

LITTON'S LITMUS TEST on form and new role

ABDULLAH AL MEHIDI

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced a 16-member squad for the upcoming ODI series against Sri Lanka, beginning on July 2. While the inclusion of Mohammad Naim Sheikh in place of Soumya Sarkar drew initial attention, it is Litton Das who finds himself under the spotlight for a different reason.

The upcoming 50-over contests could mark a turning point for Litton, who appears set for a new role in the team.

Although Litton had showed a glimpse of his old self in the recently concluded Galle Test, striking a fluent 90, his struggles across formats have been well-documented. The right-hander endured a dismal ODI World Cup in India and, in the eight matches following it up to the West Indies series last December, managed only 35 runs. He was then dropped from the ICC Champions Trophy squad.

Called back into the squad, the 30-year-old returns with greater responsibilities to bear.

"Litton wasn't included in the last series [Champions Trophy]. He was in a bad patch. Time is the best healer. He is now the T20 captain so we can think that he is there until the T20 World Cup in the team. We, the selectors, feel that one-day cricket is a good place

BANGLADESH ODI SQUAD

Mehidy Hasan Miraz (captain), Tanzid Hasan, Parvez Hossain Emon, Naim Sheikh, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Towhid Hridoy, Litton Das, Jaker Ali Anik, Shamim Hossain, Rishad Hossain, Tanvir Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Taskin Ahmed, Nahid Rana and Hasan Mahmud.

to get back someone's form," chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu said at yesterday's press conference.

But Litton's challenges are manifold, goes beyond form. With Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad retiring – the former from ODIs and the latter from international cricket – Litton is expected to shoulder more responsibility.

The squad includes three designated openers in Tanzid Hasan, Parvez Hossain Emon and Naim. However, the chief selector did not name Litton among the openers, suggesting a shift down the order.

While the final batting order remains at the discretion of the captain and coaching staff, all signs point to Litton stepping into Mushfiqur's shoes – both as wicketkeeper and in the middle order.

"We were thinking differently since Mushfiqur and Mahmudullah have retired. So, experience is missing. Our thinking is that he will bat where experience is missing in the middle order. I see him at number five or six," Lipu told The Daily Star yesterday, clarifying Litton's role.

Litton was dropped earlier for struggling against the new ball as an opener, despite scoring all five of his centuries in that role across 68 of his 94 ODIs (average 32.76).

His returns dip at other positions – averaging 17 at No. 3, just over 20 at No. 4 – with a notable unbeaten 94 at No. 5 against the West Indies in the 2019 World Cup.

Now, returning in a lean patch and tasked with a potentially unfamiliar role combining wicketkeeping duties and middle-order responsibility, Litton's ability to embrace the challenge may define the next phase of his white-ball career.



Injury scare for SHANTO

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh suffered an injury scare ahead of the series-deciding second Test against Sri Lanka as skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto sustained a finger injury while attending a slip-catching session in Colombo yesterday.

Shanto, who had earlier sustained a separate finger injury before Galle Test in which he eventually scored twin centuries, didn't attend any fielding or batting drills following the latest injury.

The Bangladesh skipper is likely to remain under observation for 24 hours ahead of the second Test, which starts at the Sinhalese Sports Club on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, all-rounder Mehidy Hasan Miraz returned to practice after recovering from fever which had ruled him out of the drawn Galle Test.

Shanto, who addressed the media before Bangladesh's first practice session in Colombo yesterday, expected Miraz to perform with both bat and ball, just the way he did against Zimbabwe and Pakistan over the last one year.

"Miraz is a very important player for our team. The way he contributes with both bat and ball; he had impactful performances with both in each match. I think the balance of the team will be better following his return to the side. I hope he can contribute well in this match," Shanto told reporters.



Sri Lanka recall Wellalage, Vishwa for Colombo Test

AGENCIES

Sri Lanka have added left-arm spinner Dunieth Wellalage and pacer Vishwa Fernando to their squad for the second Test against Bangladesh, starting Wednesday in Colombo.

Wellalage, 21, returns to the Test fold after making his debut in 2022 against Pakistan, where he scored 29 runs but went wicketless. He replaces veteran Angelo Mathews, who announced his retirement from the longest format following the drawn Galle Test.

Vishwa Fernando, a seasoned campaigner with 79 wickets in 27 Tests, steps in for Milan Rathnayake. Rathnayake impressed in Galle with four wickets and a valuable 39-run knock but was ruled out due to a left-side strain sustained during the match.

The changes mark a blend of youth and experience as Sri Lanka aim to clinch the series in Colombo. With the spin-friendly SSC surface on offer, Wellalage's inclusion could prove crucial, while Fernando's return bolsters the pace attack in Mathews' absence.

SCC's track record demands bold approach

EKUSH TAPADER

As the Sinhalese Sports Club (SCC) Cricket Ground in Colombo is known for producing results, the big question is: can Najmul Hossain Shanto's Bangladesh rewrite history after a creditable draw in Galle?

