular T20 openers like Dawid Malan and Kyle Mayers.

Shanto had no say on which team pick him from the draft, but the way things have panned out for him in this BPL, the matter has turned into a major concern to the national team's Champions Trophy prospects.

'I will try to create a performance-driven environment'

Experienced coach **Mamun Ur Rashid** has been appointed head coach of the Bangladesh national hockey team for April's AHF Cup in Indonesia. A former national player (1989-2001), he previously coached the U-21 team four times and led the senior side in World Hockey League Round 2 in 2015. The 52-year-old spoke to *The Daily Star's* Anisur Rahman about upcoming challenges and the activities of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF). Excerpts of the conversation are below:

The Daily Star (DS): You have been appointed as the national head coach through an interview, which probably happened for the first time for the local coaches. How do you see the process by the BHF ad-hoc committee?

Mamun Ur Rashid (MR): Past experience saw that the federation had before favoured certain coaches, and no one knew who was going to be the coach of the national team. To be honest, I liked the process, where the federation also has the desire to work with the coach. As coaches, we could never present the details of our plans regarding the team and opponents, but this time it happened during the interview.

DS: How challenging will it be for you on the back of no domestic competitions?

MR: Our senior players are talented, but we never gave them a platform in an organised manner so that they could perform well. I will be trying to bring transparency, with no grouping or misunderstanding among the players,

because I saw before that the coaches took the sides of some players openly, which created discrimination among the players. I want to make a balanced environment so that everyone can play from their hearts. I will try to create a performance-driven environment.

DS: Bangladesh usually become champions in the AHF Cup, but they dwell in sixth or seventh place in the Asia Cup and Asian Games. What are the reasons behind this contrasting standing?

MR: The main reason is that the players are not given the proper preparation or training after the AHF Cup. We feel complacent after becoming AHF Cup champions, but we could think differently -- that we will fight in the Asia Cup for better results instead of focusing solely on the AHF Cup.

I think we should start the preparation camp after the AHF Cup

and send the players overseas to play more matches because the players won't progress or develop through camp-based training alone.

DS: Is there any importance in having domestic competitions to develop the players?

MR: It has been a bad option to try to develop the players solely through training camps. If the premier league and franchise-based league continue, the players will benefit financially and develop a greater interest in hockey.

DS: Experienced player Rasel Mahmud Jimmy was kept out of the Cooper test to be held on February 20. What's your take on that?

MR: I don't want to make any comments on it because I was instructed yesterday [Tuesday] not to speak to the media about the matter.

DS: How do you evaluate the activities

of the ad-hoc committee, who took charge around two and a half months ago?

MR: I don't know much about their internal workings, but their style of work suggests that they are trying to bring professionalism, and I see that as a positive. As a former player, I want them to establish a good domestic structure and deliver a strong constitution for the federation, where there will be clear guidelines to organise domestic competitions regularly.

DS: What type of training facilities are you expecting from the ad-hoc committee?

MR: I want some basic things, like food and a healthy daily allowance, because Tk 400 to Tk 500 allowance is disappointing. The players also usually buy equipment with their own money, and I expect the federation to support them in purchasing those expensive kits. Besides preparation, I will request them to arrange some practice matches before the tournament.

What to WATCH

SONY SPORTS 5
Sri Lanka vs Australia
2nd Test, Day 1
Live from 10:30 am

STAR SPORTS 2
SA20
Qualifier 2
India vs England
Live from 9:30 pm



Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto sitting adjacent to Fortune Barishal head coach Mizanur Rahman Babul, who hinted yesterday that Shanto is unlikely to play a part in the Bangladesh Premier League final at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium on Friday. An out-of-form Shanto played five matches for the defending champions in the initial phase of the tournament before being dropped from the playing eleven.

'Either they stay or I stay'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team head coach Peter Butler has sent out a clear warning yesterday to the 18 protesting women's team players, saying there is no scope for negotiation regarding discipline in the team.

In a conversation with the media at the Bangladesh Football Federation House on Wednesday, Butler, who on Tuesday explained his side to the special committee - formed to resolve the row between the English coach and the players - cautioned that he would not compromise.

"There has been no negotiation. I have made it very clear to the [higher-ups] that there is no [scope of] negotiation. As far as I am concerned, it's about a choice. Either they stay or I stay. Simple as that," he said.

Eighteen players, most of them seniors, have been boycotting the national team training camp since the arrival of Butler on Tuesday last week.

The special committee held discussions with all the protesting players before sitting with the coach and is set to submit its findings to the BFF today.

