



Najmul Hossain Shanto, Litton Das and Tawhid Hridoy -- Bangladesh's batting backbone -- spend a light moment during yesterday's training ahead of today's first ODI against Australia at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. (Bottom) Bangladesh captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz (R) and his Australia counterpart Josh Inglis pose with the three-match series trophy.

‘Huge opportunity’ to end Australia ODI hoodoo

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are set to face Australia in a One-Day International series for the first time in 15 years. In sporting terms, 15 years is an eternity -- entire playing careers have begun and ended since Australia last toured Bangladesh in 2011 under Michael Clarke's captaincy. Yet, for the very first time in their history, the Tigers are heading into an ODI series against the Aussies with a realistic mindset of winning the entire thing.

Since gaining ODI status, Bangladesh have played over 450 matches in the format. In 22 previous outings against Australia, however, they have tasted victory just once -- that unforgettable day in Cardiff in 2005, built on Mohammad Ashraful's legendary batting exploits.

At home, Bangladesh fought eye-to-eye with men from Down Under in 2017 to secure a historic maiden Test win over the Baggy Greens and a 4-1 T20I series victory in 2021. However, they remain winless against Australia across six home ODIs.

For Mehidy Hasan Miraz and his teammates, this series presents a rare opportunity to not only test their mettle but rewrite history. This time, they aren't just chasing a solitary victory; the chance has arrived to seize an entire series.

Thus, the visitors missing heavy hitters like Travis Head and Mitchell Marsh will not diminish the stakes. Nor will it matter that frontline pacers Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins, and Josh Hazlewood are absent. Nor, indeed, should it matter that Miraz is still finding his feet in his captaincy stint. For Bangladesh, a series triumph over the



ultimate giants of the game, the reigning world champions, will be monumental.

Perhaps for the first time in a 50-over bilateral series, Bangladesh can look Australia squarely in the eye. That is the psychological shift a genuine express fast-bowling unit provides. Young sensation Nahid Rana enters hot off five-wicket hauls in his last two home ODIs. Alongside him, Taskin Ahmed and Shoriful Islam are in formidable rhythm, while Mustafizur Rahman brings invaluable experience. Crucially, the challenge this time is to

conquer Australia on true, sporting tracks, rather than the extreme turners in Mirpur deployed during the 2017 Tests or the 2021 T20I series.

Asked about the absence of Head and Marsh, the Bangladesh skipper insisted the team are focused on themselves. "Instead of thinking too much about them, we will try to play our role," Miraz said during yesterday's pre-match press conference.

"I am very confident because everyone is in good form. It's a huge opportunity for us since we are playing a series against Australia after many years. Since it's our home ground, if we can take advantage of it, it will be very good for us," he added.

Miraz also divulged that Bangladesh's plans stretch beyond immediate bilateral success, serving as a template for global tournaments. "We won our last three series, and this is a very important one because there is a [qualification] equation for the upcoming World Cup. Mental preparation starts now for how we want to play in the World Cup, especially since we will have to face Australia there as well," Miraz explained.

With FIFA World Cup fever taking over, Miraz remained unfazed by the distraction. "We have only one plan: we have to play good cricket and win matches."

His Australian counterpart, stand-in skipper Josh Inglis, echoed similar sentiments. "Australia and Bangladesh don't come up against each other a hell of a lot," Inglis noted. "I know our guys are really excited, and we're eager to get out there and test ourselves in these conditions."

Three-team DPL title race tightens

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club lost their grip on the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League (DPL) title race after a five-wicket defeat to Dhaka Leopards at BKSP yesterday.

Having led the standings for much of the season, Mohammedan must now beat Abahani Limited in Thursday's final matchday and hope Leopards defeat Prime Bank Cricket Club -- only scenario in which they can claim their first DPL title since 2009-10.

Mohammedan's defeat boosted Abahani's title hopes considerably. With Abahani, Mohammedan and Prime Bank all level on 16 points after 10 rounds, Abahani strengthened position with a 12-run win over Gazi Group Cricketers at BKSP-4.

Abahani now need only to beat Mohammedan to secure a fourth consecutive title, having already defeated Prime Bank earlier in the season.

Prime Bank, meanwhile, remain in contention after an 18-run victory over Bashundhara Strikers at PKSP. They must beat Leopards and hope Mohammedan defeat Abahani. In that case, Prime Bank would lift their first title since 2014-15 thanks to a superior head-to-head record against Mohammedan.

Mohammedan's defeat was the biggest upset of the penultimate round, caused largely by the

failure of their star-studded batting lineup. Apart from Mushfiqur Rahim's 68 off 80 balls, none of their batters made a notable contribution as they were restricted to 225 for eight after asked to bat.

Leopards chased the target in just 34.3 overs, powered by Mominul Haque's unbeaten 93 off 77 balls and Zawad Abrar's explosive 66 off 34 deliveries, featuring five fours and six sixes.

