

## England not taking depleted Australia lightly

AGENCIES

England expect Australia to pose a tough challenge when they meet in a Champions Trophy Group B clash in Lahore on Saturday, despite missing their pace trio.

Australia's campaign in the eight-nation Champions Trophy was hit hard after their regular skipper Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood were ruled out due to ankle and hip injuries.

To add to their woes, spearhead Mitchell Starc withdrew from the event due to personal reasons while Mitchell Marsh, suffering a back injury, and Marcus Stoinis shockingly retired from ODIs.

Experienced batter Steve Smith will take over as captain with an inexperienced pace attack, but Buttler did not underestimate the traditional rivals.

"They have been a real pillar of success for Australia for a long period of time, so naturally there'll be a miss for their team," England skipper Jos Buttler told a news conference on Friday.

"But they've got some top players to step into those shoes as well and Australia always over time have performed very well

- Australia hold the upper hand in head-to-head records against England in ODIs, winning **91** matches compared to England's **65** in **161** meetings.
- In the Champions Trophy, however, it is England who hold a narrow advantage, boasting three wins against Australia's two.
- Australia are the only side to have won the tournament twice in a row (in 2006 and 2009).
- England are the only ODI World Cup-winning nation to have never won the ICC Champions Trophy.
- Australia batter Glenn Maxwell is **49** runs away from reaching **4,000** ODI runs.



Sean Abbott, Spencer Johnson, Nathan Ellis, and Ben Dwarshuis, while spinner Tanveer Sangha supplements Adam Zampa in spin bowling.

"England and Australia, there's always a great rivalry and a competitive match. And obviously, in the Champions Trophy format, each game is really a massive game," Buttler told reporters.

"So, we look forward to it." Even Australia's Adam Zampa realised that there are big gaps to be filled, hoping that new heroes would emerge for the two-time champions of the tournament.

Zampa could not recall the last time the world champions went to a major ICC tournament without at least one of the three quicks steaming in, and suggested it was quite an adjustment.

"Most ICC events that we've played over the last -- almost decade -- it's been a very similar bowling attack," said the 32-year-old legspinner.

"So to not have those guys here, it's obviously a big loss, and we know that. "But it's obviously a great opportunity, too.

"If we're playing our roles and contributing, I think that'll be important throughout.

"And then hopefully a match-winner somewhere along the way pulls it off for us."

Despite the absence of the big names in the Australian side, Zampa greeted with relish the fact that they are about to open their Champions Trophy campaign against former ODI world champions and Ashes rivals England.

"Nice to get them first up. It's always nice to beat England, one of those teams that you definitely get up a little bit more for," Zampa said.

## Tigers hopeful Riyad will recover before Pakistan phase

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Dubai

A Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) official on Friday said that the team is hopeful of getting Mahmudullah Riyad's services in Bangladesh's remaining two Group A matches of the ongoing ICC Champions Trophy after the batter missed the opening match against India due to a calf muscle injury.

Mahmudullah, who has scored four successive fifties in his last four ODI innings, sustained the injury during Bangladesh's first training session on February 15 in Dubai. The injury forced Mahmudullah to be sidelined in their lone warm-up contest against Pakistan Shaheens on February 17.

On Thursday, the 39-year-old was seen doing some light running with spin-bowling coach Mushtaq Ahmed just before Bangladesh's match against India and according to the BCB's team manager Rabeed Imam, it was the first time the all-rounder took part in drills since getting injured.

"He is doing his rehab now. Usually, it takes a week to recover from this injury. We are hopeful of getting him back in the side for the next two games," said Rabeed, adding that Mahmudullah had undergone a scan where no tear was found.

During a media interaction after Bangladesh's six-wicket defeat to India on Thursday, batter Jaker Ali was also asked about Mahmudullah, and he said, "Mahmudullah bhai is under observation. So far, it looks like it's going well. But the physio can tell better and give a clear verdict," Jaker said.

According to medical experts, a Grade I calf muscle injury takes one or two days to heal while Grade II needs seven to 10 days and Grade III needs three to four weeks at least. Bangladesh's next two matches are on February 24 and 27 against New Zealand and Pakistan respectively in Rawalpindi. It is to be seen whether the veteran all-rounder, who is most likely playing his last ICC tournament, can recover in time for those matches.

## 'We can still make a comeback'

After the six-wicket defeat against India in their opening Group A match in Dubai on Thursday, Bangladesh have their backs to the wall before their next two games against New Zealand and Pakistan on February 24 and 27 respectively in Rawalpindi. Jaker Ali, who made a hard fought 68 off 114 balls and was involved in a record 154-run stand with Towhid Hridoy, talked to a few journalists, including The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan, immediately after the India game where he remained optimistic about his team's chances of reaching the knockout phase. Here are the excerpts:

**Question (Q):** Bangladesh came back into the match courtesy of the partnership between you and Hridoy. Still, you ended up on the losing side, how disappointing is it for you?

**Jaker Ali (JA):** Of course, it's disappointing. Initially it was a very tough situation for us. We lost half of our side before adjusting to the conditions. Then we tried to get to a respectable score. The middle part was really good but we couldn't finish well. We were close to having a decent finish.

**Q:** After being reduced to 35-5, what was the discussion between you and Hridoy?

**JA:** We were just focusing on batting deep into the innings. Because in that kind of a situation, you don't want to try too many things. So, we were focusing on one ball at a time and just tried to take the game deep.

