

'Beauty' of pitch puzzle awaits series decider

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

"How was that?" Bangladesh skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz, having just lofted a delivery over mid-wicket, asked this reporter while batting at the nets yesterday. "You didn't quite time it," came the reply. Miraz did not seem convinced, but timing could again be an obvious issue for the batters heading into the series-deciding third ODI against New Zealand in Chattogram today.

Both surfaces used in Mirpur offered enough to make batters think twice, and even though Chattogram is traditionally a better batting venue, there remains uncertainty over how this pitch will behave, especially under intense heat that may demand constant in-game adjustments.

"I mean, it looks good... but I don't want to read into the wicket too much," Bangladesh pace bowling coach Shaun Tait stated.

"One thing I have noticed in Bangladesh is that it is difficult to read wickets here in general. In Mirpur, as we saw, the first game was a little bit different to the second game. And maybe that's the beauty of playing cricket in Bangladesh," added the former Australia pacer.

Tait's tentativeness was matched by New Zealand paceman Will O'Rourke. While he initially sensed pace and bounce, possibly due to the greenish centre strips, he stressed the need to reassess on the go, irrespective of "whether we bat or bowl first", further underlining the uncertainty factor.

Bangladesh, too, are looking to keep all ends covered. Heat and humidity could open cracks faster, and the foretelling of a greenish wicket may not translate into pace and bounce.

Leg spinner Rishad Hossain was seen working on his follow-through to generate more turn, while speedster Nahid Rana, fresh from a five-wicket haul which helped tie the series, was having a dead-on serious discussion with himself as he pointed to the surface and tried to gauge how batters would fend off his length deliveries.

The onus will remain on the batters after a sub-par show in the series opener, where Saif Hassan and several others fell into the trap of variable bounce. Litton Das, meanwhile, appeared in full flow during nets, eyeing a response.

Tait said the batting group is expected "to be good all the time" and doubted whether "that's realistic".

"What you obviously want to see is a little bit more consistency," he said. But regardless of the presence of consistent bounce, batters will have their work cut out in adapting to whatever the surface throws at them.

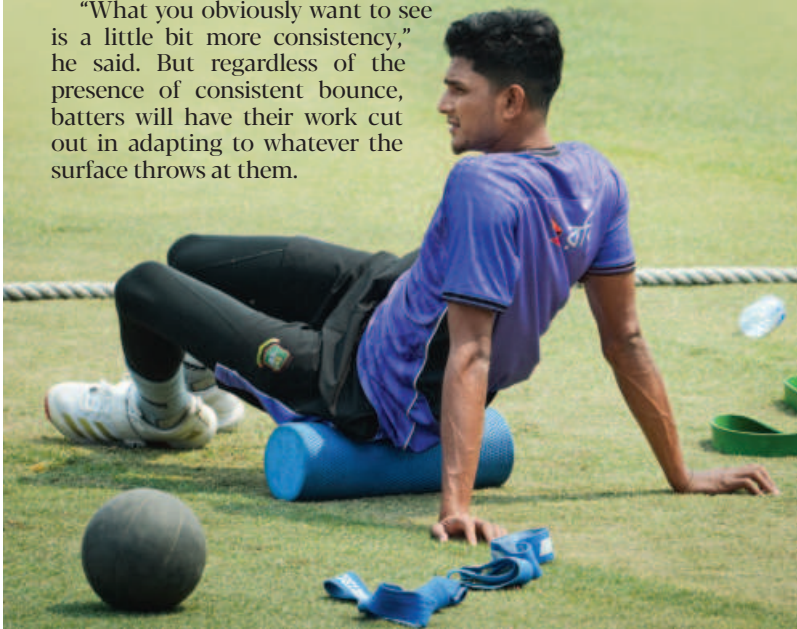


PHOTO: BCB

Bangladesh's young pace sensation Nahid Rana will aim to replicate his match-winning form when the Tigers take on New Zealand in the series-deciding third ODI in Chattogram today. The right-arm pacer received a major boost ahead of the match, climbing 32 places to 64th in the latest ODI rankings after his five-wicket haul in the second game in Mirpur. He also earned high praise from Bangladesh pace bowling coach Shaun Tait, who said during a press conference yesterday: "What I really enjoyed about this series so far was his yorkers in the last game. That sort of brings back the days of Waqar Younis—fast bowlers coming in, taking wickets up top and then cleaning up the tail with yorkers. I love that."

