

Sports

Shakib, Taskin return to give Bangladesh badly needed boost

DHAKA: Key Bangladesh bowlers Shakib Al Hasan and Taskin Ahmed return from injury as the hosts fight to prevent a clean-sweep at the hands of Pakistan in the second Test in Dhaka. Bangladesh trail the two-match Test series 1-0 after being beaten by eight wickets in Chittagong, where they badly missed a strike bowler.

The hosts were also whitewashed by Pakistan 3-0 in their Twenty20 series. But Bangladesh have won five of their last seven Tests at Dhaka's Mirpur Stadium, including beating England and Australia, which will give them confidence that they can repeat the feat there when the Test starts tomorrow.

Skipper Mominul Haque is hoping for pitch conditions at Mirpur to match those at Chittagong, where Bangladesh were competitive in the first four days. "I prefer wickets like this. I think we had a perfectly flat wicket, which was helpful for the batsmen, but the pacers faced hurdles," Mominul said after losing the first Test.

Bangladesh's left-arm spinner Taijul Islam staged a lone battle to claim 7-116 in the first innings. But Pakistan cruised to an ultimately easy win, despite his efforts, thanks to a 151-run opening stand from Abid Ali and Abdullah Shafique.

Taijul's regular spin partner Shakib missed the contest after a hamstring injury suffered during last month's Twenty20 World Cup. Shakib

was included in the first Test squad with hopes he would recover in time, but he was subsequently ruled out.

Bangladesh also missed the services of pace bowler Taskin after he injured his finger during the final Twenty20 international against Pakistan on November 22. Taskin had been in fine Test form since making his comeback to the side after a four-year absence, picking up 11 wickets in three matches.

A number of changes are expected for the hosts for the second Test, with illness sidelining opening batsman Saif Hassan. Bangladesh selectors named a 19-member squad, mindful of the upcoming series in New Zealand, where they will travel two days after the Dhaka Test.

Pakistan batsman Abid Ali, who scored 133 and 91 runs in the first Test, says that their previous wins count for nothing. "It will be a new day and we need to bat with a positive mind," he said. Pakistan sit second in the World Test Championship table.

Bangladesh squad: Mominul Haque (captain), Shadman Islam, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Liton Das, Yasir Ali, Nurul Hasan, Mehidy Hasan, Taijul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Abu Jayed, Nayeem Hasan, Mahmudul Hasan, Rejaur Rahman, Khaled Ahmed, Shohidul Islam, Mohammad Naim.



DHAKA: Bangladesh's Shakib Al Hasan checks his bat during a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium ahead of the second Test cricket match in Dhaka yesterday. —AFP

Pakistan squad: Babar Azam (captain), Mohammad Abbas, Mohammad Nawaz, Naseem Shah, Nauman Ali, Sajid Khan, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Saud Shakeel, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Zahid Mahmood. — AFP

Mumbai's surprise rain no excuse for N Zealand: Southee

MUMBAI: Tim Southee warned yesterday that the New Zealand bowlers will have to adapt quickly to Mumbai's pitch after two days of rain hampered preparations for the second Test against India. The Black Caps, led by Kane Williamson, come into the second clash of the two-match series starting today after a hard-fought draw in Kanpur.

But the tourists were forced to call off their training for the second day running while India did some indoor practice after Mumbai's unseasonal rains.

"It's a different lead-in to what we are all expecting," the 32-year-old quick Southee said.

"I don't think we were expecting too much rain in the lead-in, but it's just something that we will have to adapt to." Southee took a five-wicket haul in the first innings of the Kanpur Test and ended with eight scalps in a match dominated by the Indian spinners.

He said it was too soon to say what conditions Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium would throw up. "We won't know if it's going to swing until we are out there, so it's something that we will have to adapt to as bowlers here," said Southee.

"The wicket's been under covers and may offer a little bit more, but who knows?"

Southee believes the lack of training might be a blessing in disguise for the bowlers, who will return fresh for the final match.



MUMBAI: New Zealand's captain Kane Williamson (L) speaks with his teammates Tom Latham (C) and Ross Taylor on the eve of the second Test cricket match against India at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. —AFP

"We are fortunate to have the last week, even the guys that weren't playing were able to train throughout the Test match," he said.

"So for us bowlers it's nice to give the body a bit of a rest and freshen up ahead of another Test match... Yes, you haven't had the ideal preparation, but there is no excuse."

Top-ranked New Zealand, who beat India to win the inaugural World Test Championship in June, have never won a Test series in India. They last won a five-day game in India in 1988, also in Mumbai.

"Always nice to hear of the history of the game and New Zealand doing well here," said Southee.

"It's a long time ago, a lot's changed in that time, but our focus is on us going out there and giving our best over the next five days." — AFP

India seek clarity on SA tour with Omicron spread

MUMBAI: India skipper Virat Kohli said yesterday his side were seeking clarity about the upcoming tour of South Africa, which is in doubt over the spread of the Omicron COVID variant. Kohli returns for the second Test against New Zealand in Mumbai starting Friday after he stepped down as Twenty20 captain at the end of India's World Cup campaign and took a short break. New Zealand hung on to a draw in the opening Test of the two-match series.

India are expected to fly to South Africa for a full series including three Tests from December 17 but the highly infectious new Covid variant has put plans on hold. "There are players who are not part of this group right now who will be entering quarantine to join the team," Kohli told reporters a day out from the Mumbai Test. "Those kinds of things you want to seek clarity as soon as possible." A tour by India is easily the biggest money-spinner for South African cricket and is believed to be worth hundreds of millions of rands.

On Tuesday the South African government had pledged to take all precautions necessary to keep players safe and praised the "solidarity" of India's cricketers in choosing to continue with the tour. But the Board of Control for Cricket in India has also said it will await a government nod on the Proteas tour before making a final decision. Kohli insisted their focus is on the final Test while staying connected with the board over the Proteas trip. "At the end of the day we understand, our focus from the Test match will not shift regardless," he said. "We have been talking to the board and we are pretty sure within a day or two we will have absolute clarity as to what is going on."

"We need to be realistic about things as well, we cannot just ignore the things that potentially could put you in a confusing place and no one wants to be there." Top-ranked New Zealand, who beat India to win the inaugural World Test Championship in June, have never won a Test series in India and last won a five-day game there in 1988, also in Mumbai. — AFP