**Q:** You got out right when you were trying to accelerate and then Hridoy also started cramping up. How big a setback was that for the side?

**JA:** My plan was correct, I feel. I intended to accelerate the innings but I got dismissed.

**Q:** You guys will play your next two matches in Rawalpindi. What will be your expectation from the top-order?

**JA:** Of course, we hope that they would be able to score runs. The job becomes easier when you get runs from the top-order. I hope we will get good wickets there and we will also do well.

**Q:** You have experience of playing in Pakistan for Bangladesh A and also



struck a 172 in a four-day game over there. What do you hope to achieve in Pakistan this time?

**JA:** Actually, we have to play according to the situation. There is no way to know about the wicket beforehand. But I expect that the wicket will be good.

**Q:** Do you think Bangladesh still has a chance to reach the knockout phase?

**JA:** Of course. We still have the opportunity to make a comeback. The way the team bounced back from such a difficult situation [against India], we can take a lot of positives out of it. If we can execute everything properly in our next matches, we still have a chance.

**Q:** Can you tell us a little bit about

the first ball you faced, which was the hat-trick ball from Axar Patel. Were you feeling the pressure of the situation?

**JA:** It was quite difficult for me, facing the first ball as a hat-trick ball. The first ball was a blur, it all happened in a second. Then I changed my batting approach a bit. After playing the first ball, I got an idea of the wicket. After that, I became very focused and tried to play ball by ball.

**Q:** After you edged the ball, did you feel you would have to head back to the dressing room right then? **JA:** When I looked back, the catch was already dropped. Then I didn't think about that and just remained focused on playing the next ball.

## Kabaddi series against Nepal begins today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Kabaddi Federation is all set to host a five-match Test series after 51 years when hosts Bangladesh take on visitors Nepal in the first match at the Paltan Ground today.

The match will kick off at 3:30pm while the remaining four matches will take place at the same venue on February 23, 25, 26 and 28.

Under the guidance of former player Badsha Mia, Bangladesh have been training since January 10 while Nepalese players have come here to play the series following their involvement in recently-concluded Nepal Professional Kabaddi League.

"We are hopeful about producing good results against Nepal like in the past. We have had a good preparation," the Bangladesh coach said, adding that it is an opportunity for the players to get international exposure, which they hardly get except for matches in the South Asian Games and the Asian Games.

Nepal manager Khem Rai Chaulagan said, "We are not here with any goals or for winning any medals. We have just thought about the perspective of what our players learned from the pro league and how they implement those in the series."

BKF general secretary SM Newaz Shohag informed that Bangladesh had previously staged such a Test series against India in 1974.

## Mohammedan return to winning ways

SPORTS REPORTER

Title contenders Mohammedan returned to winning ways in the Bangladesh Premier League with a 3-1 win against Dhaka Wanderers Club at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium in Cumilla yesterday.

After suffering a 1-0 defeat to Fakirerpool Young Men's Club in their last match of the first phase nearly a month ago, the emphatic win over the minnows comes as a relief for the Black and Whites before their next match against Bashundhara Kings, which will come on April 12 as the league will be suspended for nearly seven weeks owing to the national team's engagement in Asian Cup Qualifiers.

The ninth victory in 10 matches steered Mohammedan to 27 points, seven ahead of Abahani and 10 clear of Bashundhara Kings, both of whom have matches today.

Uzbek midfielder Muzaffar Muzaffarov broke the deadlock in the 38th minute before Rahim Uddin doubled the lead in 81st minute while Souleymane Diabate sealed the victory a minute before the final whistle against an opponent Mohammedan had beaten 6-0 in the league's first meeting.

At the Rofique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh, Bangladesh Police took revenge against visitors Brothers Union with a 1-0 win, with Brazilian recruit Danilo Augusto scoring the all-important goal in the fourth minute. Brothers had beaten Police 2-1 in their first meeting.

At the Bashundhara Kings Arena, hosts Fortis FC also exacted revenge for their 3-1 first-leg defeat with an identical margin of victory against Rahmatganj, who have now lost four matches on the trot after some stunning results earlier in the league.

Valeriy Hryshyn gave a 38th-minute lead to Fortis before Pa Omar struck a brace in the second half to ensure the victory against the Old Dhaka outfit, who saw Samuel Boateng reimbursed a goal in the second half.

## Madrid derby in Champions League last 16

The Champions League last-16 draw on Friday threw up some mouth-watering ties with holders Real Madrid playing local rivals Atletico Madrid while Premier League leaders Liverpool were drawn against an in-form PSG. Bayern Munich were pitted against Bundesliga title challengers Bayer Leverkusen.



### FIRST AND SECOND LEG DATES

Last 16: March 4-5 and March 11-12  
Quarterfinals: April 8-9 and April 15-16  
Semifinals: April 29-30 and May 6-7  
Final: May 31

### QUARTERFINALS

- QF1: PSG/Liverpool v Brugge/Villa
- QF2: PSV/Arsenal v Real/Atletico
- QF3: Benfica/Barcelona v Dortmund/Lille
- QF4: Bayern/Leverkusen v Feyenoord/Inter

### SEMIFINALS

- Semifinal 1: QF2 winners v QF1 winners
- Semifinal 2: QF3 winners v QF4 winners

\*Team mentioned second play return leg at home