

Spin to win for Tigers?

EKUSH TAPADER from Chattogram

Bangladesh team's senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin was seen in deep discussion with Anamul Haque Bijoy and Shadman Islam beside the nets at the Bir Shreshtho Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Chattogram yesterday. Shortly after, the duo began batting side-by-side in adjacent nets, indicating a likely change at the top of the order for the second Test against Zimbabwe, which starts today.

Mahmudul Hasan Joy, who featured in the Sylhet Test which Bangladesh lost by three wickets, was notably absent -- a strong signal that Bijoy is set to replace him following his poor run.

Bangladesh, desperate for a series-saving win, are likely to make changes not just in batting, but also in the bowling department. With Nahid Rana leaving to play in the PSL, left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam has been called up, though he is unlikely to make the playing XI. Off spinner Nayeem Hasan, however, appears to be in contention. The Chattogram local was actively involved in both bowling and batting drills and boasts a solid record at this venue. With Zimbabwe expected to field at least four

“In Test cricket, you need five bowlers. Especially here, where we’ve played before, five bowlers are essential.”

Bangladesh coach Phil Simmons

left-handers, the team is considering pairing him with Mehidy Hasan Miraz.

Despite Taijul Islam's underwhelming performance in Sylhet, he might retain the team's backing as their most experienced spinner. However, the strategy this time will differ. Unlike previous home Tests where Bangladesh occasionally played only four bowlers to strengthen their batting, head coach Phil Simmons confirmed that the team will field five specialist bowlers:

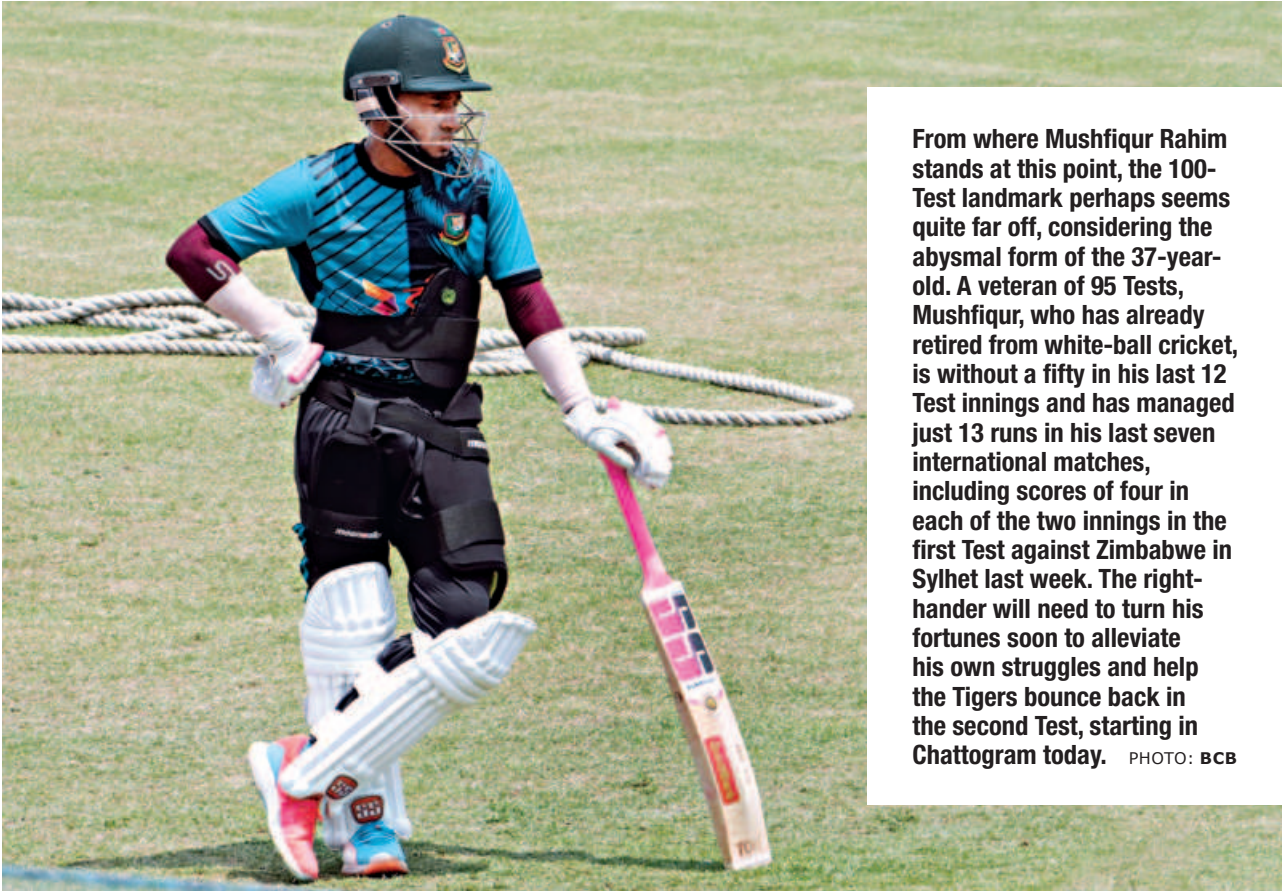
“No, not at the moment (regarding an extra batter). In Test cricket, you need five bowlers. Especially here, where we’ve played before, five bowlers are essential.”