Athapaththu powers Sri Lanka to series-leveling win

SPORTS REPORTER

Riding on skipper Chamari Athapaththu's all-round brilliance, Sri Lanka staged a strong comeback in the three-match WODI series, beating hosts Bangladesh by four wickets in the second match at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium on Wednesday.

Athapaththu, who missed the opening game due to injury, returned in style, taking 3 for 36 as Bangladesh were bowled out for 165 in 45.5 overs after opting to bat first.

Nigar Sultana Joty top-scored with 58 off 101 balls, while Sharmin Sultana made 25 and Nahida Akter 20, as several batters failed to convert starts.

Malki Madara, Nimasha Meepage and Inoka Ranaweera picked up two wickets each.

In reply, Sri Lanka lost Hasini Perera for five, but Athapaththu struck a quick 40 off 39 balls to steady the chase.

Harshitha Samarawickrama (50) and Hansima Karunaratne (40) shared a 77-run stand that proved decisive.

Nahida Akter fought back with 4 for 21, but Sri Lanka reached 166 for six in 38.2 overs to level the series 1-1.

The third and final match will be played at the same venue on Saturday.

BCB seeks long-term fix for dry Chattogram outfield

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

"Not too shabby," New Zealand batter Will Young said while surveying the outfield of Chattogram's Bir Sreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium from the boundary ropes. The surface looked dry, the grass appeared to have dissipated in patches, and large stripes could be seen from afar, where it almost mimicked the pitches.

Young showed no immediate concerns though, saying small lacerations on his arms and legs were the only minor issues to deal with.

"It's [the outfield] going to be fast due to the dryness. Usually, injuries happen when there is wetness, as you can get stuck in the surface," he further told The Daily Star yesterday.

Beyond player safety, however, the impact of water shortages on one of Bangladesh's premier venues was evident.

"We haven't had water supply in four days; it's a regular problem during this season. WASA try their best, but at times 40 percent of people in the city cannot be served due to shortages," curator Zahid Reza Babu told The Daily Star.

Rain has offered little relief, with only a brief five-minute spell in the past two weeks. Although the ground was watered after April 9, supply issues resurfaced amid



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

hot and humid conditions -- a pattern, according to Reza, that mirrors last season.

While the outfield appears visibly poor from a distance, ground staff believe the situation is less severe up close. According to sources, the venue requires about two lakh litres of water daily for proper maintenance.

BCB's former facilities chairman Shahnian Taneem had earlier attempted to address the issue, but plans were stalled by the previous board's tender and purchase processes. Under the current ad hoc committee, however, parts of that plan are now being implemented, Shahnian said.

The board is planning a water

purification plant behind the VIP stand, alongside installing a deep tube well, officials told The Daily Star.

"The purifying plant will give us relief. It's supposed to provide two lakh litres daily, though how much remains after purification is yet to be seen. Combined with WASA supply, it should be enough," Reza said.

By evening, as the heat subsided, the outfield was watered and began to look more even ahead of the third ODI today. The board remains optimistic that the water treatment plant will resolve many of the ongoing issues.



PHOTO: AI GENERATED

BFF's high-profile coach hunt

RAMIN TALUKDAR

Bangladesh football stands at the foothills of a new beginning. The chapter of Javier Cabrera has come to a close, leaving behind a dugout that is now almost a blank canvas. Yet, for a country languishing near the bottom of the FIFA rankings, master tacticians from across the world are eager to leave their mark.

Around 270 applications have already been submitted for the role of national team head coach. Alongside that, more than 100 applications have come in for age-group teams, and another 30 plus for the position of goalkeeping coach.

Such overwhelming interest from world-class coaches is apparently astonishing. But beneath that surprise lies a quiet shift. The arrival of expatriate stars like Hamza Choudhury and Shomit Shome has sparked a sense of renaissance in red and green.

At this critical juncture, one thing is clear. There is no alternative to appointing a high-profile coach.

Cabrera, despite holding a UEFA Pro Licence, had limited exposure at the highest level. As a result, even with players shaped in European systems joining the squad, that pedigree failed to translate consistently onto the pitch.

A contrasting picture can be seen in the women's team. Under the guidance of Peter Butler, the entire landscape has changed. Armed with rich experience, including his playing days at West Ham United, Butler ushered in a new awakening. The women's team and their age-level understudies are no longer confined to SAFF dominance but competing confidently on the Asian Cup stage.