On Thursday last week, the players threatened to quit if the BFF decided on keeping Butler at the helm. They put forth that the coach allegedly had misbehaved with them, created divisions in the team, and "questioned the players' personal lives - the major reasons behind their dissent. The rift between Butler and the players first surfaced in last year's triumphant SAFF Women's Championship



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Bangladesh women's football team coach Peter Butler on resolving the ongoing conflict with the players.

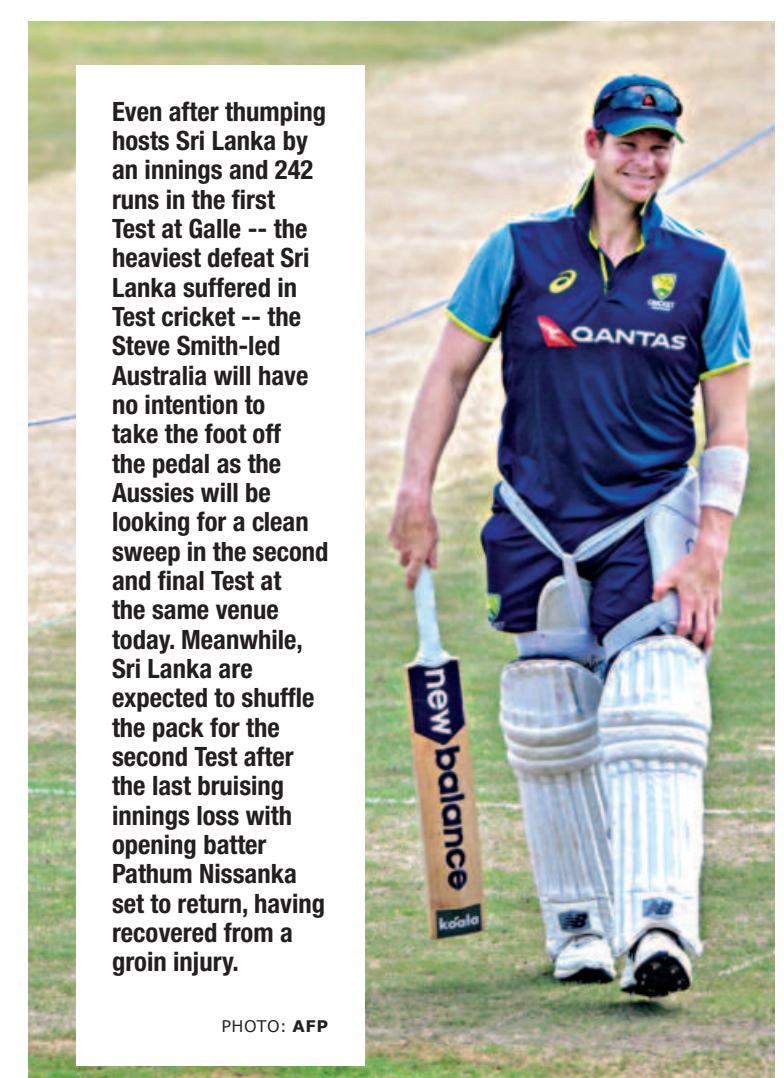
run during which the coach dropped several senior players from the playing eleven in a few matches.

"There are no facts, no truths... They are playing the victim card, which is nonsense. It should be stopped. It has to stop. They have got no facts, they speak complete illicit ill truths, and I will not coach certain individuals while I'm here.

"I haven't given names. I've said there are a certain number of players who have refused to come to training -- they are ringleaders," the 58-year-old coach said.

"And if it's a choice between them being here and me being here, so be it. I'm a big boy. I've got broad shoulders. I'm from the UK. You gotta remember, I'm from the football culture where if they performed and did things which they had been doing here, they would be upstairs, having their bags packed, they'd be frogmarched down the stairs and kicked out into the streets.

"I know this nonsense about we have won this SAFF tournament, but you know, how many girls have played overseas? They have not, because they don't have discipline. And this is a reflection of where we are in the present time," the former West Ham United player remarked.



Even after thumping hosts Sri Lanka by an innings and 242 runs in the first Test at Galle -- the heaviest defeat Sri Lanka suffered in Test cricket -- the Steve Smith-led Australia will have no intention to take the foot off the pedal as the Aussies will be looking for a clean sweep in the second and final Test at the same venue today. Meanwhile, Sri Lanka are expected to shuffle the pack for the second Test after the last bruising innings loss with opening batter Pathum Nissanka set to return, having recovered from a groin injury.

PHOTO: AFP