While the final composition is yet to be announced, Simmons said the team is weighing two possible combinations -- either three seamers and two spinners, or two seamers and three spinners. Team sources suggest the latter is more likely, especially with Chattogram's surface expected to favour spin as the match progresses.

If the team opts for two pacers, Hasan Mahmud is almost a certainty. He may be joined by Tanzim Hasan Sakib, who is in line for a Test debut. Though Khaled Ahmed performed reasonably well in Sylhet, Tanzim is being considered for his extra pace and added batting depth.

“I think he (Tanzim) can shine in any format,” Simmons said. “His bowling is deceptive, and he hits good areas consistently. He also adds some batting depth, which is a bonus.”

The Chattogram wicket is expected to differ from Sylhet's. Bangladesh's coaching staff anticipate a harder surface conducive to high scores in the early days, while Zimbabwe captain Craig Ervine expects a slower track favouring spinners. Despite differing views, both teams agree that Chattogram will not offer the extra bounce seen in Sylhet. If cracks develop as expected later in the match, spinners like Miraz and Taijul could be key to Bangladesh's success.



From where Mushfiqur Rahim stands at this point, the 100-Test landmark perhaps seems quite far off, considering the abysmal form of the 37-year-old. A veteran of 95 Tests, Mushfiqur, who has already retired from white-ball cricket, is without a fifty in his last 12 Test innings and has managed just 13 runs in his last seven international matches, including scores of four in each of the two innings in the first Test against Zimbabwe in Sylhet last week. The right-hander will need to turn his fortunes soon to alleviate his own struggles and help the Tigers bounce back in the second Test, starting in Chattogram today. PHOTO: BCB

A rivalry spiced up the Bangladesh way

ASHEFAQ-UL-ALAM

The second and final Test between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe will begin today at the Bir Shreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium in Chattogram. However, unlike the first game, there will be some stakes involved, and the credit for that goes to the Tigers, whose penchant for making things interesting in the most puzzling way once again came through.

Only by losing the first Test in Sylhet could Bangladesh have fans, and everyone else, turn their focus towards themselves for a series that nearly experienced a media blackout, forcing the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to get state-run BTV as the broadcast partner.

There are a few theories behind this lack of interest from broadcasters and fans, ranging from the current volatile state of the advertisement market to a lack of star power in the current Bangladesh team.

But arguably the chief reason behind it was the absence of any notable stakes. Simply put, fans had no reason to care about the series.

This series is not part of the ICC World Test Championship cycle, meaning the outcomes from here have no greater implications. The Zimbabwe-Bangladesh cricket rivalry has also tapered off, so generating fan interest using that angle is also out of question.

What could have really squashed any and all interest surrounding the series was if Bangladesh completely



demolished Zimbabwe in the first Test, which would have given wind to the notion that the BCB arranged the series only to help the team rack up easy wins and it would have also made the second Test feel like a mere formality.

Instead, the hosts got outplayed by Zimbabwe and are at risk of suffering their first home Test series defeat to Zimbabwe in over 23 years, spicing up the series that should have been a dull affair in the process.

The last time the Tigers lost a Test series at home to Zimbabwe was in 2001, when they suffered a 1-0 defeat in the two-match series. It also remains their only Test series defeat to

Zimbabwe as hosts.

The narrow margin of the defeat in the Sylhet Test gives an impression that it was an evenly-matched contest, but that is far from the truth. Barring the stutter in the last hour or so of the match, Zimbabwe controlled the game and came out as the deserved winner.

The fact that a full-strength Bangladesh could not beat a team that had not won a Test in almost four years is alarming. What is even more alarming is that they have now lost their last six Tests at home.

Ironically, their form away from home has been encouraging, as they have defeated New Zealand and the West Indies once and Pakistan twice in away Tests in the last 18 months.

But while the away Test wins make it seem like Bangladesh have taken a step forward in the five-day format, their six-match losing streak at home, which last happened to them from December 2008 to March 2010, indicates they have gone two steps back.

If their home woes continue for one more game, it will become their second-longest losing streak at home behind the 13 straight defeats on home soil right up until their maiden Test win in 2005, which ironically had come against Zimbabwe and that too in Chattogram.

