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Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was in his usual jolly mood and focused even while heading a football during Bangladesh's practice session yesterday ahead of their first ODI of the three-match series against Zimbabwe starting today in Sylhet. However, the inspirational leader could not hold onto his gleeful nature following a question at the pre-match press conference yesterday that hogged all the spotlight at the end. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Time for a reboot?

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

From 2015 to 2017 and even in 2018 to an extent, Bangladesh emerged as a force to be reckoned with in the fifty-over format under skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and head coach Chandika Hathurusingha.

Since making their first ICC World Cup quarterfinal in 2015, the Tigers' graph in the ODI format trended upwards as long-term planning and introducing fresh faces paid dividends for Bangladesh.

The Tigers became an unstoppable force at home -- bolstered by the fantastic five of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad -- and managed to win series against India, South Africa and Pakistan, which heightened expectations for the 2019 World Cup.

The fifty-over format was labelled the Tigers' favoured format and the side would go into each game with a clear game plan and strategy. But things started to change last year after a disappointing eighth-placed finish in the ten-team World Cup.

There is undoubtedly a vacuum and sense of confusion when it comes to leadership in Bangladesh cricket, with Mashrafe at the final stage of his career and Shakib Al Hasan absent after being banned for a year for not reporting corrupt approaches from a bookie.

With the five stalwarts nearing the end of their careers, a new coaching staff led by head coach Russell Domingo and the next World Cup in mind, the need for reform

in the Bangladesh ODI team is clear and should start now.

Talk about creating a good cricketing culture has been the buzz in Bangladesh cricket and a long-term goal to do well in Tests has already taken shape.

It will be interesting to see whether Domingo and the team management will plan accordingly in limited-overs formats too and prepare a new set of players for the next World Cup.

The first of the three match ODI series against Zimbabwe starting from today in Sylhet can be the beginning of a new era for the Tigers.

It is true that Bangladesh have not done well in the ODIs since the World Cup, which preceded a 3-0 whitewash at the hands of Sri Lanka in August last year.

The Tigers will return to fifty-over cricket after a gap of nearly six months and, despite questions over the strength of Zimbabwe, it will be interesting to see whether Domingo goes for a win-first strategy to gain much-needed confidence and break the losing streak or if the South African will look to provide opportunities to youngsters in order to prepare them for the future.

There is a new batch of cricketers coming into the Tigers ranks in recent times, featuring players such as Nazmul Hossain Shanto, Afif Hossain, Naim Sheikh and Mohammad Saifuddin alongside relatively experienced players like Mustafizur Rahman, Liton Das, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Mohammad Mithun. And with all those factors in mind, it seems it is high time for the Tigers to look forward now.

'Why should I be ashamed?'

MAZHAR UDDIN from Sylhet

Perhaps skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza knows best that his performances in the three-match ODI series against Zimbabwe will be the key factor as talks over his retirement peaked on the eve of the first ODI at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet yesterday.

The scenario has certainly changed for Mashrafe, whose jovial mood saw him share his thoughts during informal chats with journalists before. Nowadays, the 36-year-old maintains a distance from the media.

As has been the case for quite some time now, a major portion of the pre-match press conference involved questions about his retirement -- a topic that has been lingering since the World Cup last year.

Questions were raised over Mashrafe's performances at the tournament, where he picked up just one wicket in eight games.

The issue of Mashrafe's retirement was again raised after Bangladesh Cricket Board President Nazmul Hassan earlier in February stated that they would decide on a new captain for ODIs after the Zimbabwe series.

Overall, there was a sense of bitterness and distance from all corners for Mashrafe, whether in the case of the board, team management, media and even from his colleagues, who did

HEAD TO HEAD									
BANGLADESH					ZIMBABWE				
Head to Head in Bangladesh									
M	W	L	D	M	W	L	D	M	D
41	30	11	0	41	11	30	0		
Head to Head in all ODIs									
M	W	L	D	M	W	L	D	M	D
72	44	28	0	72	28	44	0		

Last meeting in ODIs: Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, Chattogram, Oct 1, 2018. Bangladesh won by 7 wickets.

self-respect: Do I steal on the field? Am I a thief? I cannot relate shame and self-respect with cricket," a fiery Mashrafe responded.

"There are so many offences committed around us but they don't have shame. If I don't get wickets on the field, why would that embarrass me? Am I a thief? I will be criticised if I am not being able to get wickets. Why should I be ashamed? I am playing for Bangladesh. If I can't do it, they will exclude me. This is simple," Mashrafe added.

Over the years, Mashrafe has proved his worth despite having seven surgeries on his legs. Every time questions were raised about his ability, he has managed to come back strongly.

Mashrafe's body language and intensity over the past few days showed his desperation to prove something. Although he denied that he had something to prove, he will be desperate to perform.

The cricketer was adamant about fighting it out and announced his availability for the upcoming one-off ODI against Pakistan in April.

"What happened is that I didn't perform, which made things critical. But I won't be able to come out of that by overthinking. At the same time, I can't guarantee that I will take five wickets in the next game and everything will be finished; that won't happen. There is always an age barrier which makes every day more challenging. Maybe I am going through that phase," said Mashrafe.



