

Australia send WTC final warning

Australia wrapped up a dominant 2-0 sweep of the Test series against Sri Lanka at Galle on Sunday, romping to a nine-wicket victory before lunch on day four in the second Test. Set a modest target of 75 to win, Australia lost only Travis Head as they stormed to a commanding victory in a ruthless display from the world's top-ranked Test side.

● This is Australia's first series victory in Sri Lanka since 2011, with the Aussies' last success in the country coming under Ricky Ponting's captaincy when they won 1-0.

● The win is a timely boost for Australia, who will be defending their World Test Championship (WTC) title in the final against South Africa on June 11-15 at Lord's. Australia finished on a PCT of 67.54, just behind South Africa (69.44).

● The win in the second Test was Australia's 33rd win in the WTC -- the most by any team. The record was previously held by England who won 32 matches

in 65 games. Australia, on the other hand, won 33 in 53 games.

● Australia stand-in skipper Steve Smith scored his 24th Test hundred in a winning cause, thus becoming the fourth leading batter in the list of most centuries in a winning cause. Only Ponting (30), Joe Root (25) and Steve Waugh (25) are ahead of him.

● Smith also took his 200th catch in the second Test -- the most by any Australian. Smith equalled Jacques Kallis and is only behind Rahul Dravid (210), Joe Root (207), and Mahela Jayawardene (205) on the all-time list for most catches.



'Team game is the most important thing'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national team are gearing up for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy with a pre-tournament training camp being held at the National Cricket Academy in Mirpur under head coach Phil Simmons.

The camp will run for three more days before the team leaves for the UAE, leaving very little time for the players to refocus in the 50-over format after playing T20s for over a month in the BPL.

Former selector Habibul Bashar, however, felt that the transition from T20s to the 50-over ICC event would not be difficult.

"Players now don't take much time to adapt while changing formats," the former national captain told the reporters in Dhaka yesterday while attending the inauguration event of former national team opener Javed Omar's social welfare foundation.

In a big tournament, team game is the most important thing. Rather than thinking of who are the x-factors, we need to focus on playing as a team since that's when we do well. Our bowlers are doing well. Taskin has been wonderful, we saw Rana's pace and Tanvir Tamim has done well with the bat. We have performers but in a big tournament the team game is necessary."

The Tigers are set to depart for Dubai on February 14 (Thursday night) and will face India in their opening match on February 20.

BPL champions' chaotic reception in Barishal

SUSHANTA GHOSH

A little over two years ago, the world witnessed how much the Argentina football team means to the people of that country when their World Cup winning team had to cancel their bus parade through capital Buenos Aires because the entire city was in the streets, busy in raucous revelry, celebrating the historic win.

Yesterday, somewhat similar scenes unfolded in Barishal when around 50 thousand fans congregated to catch a glimpse of their beloved



"We are overwhelmed and apologetic. Overwhelmed seeing your love and enthusiasm -- we have never witnessed such a wave of millions. However, we are sorry that we were not able to spend more time with you."

Fortune Barishal skipper Tamim Iqbal's message to Barishal people on Facebook.

Fortune Barishal but ironically, their unfettered love for the team, who have recently won their second consecutive Bangladesh Premier League (BPL), cut the celebrations short.

The Barishal team arrived in the city in the afternoon, ready to parade both of their BPL trophies. The team bus was greeted by fans standing roadside all through the 17-kilometer stretch from

the airport to the Bell Park, where the celebration took place.

At 4:45 pm, around two hours after the scheduled time, the team entered Bell Park led by captain Tamim Iqbal, flashing victory signs amid thunderous applause while the jubilant crowd chanted "Barishal! Barishal".

Team owner Mizanur Rahman, who was present with his family, was

overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and said, "We dedicate this victory to the martyrs of July. This victory is not just ours; it's the victory of the people of Barishal."

However, the celebrations did not last much longer as by 5:00 pm the players were off the rickety and overcrowded stage, boarded their bus and left the venue. There were also plans of a concert, which fell through, much to the dismay of the packed crowd.

Perhaps the management had underestimated the love this city holds for their champions. But now everyone knows, the city of Barishal maybe one-fourth the size of Buenos Aires and one-eighth in population, but they love their beloved team just as much.

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Hamza, Fahamedul in preliminary squad

SPORTS REPORTER

Sheffield United midfielder Hamza Choudhury has been named alongside Italy-based young midfielder Fahamedul Islam in the 38-member preliminary squad for Bangladesh's first Asian Cup Qualifiers match against India, which will be held in Shillong on March 25.

Head coach Javier Cabrera also picked a few fresh faces, all of whom have impressed in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League while recalling a number of players, who had previously worn the red and green jersey.