Butler's success serves as a clear reminder that the men's team, too, needs an experienced, high-profile tactician, especially a manager capable of understanding players raised in Europe and America while building chemistry with local talent.

While the list of names circulating on social media is eye-catching, the Bangladesh Football Federation has not disclosed any specific candidates, though it confirmed to The Daily Star that several coaches with national team experience have applied. Among the prominent names being linked

are Petar Segrt, who led the Maldives to SAFF glory, and India's two-time SAFF-winning former coach Igor Stimac. Also in the mix are former Bashundhara Kings coach Valeriu Tita and Germany's experienced Antoine Hey. Names such as Miodrag Radulovic and Didier Olle-Nicolle, along with other European tacticians, are also believed to be on the federation's radar.

High profile coaches often operate differently and they rarely come alone. They are not confined to conventional training routines. Their approach is rooted in science and data, demanding a full support structure aligned with their philosophy -- tactical analysts, fitness trainers, nutritionists, and goalkeeping coaches working in unison. In the dressing room, they expect complete authority, free from administrative interference.

The federation, meanwhile, appears aligned with entrusting their faith on someone who can build a seamless structure from grassroots to the national team.

"We want someone who can plan across the entire structure, from grassroots to Under-23 and the national team," Technical Committee chairman Kamrul Hasan Hilton told The Daily Star.

"Ideally, we are looking for a coach who has developed teams from a young level and delivered results at national, AFC or World Cup stages."

Ultimately, the psychological boost a heavyweight coach brings to a dressing room, especially when managing players like Hamza and Shomit, is irreplaceable. With that, players can buy into the idea of chasing bigger targets more wholeheartedly, not just SAFF supremacy, but success on the AFC stage and beyond.

In the coming days, the selection committee will trim the list down to a shortlist of 25 to 30 candidates.

"No coach can change everything overnight; he must be given at least two to three years to build a group capable of representing the country for the next eight to ten years," player-turned-coach Allaz Ahmed believes.

Who will emerge as the high-profile architect to break the shackles of stagnation in the men's team?

SAFF WOMEN'S C'SHIP Bangladesh, India in same group again

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bangladesh have been drawn with host India in the SAFF Women's Championship, which will be held in Goa from May 25 to June 6.

The draw was held in New Delhi on Wednesday. Two teams will qualify from each group for the semifinals.

Pakistan have opted not to participate in this edition.

Bangladesh first won the SAFF Women's Championship title in 2022 in Nepal, breaking India's dominance, under Golam Rabbani Choton. Peter Butler then helped the women in red and green defend the title in style in the 2024 edition, also held in Nepal.

Bangladesh had beaten five-time champions India in the group stage in both editions on way to beating Nepal in both finals.

GROUP A
Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bhutan.
GROUP B
Bangladesh, India and Maldives.



Women's hockey team set for historic debut

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's women's hockey team are set to embark on a historic journey today as they play their first-ever senior international match, opening their Asian Games Qualifiers campaign in Jakarta.

Having impressed at under-18 and under-21 levels last year, the senior side will now step onto the international stage for the first time when they face Chinese Taipei in Pool A. The match is scheduled to begin at 4:10 pm Bangladesh time.

Apart from Bangladesh and Taipei, Pool A includes Hong Kong and Uzbekistan, while Pool B features Singapore, Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka and hosts Indonesia. The four semifinalists will qualify for September's Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan.

Head coach Zahid Hossain Raju said the team is prepared for the challenge, while acknowledging the step up required at senior level.

"This is the toughest match of the group, Chinese Taipei are a difficult opposition," Raju told The Daily Star over the phone from Jakarta yesterday. He added that Bangladesh won a 20-minute practice match against Indonesia 2-0 on Tuesday.

Raju admitted the lack of competitive preparation could be a concern. "We haven't played any practice game, which is an issue," he said. "The other thing is, these players played matches at junior level, but senior level is very different."

49 DAYS TO GO



Who can beat Morocco?

So far, 13 African teams have made a combined 49 appearances in the World Cup. Among them, only Morocco have reached the semifinals, achieving the feat in the 2022 edition. Cameroon have featured the most times, with eight appearances, while Nigeria, Morocco and Tunisia are joint second with six each.

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