Even amid the fuss regarding Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's captaincy and his place in the team, for coach Russell Domingo the pressing issue is to ensure a solid future for Bangladesh as the South African remained busy discussing tactics with his troops at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: STAR



NZ take charge after Jamieson's five-for

AFP, Christchurch

They are two different formats. This is the shorter version of the game and I think it suits us more. We want to play positive and aggressive cricket. I think one-day cricket gives us an opportunity to do that. We won the Test match (in 2018 in Sylhet) and we are playing here again. We know how the wicket plays here so that's a bonus. Leading up to this game, something that's given us a bit of a boost is that we know the conditions and we have done well in these conditions.

CHAMU CHIBHABHA
ZIMBABWE CAPTAIN

Kyle Jamieson continued his eye-catching introduction to Test cricket with a five-wicket haul Saturday as New Zealand took the honours on day one of the second Test against India in Christchurch.

New Zealand, who won the crucial toss with an inviting green pitch on offer, were 63 without loss at stumps after rolling India for 242.

Tom Blundell was on 29 with Tom Latham on 27.

Jamieson, who has his sights on becoming established as an all-rounder, grabbed the headlines on debut with four wickets and a sparkling 44 runs in New Zealand's 10-wicket first Test victory in Wellington.

He backed that up in Christchurch with five for 45 to blunt a promising start by India in the second Test.

"I guess it has fallen my way in the first couple of Tests," Jamieson said, but added the Hagley Oval wicket required more precision than Wellington's Basin Reserve.

"Your margin for where you try and land the ball becomes a little bit smaller and when we overpitched they put it away, if we missed wide they put that away. So it was a matter of hanging in there and as a collective we managed to do that and have a good day."

Prithvi Shaw, Cheteshwar Pujara and Hanuma Vihari all collected half centuries for India to show that the green wicket was not as threatening as expected, and Vihari believed the side were at least 60 runs short.

"I think 300 plus would have been an ideal total on this wicket, but we showed more intent than we did in Wellington and that's a positive," he said.

"But he (Jamieson) gets much more bounce than other bowlers and that extra bounce is a big factor.

"The front foot ball becomes more dangerous than the short ball ... and deservedly he got the five."



PHOTO: REUTERS

New Zealand's Kyle Jamieson shows the cherry after his five-wicket haul against India on the first day of the second Test at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch yesterday.

Shaw was in sparkling form at the top of the innings with 54 off 64 deliveries while Pujara and Vihari played more patient roles.

Pujara faced 140 balls for his 54 while Vihari's 55 took 70 deliveries but with most of his runs coming in a late flurry of boundaries.

Captain Virat Kohli again fell cheaply and there was little life in the tail.

The last six wickets produced only 48 runs with 26 of them from Mohammed Shami and Jasprit Bumrah for the final wicket.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: First innings 242 all out (Shaw 54, Pujara 54, Vihari 55; Southee 2-38, Boult 2-89, Jamieson 5-45)

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 63 for no loss (Latham 27 not out, Blundell 29 not out)

'Need to play top sides regularly'

Tigresses exit after loss to New Zealand

STAR SPORT DESK

Bangladesh's bowling brilliance was not enough to clinch a historic victory against New Zealand in their Group A encounter of the Women's T20 World Cup at the Junction Oval in Melbourne yesterday.

Ritu Moni's first four-wicket haul, which cost 18 runs, are the best figures of the tournament so far. Salma Khatun added three wickets for seven runs as New Zealand were bundled out for just 91, the second-lowest total at T20 World Cups, but the Tigresses still suffered a 17-run defeat following a terrible batting failure.

A third consecutive defeat saw them crash out of the tournament and they will now play their last group match against Sri Lanka tomorrow in Melbourne.

"After the first innings, we planned to go not for quick or hard-hitting batting, we just tried to be calm. But in the end, we were not able to bat well and that was a really poor performance from us. But credit goes to New Zealand, of course, because of the way they bowled," Ritu said during the post-match press conference.

Hayley Jensen and Leigh Kasperk took three wickets apiece as New Zealand produced a comeback to down Bangladesh, bowling the Tigresses out for 74. The win means Group A is set-up for a final showdown, with a trans-Tasman match on Monday pitting New Zealand against Australia on Monday, with the winner set to reach the semifinals.

Salma's side showed a lot of promise and improvement in the bowling and fielding departments in their three matches but they lacked

the batting prowess to compete with quality opposition.

Ritu Moni believes they can only improve by playing top opponents on a regular basis.

"We need to play regular cricket series with top-ranked teams because that is the only way we can improve. We can compare ourselves to them and gauge where we are. We look forward to that because the more we'll play with the top teams, the more we will improve. This is definitely one of the key things to improve our cricket," she said.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: 91 all out in 18.2 overs (Rachel Priest 25; Ritu Moni 4-18, Salma Khatun 3-7)

BANGLADESH: 74 all out in 19.5 overs (Nigar Sultana 21; Hayley Jensen 3-11, Leigh Kasperk 3-23)

Result: New Zealand won by 17 runs.



Heinrich Klaasen's unbeaten maiden century (123*) powered South Africa to 291 for seven in the first ODI against Australia at Boland Park Cricket Stadium in Cape Town yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

'Asia Cup will be held in Dubai'

AFP, New Delhi

The next Asia Cup will be held in Dubai so that arch-rivals India and Pakistan can both take part, Indian cricket chief Sourav Ganguly said.

The tournament had been scheduled for Pakistan in September but India had refused to take part unless it was held on neutral territory because of tensions between the two countries.

"The Asia Cup will be held in Dubai and both India and Pakistan will play," Ganguly said late Friday before leaving for an Asian Cricket Council meeting in Dubai.