While the visitors were largely content with their body language after the first Test, criticism arose over their cautious approach – particularly the timing of their declaration and the captain's own batting

Of the 45 Tests held there, 31 have produced results. Drawn matches have become rare in recent years -- the last one occurred due to rain in 2014, and excluding such interruptions, no Test has ended in a draw since 2010.

mindset. Nevertheless, the draw in Galle has given them a confidence boost heading into the second and final Test, starting tomorrow.

Unlike Galle's batter-friendly surface, SCC has a reputation for decisive outcomes. Of the 45 Tests held there, 31 have produced results. Drawn matches have become rare in recent years -- the last one occurred



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Bangladesh have played three Tests there, losing all of them by hefty margins. Their last appearance was 18 years ago. Yet, the ground holds a cherished memory: in 2001, Mohammad Ashraf scored a stunning century on debut to become the youngest Test centurion. Despite Bangladesh losing by an innings, Ashraf was named Player of the Match – an exceptional feat for a player from the losing side.

This time, Shanto's team will hope for a reversal of fortunes. The pitch historically assists spinners slightly more, with spinners taking 51.92 percent of the wickets and pacers 48.08. Sri Lankan spin legend

Muthiah Muralitharan tops the wicket tally at this venue with 166.

However, seamers have also made an impact over the years.

Recent matches reinforce the spin factor – Prabath Jayasuriya claimed eight wickets in Sri Lanka's 10-wicket win over Afghanistan last year, while Pakistan's spin duo Abrar Ahmed and Nauman Ali dismantled the hosts in 2022.

Both teams have spin options capable of thriving in supportive conditions. For Bangladesh, the return of Mehidy Hasan Miraz from illness is a timely boost, strengthening their spin department.

Early in the match, batting is generally easier. A commanding first-innings total could prove crucial. Bangladesh will look to capitalise early, as Sri Lanka, playing at home, are expected to play aggressive cricket in search of full World Test Championship points.

Bangladesh last played a Test in Colombo in 2017 – at the P Sara Oval – celebrating their 100th Test with a historic win over Sri Lanka. Now, at a different Colombo venue, they aim to showcase a winning mentality and script a first-ever Test series victory against the Island nation.



India batters Rishabh Pant and KL Rahul celebrate their centuries in style on the fourth day of their first Test against England at Headingley in Leeds yesterday. Pant, with his blazing 118, became the second wicketkeeper-batter in history to hit two tons in the same match against England.

PHOTO: REUTERS



PHOTO: REUTERS

COURTOIS WALL KEEPS REAL MADRID ALIVE

Thibaut Courtois produced a Club World Cup record 10 saves to anchor 10-man Real Madrid's gritty 3-1 win over Pachuca in steamy Charlotte on Sunday. Jude Bellingham and Arda Guler scored before the break, Federico Valverde volleyed in a third, and only a deflected Elias Montiel strike beat Courtois. The win marked Xabi Alonso's first as Madrid boss and revived their campaign.

City's 'Little Devil' makes a statement

AGENCIES

Claudio Echeverri's dedication on the training ground paid off in spectacular fashion as the 19-year-old Argentine scored his first goal for Manchester City in style – a stunning free-kick – during their 6-0 rout of Al Ain in the Club World Cup on Sunday.

Nicknamed the 'Little Devil', Echeverri made his first start for City and wasted no time in making it memorable. With City already 1-0 up, the attacking midfielder stepped up confidently over a free-kick on the edge of the area and curled a sublime shot over the wall and into the top corner.

Echeverri, who joined City from River Plate in January, is already drawing comparisons to Argentine legends Lionel Messi and Diego Maradona due to his low centre of gravity, close control, and creative flair – attributes that have marked him as one of Argentina's brightest young prospects.

City boss Pep Guardiola was full of praise for the teenager's work ethic, revealing that Echeverri has been relentlessly honing his free-kick skills behind the scenes.

"Since he arrived, for the last three or four months, he's been staying after training to practise free-kicks – alone, with the 'keeper, with the wall," Guardiola said. "Work pays off. At the end, he had the courage and quality. It's like golf or basketball – the more you practise, the better your chances."

Echeverri made his City debut in the FA Cup final defeat to Crystal Palace in May but looked far more assured this time before being subbed at half-time due to a minor ankle issue.

"It was a fantastic goal. He's incredible in tight spaces," Guardiola added. "It's a shame he couldn't continue, but he showed how good he is."

Late strikes from Oscar Bobb and Rayan Cherki added gloss to the scoreline, bringing City level on points with Juventus at the top of Group G. However, Guardiola's men trail the Italians on goals scored, meaning they must beat Juve on Thursday in Orlando to avoid a likely clash with Real Madrid in the next round.

Still, Guardiola remained unfazed: "Sooner or later, we'll face top teams. We're in the next phase – that's what matters