While the inclusion of Hamza, who recently moved from English Premier League outfit Leicester City to Championship League side Sheffield United, was expected one, Fahamedul's inclusion was a surprise.

Fahamedul, an 18 year-old who currently plies his trade for Italian Serie D side Olbia Calcio, plays as a left-back and left wing-back. He has previously played for Ligiorna and Livorno after having been in the ranks of the Sampdoria youth team.

Speaking about the youngster, Cabrera said: "He's (Fahamedul) still young but has already been playing at a senior level in Europe. So we believe he might provide a good boost to the team."



BANGLADESH SQUAD (PRELIMINARY)

GK: Mitul Marma, Sujon Hossain, Anisur Rahman, Mehedi Hasan Sharbon, Shakib Al Hasan

DF: Murad Hasan, Mehedi Hassan, Shakil Ahad Topu, Rahmat Mia, Sakil Hossain, Isa Faysal, Taj Uddin, Tariq Kazi, Topu Barman, Saad Uddin, Sushanto Tripura, Yeasin Khan, Jahid Hasan Shanto

MF: Md Ridoy, Papon Singh, Syed Shah Quazem, Md Sohel Rana, Sohel Rana, Chandan Roy, Mojibur Rahman Jony, Shekh Mursalin, Jamal Bhuyan, Hamza Chowdhury, Fahamedul Islam

FW: Faysal Ahmed Fahim, Rakib Hossain, Rabby Hossen Rahul, Rafiqul Islam, Emon Shahrir, Mohammad Ibrahim, Arif Hossain, Al Amin, Piash Ahmed Nova

It is understood that the BFF has been trying to woo foreign based players to the national team for quite some time, a move which gathered pace after Hamza's switch of allegiance from England to Bangladesh in December last year.

"Hamza is now playing for Sheffield United and he has played both of their last games, (and was) in the (starting) line-up. Of course, (I am) expecting a great impact from him," Cabrera said.

Among the others who have been called to the squad for the first time are goalkeeper Shakib Al Hasan, defender Zahid Hossain, forward Arif Hossain – all three from Mohammmedan, alongside and Police FC forward Al Amin, who is currently the top scorer among the locals in the BPL with seven goals.

Anisur Rahman, Tariq Kazi, Shushanto Tripura, Yeasin Khan, Mohammad Sohel Rana and Mohammad Ibrahim have earned recalls for their performances.

Cabrera said he would trim the squad to 28 players before the team's departure for a two week training camp in likely on February 28. The team will then be joined by the two foreign based players and train here four a few more days before leaving for India five or six days prior to the match.

BFF to 'move on' from rebellious 18?

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has apparently decided to move on from the rebellious 18 senior players, focusing on the younger ones for the upcoming UAE tour and central contracts.

BFF president Tabith Awal met with each of the 18 players on Thursday night following his return from the UK and tried to convince them to join training from Saturday. However, the players still demanded removal of head coach Peter Butler, refusing to join the camp till Sunday.

With hope for a resolution fading, BFF is focusing on the 37 current players who are currently in training under Butler and preparing new contracts with a number of them, keeping the 18 out of it.

A total of 30 women footballers were under BFF's central contract, which ran out last October. Out of those 30, only 12 are currently in BFF's training camp while 25 others -- mostly from age-group teams -- are out of contracts.

"The contracts will be finalised within Tuesday. I can't say the exact number of contracts to be offered, but the contracts will be for among those who are currently in training," BFF's vice-president Fahad Karim told The Daily Star, adding the president had asked the board to 'move on' as 'football can't be stopped'.

Another BFF vice president Sabir Ahmed Arif, however, said later in the evening yesterday that the 18 seniors and the coach will "understand their mistakes and reach an agreement", keeping a door open for negotiation. Bangladesh are scheduled to travel to UAE on February 24 to play two international friendly matches on February 26 and March 2. In all likelihood, the 23-member squad will be made out of the current 37 players.



Atletico Madrid players converge to celebrate after Julian Alvarez converted from the spot with a Panenka in the 35th minute as Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham and Federico Valverde express their discontent over a controversial penalty call during the Madrid derby at Santiago Bernabeu on Saturday. Referee Cesar Soto Grado found Aurelien Tchouameni guilty of stepping on Samuel Lino's foot in the box after a VAR review, however, Real players and coach Carlo Ancelotti were convinced the referee had got it wrong. Later, Kylian Mbappe brought Los Blancos back into the game with a second-half strike. The 1-1 draw might have a big role in the title race as Real remained top of LaLiga on 50 points, one ahead of Atletico in second while Barcelona, third on 45 points, visit Sevilla on Sunday with a chance to close the gap to just two with the leaders.

PHOTO: REUTERS