At the adjacent venue, Abahani were bowled out for 221 in 48.3 overs, with Mahidul Islam Ankon top-scoring with 66.

Their bowlers then bundled out Gazi Group for 209, but a 73-run last-wicket stand had led the contest to a tense finish.

At the PKSP, Prime Bank slumped to 103 for nine, with Sunzamul Islam claiming four wickets. However, Abu Hider Rony's 58 off 48 balls and an unbroken 57-run stand with Tipu Sultan lifted them to 160 all out in 38 overs.

In reply, Sunzamul's 57 and Nahidul Islam's 35 guided Bashundhara to 127 for five before they lost their last five wickets for 15 runs and were dismissed for 142. Rony took 3-18 while Sultan claimed 4-22.

Elsewhere, Rugganj Tigers Cricket Club defeated Agrani Bank Cricket Club by two wickets at the Bashundhara Sports Complex, while Habibur Rahman Sohan's record 45-ball century powered Legends of Rugganj to a 74-run win over City Club at the ULAB Cricket Ground.



FASTEST TONS IN BANGLADESH LIST A CRICKET

Habibur Rahman Sohan (45 balls)
Habibur Rahman Sohan (49 balls)
Mosaddek Hossain Saikat (49 balls)
Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (50 balls)



Croatia captain Luka Modric celebrates his opening goal during a 2-1 win against Slovenia in their final warm-up match ahead of the FIFA World Cup. The 40-year-old Modric, likely playing his last international match at home, cleverly placed a shot from the edge of the area into the net in the 51st minute after being set up by a square pass by Ivan Perisic. It was the 29th goal in his 198th appearance for his country.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Yamal available for Spain's WC opener

AFP, Mexico City

Teenage Barcelona star Lamine Yamal and fellow winger Nico Williams will be available for Spain's World Cup opener against debutants Cape Verde on June 15, coach Luis de la Fuente said on Sunday.

Yamal and Athletic Bilbao's Williams both missed the end of the club season with hamstring injuries and their imminent returns will be a big boost to the European champions.

Osasuna winger Victor Munoz is also

expected to be fit for Spain's opening game in Atlanta, although none travelled to Mexico for Monday's friendly with Peru and instead remained at their training camp in the United States.



"We regret that they are not here with us, but the medical and physical conditioning staff advised them to stay there," De la Fuente said.

"All three should be available for the next match... they are progressing well in their recovery and are doing

very well."

Eriksen in 'good spirits'

AFP, Copenhagen

Christian Eriksen is in "good spirits", said the Danish team football doctor, despite being hospitalised after collapsing during Denmark's friendly against Ukraine, five years after suffering a cardiac arrest during the European Championship.

The 34-year-old former Manchester United midfielder, who had a type of pacemaker inserted after he collapsed in 2021, fell to the ground in the 64th minute of the match in Odense on Sunday.

Medical staff rushed onto the pitch while players from both teams gathered around him to shield the scene from

television or smartphone cameras.

The referee called off the match and Eriksen was subsequently taken to hospital, having been shielded by both sets of players as he walked off the pitch.



Denmark's team doctor Morten Boesen said Eriksen had been "briefly unconscious" but "the pacemaker responded as it should".

Boesen was able to offer a positive update early on Monday morning.

"I spoke to Christian this morning, and he is doing well," he said in comments posted on Instagram.

"He is with his family and in good spirits. The expectation is that he will be discharged soon and can return home."

Sibling rivals line up for different teams

REUTERS

Four sets of brothers will compete at the World Cup, all for different countries in a reflection of how steady migration around the world has had an impact on football.

Desire Doue and his older brother Guela are French-born, but while Paris St Germain starlet Desire plays for Les Bleus, Guela is an overlapping fullback for the Ivory Coast from where their father hails.

The Williams brothers Inaki and Nico are both Basque-born, and the 23-year-old Nico was player of the match when Spain beat England in the European Championship final two years ago.

Older brother Inaki, who turns 32 next week, played once for Spain too, but only in a friendly, which qualified him after a hiatus to switch allegiance and declare for Ghana, the country from where his parents

migrated.

Also in the Ghana side is the 30-year-old Dutch-born defender Derrick Luckassen, who was added at the last minute to the World Cup squad as an injury replacement and joins his half brother Brian Brobbey at the tournament.

Brobbey, 24, is a back-up striker for the Netherlands, going into the tournament on the back of a strong second half of the Premier League season with Sunderland. They share the same mother but have different fathers.

Australia selected Scottish-born centre-back Harry Souttar, 27, while his two-year-old brother John will be playing for Scotland. They were born in Aberdeen, but their mother is Australian, and Harry switched his allegiance seven years ago after being capped at junior level by the Scots.