With BTV telecasting the matches, this series had a retro vibe to it from the start. And after the defeat in the first Test, Bangladesh are set to face Zimbabwe in a high-stakes match, after rekindling a rivalry only how they could.

Taskin leaves for England to consult ankle specialist

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed left for England yesterday to consult an ankle specialist regarding the Achilles injury that ruled him out of the ongoing Test series against Zimbabwe.

“The injury first started in West Indies. I carried on playing with it. At the latter end of the BPL [Bangladesh Premier League], the soreness increased a lot more and I had to rest for a few matches.

“During the Premier League [Dhaka Premier League], the pain increased a lot more and it became difficult to put effort. That’s when I informed the board and they wanted me to rest and undergo rehab since there are important assignments ahead. That’s why I have been undergoing rehab without playing this [Zimbabwe] series,” Taskin told The Daily Star before his departure yesterday.

Taskin is scheduled to consult Doctor James Calder, a renowned specialist in treating Achilles Tendinopathy, on April 29. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chief physician Debashish Chowdhury is expected to join the right-arm quick in England ahead of the consultation.



“Right now, we are consulting someone very high-profile. Many footballers from the English Premier League and other athletes also consult with him,” Taskin said.

Prior to his departure, Taskin bowled a session with very short run-ups at the Academy Ground in Mirpur on Saturday. He felt positive about his condition, suggesting that surgery might not be necessary, although a consultation would determine the next course of action.

“I felt comfortable [bowling on Saturday]. With some rest, at times, there seems to be no problem at all.

“Surgery might be required if there is something major but as far as our understanding, it is not major but after the consultation, we will get a better idea.”

RULES BEND, REPUTATIONS BREAK

How Bangladesh cricket shot itself in the foot over Towhid Hridoy's ban.



SCAN QR CODE TO READ FULL STORY



Djokovic's early exit marks new reality

AGENCIES

Novak Djokovic's storied journey at the Madrid Open may have come to a quiet, emotional end. The 24-time Grand Slam champion crashed out in the second round on Saturday, falling 6-3, 6-4 to Italy's Matteo Arnaldi.

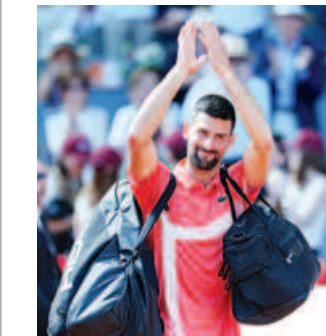
It marked another early exit for the Serbian legend, whose form in 2024 continues to trend worryingly downward.

In a candid post-match press conference, Djokovic admitted that this could very well be his final appearance in Madrid. “It could be. I’m not sure if I will come back,” he said, suggesting a future visit might be as a guest, not a player.

The loss was Djokovic's second consecutive opening-round defeat, after a similar early exit in Monte Carlo two weeks prior, and his third straight straight-sets loss following a Miami Open final setback.

For a player who once dominated the sport with unrivalled consistency, this “new reality” of modest expectations and early goodbyes is a stark shift.

Arnaldi, ranked 44th in the world, showcased fearless all-court tennis and capitalised on Djokovic's struggles. The 24-year-old Italian, who



called Djokovic his “idol,” scribbled “OMG” on the camera lens after his milestone win, a symbol of the new generation's rise as legends like Djokovic begin to fade from the spotlight.

Djokovic's match was littered with unforced errors—32 in total—reflecting the sharp decline from the clinical precision that once defined his game.

Despite his vast experience and illustrious past, the 37-year-old now faces a mental battle against the reality of time.

“It’s kind of a challenge for me mentally,” Djokovic confessed. “Trying to win a match or two, not really thinking about getting far in the tournament. But that’s the circle of life and the career, eventually it was going to happen.”

From winning three out of four majors in 2023 to struggling for a single clay-court victory in 2024, Djokovic's current form signals a dramatic turning point. And while he still

owns countless ATP records—from most Masters 1000 wins (414) to most titles (40)—the future looks increasingly uncertain.

Whether or not he returns to Madrid again, one thing is clear: Djokovic is coming to terms with a new phase of his career—one that even the greatest must eventually face.



Barcelona players celebrate with the trophy after a Jules Kounde goal in the dying minutes of extra time handed the Catalans a dramatic 3-2 win over fierce rivals Real Madrid in an enthralling Copa del Rey final in a raucous atmosphere at Seville's La Cartuja stadium on Saturday. It was one of the most heated Clasicos in recent times, that came hot on the heels of Real Madrid complaining about referees and saw Antonio Rudiger receiving a red card for throwing an object at the referee from the bench after the defender was substituted.

PHOTO: BARCELONA